

Studies in Revelation

Christ's Victory Over the Forces of Darkness

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Preface

All Scripture is God breathed and therefore profitable. Every book in the Bible is important, but the book of Revelation, as the last book of the Bible, provides us with the consummation and climax of God's revelation. It is the terminus for all the great truths found in the rest of Scripture, many of which have their beginning in Genesis. It is God's final word to man. This in itself makes this book tremendously significant. But the most important element of the book is that it is a special revelation of Jesus Christ Himself anticipating the glory of His second coming and His final victory over the forces of darkness and evil so prominent in the world today. Introduced in verse one, He is the major theme of the Book.

Another reason for the importance of this book is brought out by Ryrie who points out, "Revelation is primarily significant because it is a book about 'things which must shortly come to pass.' Many of these things we would not know if the book of Revelation were not in the Bible. It is the only major prophetic book in the New Testament."¹

There are many excellent commentaries written on Revelation, but, in keeping with the purpose of the Biblical Studies Foundation, these studies are offered to especially help those who do not have access to these books for whatever reason. Having taught Revelation several times over the years, the studies that follow are the product of my teaching ministry as a pastor seeking to minister the Word of God to our people.

As mentioned in some of my other studies on our web page, I do not offer them as a final word on this wonderful book, nor do I claim a lot of original ideas. I simply share basically what I have learned not only from my own studies, but from others who have ministered to me personally in seminary, or through many good commentaries and theological works. I offer these for your own study and progress in knowing and communicating God's Word and hope you will find them of benefit in that regard.

For those who may not be familiar with some of the prophetic terms used in this series, a Glossary is provided in Appendix 7.

¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Revelation*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1968, p. 7.

Lesson 1: Foundations for the Study of Prophecy

In the study of any book of the Bible or any topic of Scripture, a certain amount of ground work is needed for understanding, orientation, and motivation. This is particularly so with the Book of Revelation or prophecy in general. Revelation is a book that has been called everything from a hodgepodge of nonsense to a masterpiece. Because it contains a large amount of symbolism and because of the faulty approaches or methods of interpretation applied to its study, many have a difficult time grasping its meaning. It has become a book which is the object of the widest possible divergence of interpretation.

Regardless, God promises blessing to the student of this book (Rev. 1:3). In fact, Revelation is a book in which all the great themes, seed plots, lines of doctrine and Bible prophecy find their fulfillment. It is in this book that the victory of God as the God of history is seen in the culmination of the ages and the establishment of the eternal state.

The Purposes of Prophecy

It Is Not Designed to Make Us Prophets

God did not give us prophecy so we could become a prophet or the son of a prophet and thereby predict the future. It is not given so we can predict who the Man of Sin or the Antichrist or the beast will be, nor is it given so we can predict the precise day and hour when the Lord will return.

History is full of those who thought they knew who the Antichrist would be or was. Men have said it was Napoleon, others Mussolini, others that it was Hitler, others John F. Kennedy because of the head wound by which he died. Some have said it would be Henry Kissinger because he was from one of the countries of the Old Roman Empire and because he was so involved in seeking peace between the Israelis and Arabs a few years ago.

From the Bible we can see the alignment of nations that will occur in the last days and we can see how our world is fitting into the pattern of those conditions morally, politically, religiously, and economically that will exist in the last days and in the days often referred to as the Tribulation or more accurately, Daniel's Seventieth Week.

From this we may take warning and encouragement from the Scripture, but we need to be careful about making predictions. It is only logical that the 'last day' conditions will undoubtedly exist or begin to fall into place before the Tribulation begins in preparation for the terrible days that lie ahead. God will obviously be placing the props on the stage of human history and putting the actors in the wings ready to come on the stage of this great drama. We may see those who possess characteristics consistent with the key players we see revealed in Scripture, but we need to be careful about making predictions.

This means that when we see such conditions developing, we can know that those days could be near, that conditions appear to be rapidly marching toward the events of the last days which could mean suffering for the body of Christ, the church, in the form of greater persecution. Though I believe in the blessed hope, the pre-tribulation rapture, the unfolding of these events in preparation for the Tribulation period also means we should take the necessary precautions and prepare as well as we can for difficult times since we could see them before the Lord returns for the church.

But we should also know that these conditions can wax and wane like the moon to some degree so we can never be sure as to the time. All we can say is that this is like what will happen or that the present world affairs are growing and shaping up as we see them in the prophetic Word.

It Demonstrates the Accuracy of the Bible

In all the writings of the world, the accuracy of biblical prophecy is unique and stands as one of the great evidences of the God-breathed nature of the Bible. The cults are basically silent on the future and when they are not, they end up with egg on their face.

The test for any prophecy and the authenticity of its source is fulfillment, and hundreds of Bible prophecies have been fulfilled in minute detail. This is true of prophecies fulfilled in Old Testament times, in the life of Christ (birth, life, death, and resurrection), and in relation to even the shaping of world events of our day. Compare Deuteronomy 18:20-22; Jeremiah 28:9; but also Deuteronomy 13:1-5.

Note that a false prophet's prediction might very well come to pass. The determination of whether he was a true or false prophet was not made on this basis but on whether or not he led the people away from God. The success of false prophets was permitted in order to test God's people (vs. 3).¹

The ultimate issue for all prophecy is its spiritual impact on the lives of God's people. Does it cause men to follow the Lord or turn them away from Him?

Ezekiel's Prophecy concerning the city of Tyre is an illustration (Ezek. 26:1-5). About 350 years before Christ, Philip of Macedonia dreamed that one day he would throw off the Persian yoke. His son, who had already shown an ability for military logistics and leadership, had a falling out with his father at about the age of 15 and became a playboy on the Mediterranean. Later Philip was murdered, some even accused Alexander, but he returned to Macedonia. At age 21 he formed a military force and began conquering one country after another. He never lost a battle and he stopped his conquest at India only because his men were homesick.

The inevitable happened and he met Darius the Persian at the headwaters of the Tigris/Euphrates in the Battle of Issus. Darius and his men were put to flight by this upstart Greek. Alexander's men being flush with victory wanted to pursue Darius back to Babylon and fight the final campaign. Alexander said, "No." He felt that the time was not right because they didn't have the proper supply lines. The Phoenicians would come in and help Darius. Instead, Alexander said, "Let's go down to Tyre. Let's defeat it and then the Phoenicians will throw in with us."

Well, how much do you know about Tyre? Though besieged many times, no one was ever able to capture the city. Years before Alexander decided to go down to Tyre, Nebuchadnezzar went after Tyre himself. He besieged the city for 13 years. As it happened, both Nebuchadnezzar and the people of Tyre decided to quit about the same time. The people of Tyre decided to make one last effort. They picked up all they could load in boats and at midnight, they went out and camped on a large rock-like island about 300 yards from the shore and reestablished themselves. Nebuchadnezzar made one last attack against the city, but when he found the city vacant, he left in disgust.

Because of the success of this move, Tyre built an impregnable fortress and city there on the rock some 900 feet from the mainland. Now, years later, Alexander said, "We will go up against the great fort on the rock and it will fall as other cities have." So he did. He commandeered boats, and attacked the city, but he was repulsed time and again. He was upbraided by his men and their argument was, "You can't fight across 900 feet of water." So Alexander took the dust, the rubble and the ruin from the old city of Tyre and poured it into the sea. It took seven months, but he built a causeway out to the rock and the city fell in one day. After that the site of the old city became nothing more than a flat rock where fishermen spread their nets. And what had Ezekiel prophesied years before Alexander's time?

Now it came about in the eleventh year, on the first of the month, that the word of the LORD came to me saying, 2 "Son of man, because Tyre has said concerning Jerusalem, 'Aha, the gateway of the peoples is broken; it has opened to me. I shall be filled, *now that* she is laid waste,' 3 therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I am against you, O Tyre, and I will bring up many nations against you, as the sea brings up its waves. 4 And they will destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers; and I will scrape her debris from her and make her a bare rock. 5 She will be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea, for I have spoken,' declares the Lord GOD, 'and she will become spoil for the nations...'" (Ezekiel 26:1-5)

Why begin our study of Revelation here? God said this about Tyre 2000 years ago, but the Hebrew prophet spoke these words 350 years before Alexander the Great.

It Reveals the Power and Wisdom of God

As just demonstrated, prophecy shows how God continues to control the affairs of this world in spite of the great and constant opposition of both Satan and man to the purposes of God (read Isa. 10:5-19). Though Assyria boastful-

¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible*, Expanded Edition, NASB, Moody Press: Chicago, 1995, p. 296.

ly acted on her own initiative as an enemy of Israel (vs. 7), she was but an instrument of God's wrath against a rebellious Israel. God was always in charge and through Isaiah the prophet, He prophesied that He would destroy Assyria so completely that a child could easily count the number of leaders that remained (vs. 19). Assyria fell between the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C. and the battle of Charchemish in 605.

It Reveals the Plan and Purposes of God

In the process of this study we will see this plan unfold along with some of God's purposes. We will see God's purpose for Israel, why they were cut off from the place of blessing, what God is doing today with the nation of Israel and with the Gentiles, and we will see God's purposes for the church, for the Tribulation, and for the millennial reign of Christ.

It Protects Believers from Satan's Counterfeits

Understanding prophecy can also protect Christians from the counterfeit strategies of Satan and the world system that lies under his control. As an example, one of the ancient counterfeits and one that will be a key note of his last day strategies, a strategy already prominent today, is the belief in one world government which is portrayed as a utopia and the last final hope for mankind. Nationalism will be hated and internationalism praised as the answer. Another illustration is the postmillennial belief that the church will be able to bring in the kingdom by the efforts of God's people in concert, of course, with God. But an understanding of prophecy which warns of Satan's attempts to bring the world together under his last-time leader (an anti-God, anti-Christ figure) warns us not to fall for any kind of one world movement.

It is Designed to Give Comfort

When we hear of wars and rumors of wars or hear of the problems of the Middle East or Russia, or we see the condition our country is in and the way it is in the control of the 'one worlders,' the knowledge of prophecy can give comfort by reminding us of God's plan and that He is still on the throne, in control, and carrying out His purposes and plans (note that the purpose of these verses is to bring comfort John 14:1-3; 1 Thess. 4:18; 5:11; 2 Thess. 2:2).

It is Designed to Promote Holiness

The greatest purpose of the prophetic Word, as designed by God, is the pursuit of holiness by His people. This is everywhere evident in one prophetic passage after another. Check all the passages dealing with the return of the Lord and you will find that, almost without exception, our Lord's return is used as a basis for an exhortation to godliness. This includes living as aliens in His service, living for heavenly treasure, and finding comfort in the midst of suffering and persecution through the assurance of Christ's return.

Some illustrations:

Philippians 3:15-21 Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; 16 however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained. 17 Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. 18 For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, 19 whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. 20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

Colossians 3:1-5 If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. 5 Therefore

consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.

1 John 2:28-3:3 And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. 29 If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him. 1 See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. 3 And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Titus 2:9-15 Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, 10 not pilfering, but showing all good faith that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect. 11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12 instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; 14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. 15 These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

1 Peter 1:13-17 Therefore, gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, 15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; 16 because it is written, “YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.” 17 And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth;

As we see how prophecy has been fulfilled, as we see it being fulfilled, as we contemplate the fulfillment of future events and their ramifications, and as we remember and live in the light of the coming Judgment (be,ma) Seat of Christ, prophecy should have a special message and appeal for us to live now in the light of the sure and blessed hope of the future.

It is Designed to Unfold the Loveliness of Jesus

Revelation 19:10 And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said to me, “Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

Prophecy is designed to reveal truth concerning the person and work of the Lord Jesus. This is nowhere more evident than in the book of Revelation.

Dangers in the Study of Prophecy

The Danger of Sensationalism

Two passages are particularly pertinent here:

Acts 17:21 Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new. (RSV)

2 Timothy 4:3 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings,... (RSV)

The Athenian philosophers were always ready to hear or tell some ‘new thing,’ but Paul warns us that this idea did not die with the Athenian philosophers. It is still with us today among Christians and non-Christians alike who often run from one prophetic conference or prophetic teacher to another, but in the process, they often show no real

interest in other areas of Bible study. Why? Because they are looking for something sensational, novel, exciting, and entertaining, or because they are simply curious.

Prophecy was not meant to be sensationalized. It was meant to instruct believers according to certain clear-cut purposes of the Word that we have studied. Prophecy is fascinating and can be exhilarating, but should we be any more interested in it than in any other major tenet of Scripture? I think not.

Of course we should look expectantly for the return of the Lord and the blessed hope, but we need all of Scripture to do that effectively. Furthermore, reality reminds us that 2000 years have passed since the promise of His coming. This does not minimize the certainty of His return, but it should provide us with balance so that we live and anticipate His coming as though He will return today, yet work and serve as though He will not come for another 1,000 years!

The Danger of Ignoring Prophecy

Of course the opposite of the above, ignoring Bible prophecy, is also a danger. Prophetic teaching was strong in the '50s, '60s, and '70s, but began to decline in its popularity in the '80s. I think this was so partly because it was sensationalized, which, after a while, had a deadening affect.

I remember hearing comments by well-known prophetic speakers that we could expect the Lord's return within twenty years, at least by the '70s or '80s. The idea was that in view of the shaping of world events, they didn't see how it was possible for the return of the Lord to be delayed any longer than that. Many times this would be followed by disclaimers like, "Now, no one knows the day or the year of the Lord's return, but..." Another common statement was something like this, "We have more reason to believe the return of the Lord for the church will be in our day than any other generation in history since the early church."

Though world events were still moving toward the picture we see in Revelation and prominent passages like Daniel 9, still things on the surface seemed much the same. Israel became a state in 1948, thousands of Jews began to flock back to their land, and there was all the news and talk about peace in the Middle East. But the fact the Lord did not return within that twenty-year period, as many expected, seemed to lull the church into a kind of prophetic sleep. Add this to the fact that in the '80s we moved into a time known as the 'age of consumerism' and we can see how the church surely began to forget about the return of the Lord and began to look more and more like the world.

Our need is to maintain the biblical balance. We should be looking for the Lord's return as One who might come tomorrow with the impact that should have on us from the standpoint of heavenly treasure and living as aliens. At the same time, from the standpoint of ministry and involvement in our society, we should live as though He will not return for years to come.

The Danger of Pride

In 1 Corinthians the apostle reminds us that knowledge without love makes us arrogant (2 Cor. 8:1) and pride is, of course, a danger we all face in some area of our lives. But, for some reason, people tend to become more puffed up over their knowledge of prophetic truth than in other areas.

Prophecy is a complicated area of Scripture with many divergent viewpoints even within the same prophetic scheme of things. As a result, people often view the knowledge of prophecy as a sign of maturity, great intelligence, or spiritual insight. The tendency is to think that if someone knows a lot about prophecy, that person is something close to the incarnation of the apostle Paul. You often notice a tendency in this direction in some of the well-known speakers who specialize in prophecy. And though by-in-large they are godly and well-meaning in their purpose, pride nevertheless still comes out in some of the comments and attitudes displayed. There is a kind of arrogance, an attitude like, 'you better come and hear what I have to say, or get my monthly newsletter and get the latest scoop, because I have it all figured out.'

The Danger of Imbalance

Imbalance is a problem in any area of life. One of the unique things about the Lord Jesus is the fact of His balance. The apostle John described Him as One who was "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). He was and is perfectly balanced. But what happens to us? We tend to become overly occupied with one area of doctrine or truth to the ex-

clusion of others. We find a ‘hobby horse’ and ride it to death. This is especially true with the study of prophecy, especially from the standpoint of coming events and world affairs.

Of course we need to be alert and aware of world events, and we need people who are on top of these things, but our tendency is to so focus on them that we neglect other important areas of truth—principally the heart of all prophecy—the person and work of the Lord Jesus which includes His second coming. This doesn’t mean one cannot have a specialty, an area of doctrine in which they specialize such as the family, or the church, or prophecy. We need those specialists who devote much of their time to such studies, but we all still need balance and to need to know the whole counsel of the Word.

The Lord Jesus and His coming form the heart of all Scripture and especially in the passages on prophecy. The great hope of the church and mankind is the personal and visible return of the Savior. The last book of Scripture is called “The Revelation of Jesus Christ” and much of its content deals with “the things which must soon take place.” The visible return of Christ in all His glory is the prominent note or theme of this book (Rev. 1:7, 8; 19:10; see also 1 Thess. 4:13f; 2 Thess. 2:8f; Tit. 2:13f; Phil. 3:19-20) so we would never deny the importance of prophecy, but the appeal here is for balance.

Until then there will be the rise of one false hope after another—utopias, world leaders, and false messiahs, but none will be able to deal with man’s problems. Only the Lord Himself can do that.

The Danger of Discouragement

If you are new at the study of prophecy, don’t become discouraged if at first the study of prophecy seems like a large puzzle. Keep in mind the purposes of prophecy. In time, it will begin to fit together as you pick up the pieces one by one, but never expect to have all the answers to all the questions.

Prophecy and the Terms Used for King and Kingdom

In Bible prophecy or prophetic passages of Scripture, God often uses the same language to describe both the king and the kingdom. Why? Because the kingdom takes on the characteristics of the king. As a result, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish one from the other in a prophetic passage since they both represent each other. Point: Is the passage talking about the king (the ruler), or the kingdom of the ruler, or both? Let’s note a couple of illustrations.

(1) Daniel 7:17-19 calls the four beasts “kings,” but in verse 23 the fourth beast is called the fourth kingdom.

(2) In Revelation 13:1-3, the system of the beast, which many believe is the revived imperial form of the Roman empire of the future, is clearly in view because of the ten horns and the seven heads. It is a reference to a ten-nation confederation of ten kings that come together to form the revived Roman empire. But in verses 4-7, the king, the one who emerges as the ruler of this last day system, seems to be in view. Sometimes a clear distinction is made, other times it is not.

Kinds of Fulfillment in Prophecy

Double Reference Fulfillment (Near and Far)

Bible prophecy may have both a near and a far fulfillment. “Two events widely separated as to the time of their fulfillment, may be brought into the scope of one prophecy. This was done because the prophet had a message for his own day as well as for a future time.”² In addition, the fulfillment of the near often became the assurance of the fulfillment of the far. For instance:

² J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, Dunham Publishing Company: Findlay, Ohio, 1958, p. 46.

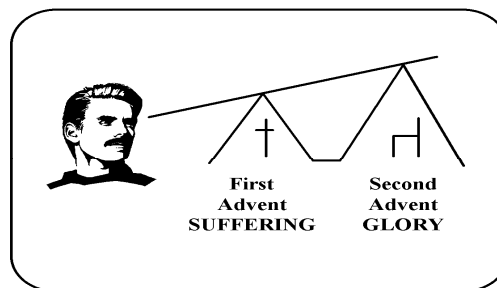
(1) The Abrahamic promises had their ultimate goal in the coming of Messiah through whom all the families of the earth could be blessed, but the promise and birth of Isaac under the most adverse conditions would help Abraham to believe that in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed.³

(2) Daniel 8:9-11 and 23-27 provides another example. The little horn of these two passages were prophecies of Antiochus Epiphanes of Greece who, in 175 B.C., plundered the temple in Jerusalem and desecrated it by offering a pig on the altar, but many believe that this passage ultimately anticipates the character and actions of the last day ruler of the Revived Roman Empire or the antichrist.

Dual or Partial Fulfillment

A prophetic passage may totally look to the remote future for its fulfillment, but at the same time there is often a dual fulfillment in the future with part of the prophecy to be fulfilled before the rest of the prophecy.

The prophet would be given a vision of future events which would appear together like great mountain peaks in the distance, but in actuality they were separated by a valley of time, a parenthetic period that would come between the fulfillment of the two parts of the prophecy.



Scriptural Illustrations:

(1) Isaiah 9:6a: The prophecy of the birth of Messiah, refers to the first advent though some often also see an immediate fulfillment in the birth of Isaiah's son but the context favors the remote view. This was remote and looked to the future. But Isaiah 9:6b-7, the prophecy of the government that will rest on His shoulders, looks at the second advent. Like a valley that separates two mountain peaks, the two events are separated by hundreds of years and the church age.

(2) Isaiah 11:1-5: The shoot that will spring from the stem of Jesse, refers to the first advent, and 11:6-10f, the wolf that will dwell with the lamb, looks to the results of the second coming in the millennial reign of Christ.

(3) Compare Isaiah 61:1-3 with Luke 4:17-20: The Lord quoted Isaiah 61:1-2a, but He stopped abruptly in the middle of verse 2, put down the book, and then stated that "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Why did He leave out verses 2b and following? Because they must wait until the second advent for fulfillment.

(4) Another passage that adds insight to this issue is 1 Peter 1:10-12. In these verses Peter tells us that the salvation about which he has been writing is the subject of Old Testament prophecies. The content of these prophecies embraced both the sufferings and glories of Messiah (vs. 11). But he also shows that though the prophets spoke by the Spirit of Christ within them, they did not always understand their own utterances, especially as to the time (or times) of these things, so they diligently searched as did Daniel to find this out (Dan. 8:27; 12:8). The perplexity lay in the two mountain peaks—the sufferings and the glories.

- They knew they were speaking of the future and in that, they were serving not themselves, but those who would live in the days of Messiah in the far future. "Serving" is the Greek diakoneo,, to serve, minister. It reminds us that the writing and teaching of the Word is a service, a ministry to others, specifically today, the church.

³ Pentecost, p. 47.

- The prophets knew that God would bless the Gentiles, that grace would come to them (vs. 10).
- They saw the sufferings (Isa. 53 for example) and the glories (Isa. 11 for example), but they could not see the valley, the interim between the two. They could not fully understand the relationship of the sufferings of Messiah to His glory. They could not see that the sufferings related to His first advent and the glories to His second advent.

Single or Complete Fulfillment

Some prophecies look only to one historic fulfillment. This may be reasonably near or very remote, but once accomplished, it is done, fulfilled. Some illustrations are:

- (1) The destruction of Tyre (Isa. 23; Ezek. 26) and Nineveh (Nah. 1:15f and Zeph. 2:13).
- (2) The birth place of Messiah in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2).

(3) Daniel's Seventieth Week (Dan. 9:24-27), the unprecedented time of trouble coming upon all the inhabitants of the earth (Rev. 3:10).

Historical Fulfillment as Prophetic Foreshadows

A Bible prophecy may have its foundation in some event in biblical history, yet at the same time be a prophecy in the form of a type, a picture, or foreshadow of a future event.

As mentioned earlier, the prophecy regarding the antichrist of the abomination of desolation (Dan. 8) may be foreshadowed in the person and actions of Antiochus Epiphanes (Dan. 8:9, 21-25).

Psalms 22 undoubtedly had its origins in some event in the life of David, yet it goes far beyond anything David experienced, and the Psalm became a miraculous prophecy of the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Several of the fulfillment quotations in the gospel of Matthew fall into this category:

- (1) Matthew 2:15, the life of Israel and their deliverance was used by Matthew as a type of deliverance of God's Son from Egypt to protect Him from Herod.
- (2) Matthew 2:17, the wailing of Israel at the time of the exile, is used as a prophetic shadow of the time of the slaughter of the young children after the birth of Christ.
- (3) Matthew 12:39, the experience of Jonah in the belly of the great fish, also became a foreshadow of the resurrection.

Prophecy and the Time Element

Length of a Prophetic Year

In Bible prophecy, time consists of 30 days in a prophetic month, but it consists of 360 days to a prophetic year, not 365. God's prophetic calendar year is calibrated on 360 days. Thus, promises like that of Daniel 9:25 are to be figured on a calendar year of 360 days.

When this is done, beginning in 445 B.C., the time of the decree to allow Israel to return to restore and rebuild Jerusalem to the time of Messiah, we are brought precisely to the birth or the triumphal procession of Christ.

Daniel 9:24 shows us that God would finish His dealings with Israel in 70 weeks of years, or 70×7 , i.e., 490 years. That this prophecy is dealing with 70 weeks of years and not days is clear from two things: (a) Daniel was thinking of years and not days in verse 2 of this same chapter in relation to the 70 years of captivity, and (b) in 10:2-3, when days were in view, the Hebrew text makes this clear by adding "days" to the word "weeks." Literally, the Hebrew text reads "weeks of days."

At the beginning of the 70th week of years, or the last seven years (Dan. 9:27), a Roman ruler, i.e., 'the prince of the people who would destroy Jerusalem,' would come on the scene and make a covenant with the nation of Israel

for one week or seven years, the 70th week. How do we know he will be a Roman? By his description in verse 27. It was the Romans who destroyed Jerusalem and he is their prince.

Midway through that 70th week, after 3 1/2 years, he would break his covenant, stop the sacrifices in the rebuilt temple (either just before or perhaps during the first 3 1/2 years), desecrate this temple, demand to be worshipped himself, and it would be a terrible time of desolation and anti-Semitism as never before in history.

Revelation 6-19 deals with this same period of time of seven years and defines half of this period, 3 1/2 years, in terms of specific numbers of days and months. This shows us that the length of God's calendar is 360 days. How? The last half (3 1/2 years) is defined as 1260 days and as 42 months (Rev. 11:2-3 and 12:6, 14). When this is calculated (i.e., divide 1260 days by 3 1/2), you get a year of 360 days, not 365. Or multiply 3 1/2 times 360 days to get 1260 days.

Problem of the Order of Events in Prophecy

Prophecy does not always keep to a chronological order in the unfolding of events. This means as future events are described they are revealed in God's own order for His own emphasis, but not necessarily in the order of their occurrence.

While Prophecy is for instruction and understanding, it is also for comfort and warning. The comfort or warning is usually more important than the chronological order. The comfort and warning challenges our way of life, the chronological order (which we can do nothing about anyway) often serves only to satisfy our curiosity.

Which comes first, the day of God's wrath, the day of reckoning in judgment, or the millennial reign, the time of peace and Messianic prosperity? The answer is obvious. Before the Lord will reign, He must put down His enemies. But when we compare Isaiah 2:1-22 we find the order reversed. Verses 1-4 describe the blessings of the millennial kingdom as a means of comfort and motivation, but this is followed in verses 5-11 by a description of Israel who had failed to walk in the light of the Lord. As a result, verses 12-22 describe a day of reckoning, the judgment aspect of the Day of the Lord that must come upon the nation before she will turn from her rebellious ways.

When reading or studying Revelation, people often assume that each section is chronological so that the next chapter or series of events naturally follows the preceding, but that is not the case. Rather, a number of sections in Revelation are parenthetical and the chronological order is halted in order to develop in more detail some aspect of this end-time period like a key person(s), or event(s), or condition(s). Some examples are:

(1) Chapter 7 stops the chronological progress begun in chapter 6 and forms an interlude which gives us information about the 144,000 and about multitudes who will be saved during the Tribulation. The six seals are described in chapter 6, but the trumpet judgments don't begin until chapter 8 which constitutes also the seventh seal. Six of these trumpet judgments occur chronologically and are described through chapter 9. The seventh trumpet is not sounded, however, until 11:15.

(2) So again the story of the progress of judgment on earth is halted and we have another parenthesis from 10:1-11:14. Here a vision is given concerning the little book, concerning the no delay once the seventh trumpet is sounded, and concerning the two witnesses.

(3) Revelation 11:15 picks up the chronological process again and the seventh trumpet is sounded. Other sections which are somewhat parenthetical regarding persons and systems are chapters 12, 13, and 17-18.

Prophecy and the Church

In Old Testament prophecy, the church is omitted because it was a mystery that was not revealed until New Testament times (Eph. 3:1-5, 9; Col. 1:25-26; Rom. 16:25-26). The Old Testament prophets saw the coming of the Savior, His birth, death, life, resurrection, etc. The Old Testament spoke of the salvation and blessing of the Gentiles, but not in terms of the church where Jew and Gentile become one in Christ and coequal. The Old Testament illustrates truth for us that is applicable to the body of Christ in many ways, but the church as an institution is simply not there.

Likewise, you will not find the church mentioned in Revelation 6-18 because this portion of the book is dealing with Daniel's 70th week and the resumption of God's program for Israel. The church and the term church is men-

tioned repeatedly in chapters 1, 2, and 3, but it is not mentioned again until Revelation 19 in the symbolism of the bride and in connection with the return of Christ to earth. There He is seen coming with His bride who has been prepared for the wedding supper of the millennium. If the church is to go into the period described by chapters 6-18, why isn't it mentioned? Because it is not there. Instead, the church is even given a special promise that it will be kept out of this time of testing for those who dwell on the earth (Rev. 3:10).

Lesson 2: The Introduction Proper

Having looked at some basic principles and definitions for prophecy as a whole, we now want to look at some points of introduction to the book of Revelation itself.

Title of the Book

Our Bibles carry the title of the book as “The Revelation of John,” or “The Revelation to John” which means it is a revelation given to the apostle John, but the proper name is found in the first words of 1:1, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.” Revelation is from the Greek word *apokalupsis* meaning “a disclosure, an unveiling.” The name “revelation” (note that it is singular) is derived from its use in 1:1, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.”

“Of Jesus Christ” is a genitive construction which can mean “about Jesus Christ” or “from Jesus Christ.” This is what some grammarians call a “plenary genitive,” i.e., a genitive doing double duty since both aspects are true.

(1) It is the revelation that comes from Christ (cf. the second clause in 1:1, “which God gave Him to show to His bondservants,” and 22:16 make this point clear). Jesus Christ, being God Himself, gave this revelation to His servant.

(2) But Jesus Christ is also the center of the book. The book is supremely the revelation about the Savior who has overcome and will return to defeat all evil (1:7, 13 [Note that each message to the seven churches begins with some aspect of the vision of Christ in 1:13-16]; 5:5-14).

Let’s note one more thing about the title. While this book contains several visions and unveilings, it is one book and one total revelation centered around one person and His literal return to earth—the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not the Book of Revelations (pl). The noun *Revelation* in verse one is singular and is so in the Greek text.

Theme of the Book

The prominent theme of the book certainly concerns the conflict with evil in the form of human personalities energized by Satan and his world-wide system, and the Lord’s triumphant victory to overthrow these enemies to establish His kingdom both in the millennium (the 1,000 years of Revelation 20) and in eternity.

This is accomplished by taking the reader and hearers (1:3) behind the scenes through the visions given to John to see the demonic nature and source of the awful evil in the world along with the conquering power which rests in the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, who is also the Lamb standing, as if slain, but very much alive, angry, and bringing the judgment of God’s awesome holiness against a sinful and rebellious world.

Importance and Purpose of the Book

I suppose there is no book in the New Testament which has been as neglected and as controversial as this book, at least in some quarters. Some assert that Revelation is impossible to interpret. Others claim it should not even be in the New Testament much less studied and read. An illustration of this can be found in Martin Luther’s attitude and remarks. For Luther, Revelation was “neither apostolic nor prophetic” and because of its overuse of visions and symbols, Christ was neither taught nor accepted in this book.¹ Luther was offended by this book. Some seminaries avoid it almost entirely or give it very little attention, and many people and schools dismiss it as a hopeless conglomeration of visions and dreams.

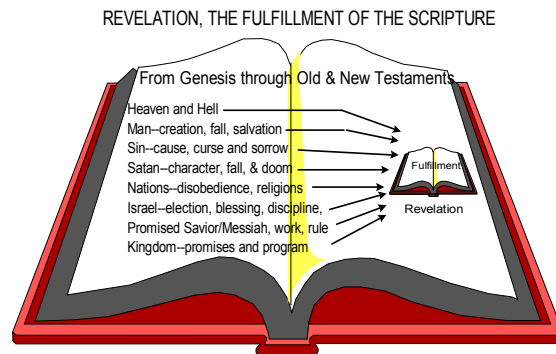
The point is man has attempted to do precisely what God has told him not to do. Revelation 22:10 says, “seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.” God does not intend for the truth of this book to be sealed to man. He intended the church to study and understand the message of Revelation. Why is that?

¹ Alan Johnson, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12, Frank E. Gaebelein, general editor, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1981, p. 404, 407.

First, because blessing, not confusion is promised to those who will read it (1:3). Though filled with horror, it ends in the triumph of righteousness and faith.

Second, the Bible says “all Scripture is profitable,” meaning every book of the Bible. But Revelation has a unique and very important place as it is the consummation and climax of God’s revelation and redemptive history. As the final book of the Bible, Revelation brings together a number of lines of prophetic truth which run parallel throughout the Old and New Testaments, but, apart from the book of Revelation, they find no complete prophetic fulfillment.

I remember reading about a young believer who, at the conclusion of reading Revelation for the first time, jumped up and shouted, “We Win! We Win!” The point is that without the book of Revelation, the Bible would be incomplete. Other Old and New Testament books add new dimensions and give added information and details of prophetic truth regarding the end times, but only Revelation draws them all together into a final conclusion.



This forms one of the arguments for the Bible as a completed canon. All the themes of Scripture are fulfilled and find their culmination in Revelation. There is no need for more revelation from this standpoint. With this book, we truly have “a faith once and for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

Third, this book is also important because it deals with “things which must shortly come to pass.” It is the only major prophetic book in the New Testament that deals in an in-depth way with the events of the Day of the Lord. Many other passages deal with this period of time like Matthew 24 and 1 Thessalonians 5, but not to the extent Revelation does.

Fourth, it is also important because of the way it reveals the Lord Jesus. It reveals Him as the Lamb of God and King of kings who, in the consummation of His program of salvation, restores to man what was lost by the fall and much more. All of Scripture ultimately speaks of the Lord, it points men to Him, but it is Revelation which thoroughly demonstrates the culmination of God’s complete salvation in Christ.

Fifth, Revelation is also important because of its unique warnings and challenges to the church in the section spoken of as “things present” (2-3). But even beyond this, the rest of the book also has a very pertinent message for us today for two reasons:

- On the one hand, it provides us with an extended commentary on the spiritual warfare described in Ephesians 6:12. What we see revealed in this book is but the culmination of the warfare with rulers, principalities, and powers of evil under the control of Satan. As such, it calls us to walk carefully and to understand that what is happening around us is not merely a struggle with flesh and blood, but with supernatural entities that are as real as we are.
- On the other hand, it gives us light concerning things to come, of things that have not as yet occurred in history, but will. It thereby comforts and encourages us to carry on in the light of the sure and final judgment on evil and consummation of God’s kingdom in time and eternity.

Sixth, it is important because it discloses conditions that will be present in the end-time system of the beast and the final world empire, politically, religiously, economically, and internationally. Such conditions, one would think, would naturally begin to come together to set the stage, as props are prepared for the world stage, before this end-

time drama would actually unfold. Thus, while Christ's return for the church is imminent, those members of the body of Christ who will be living in this moment of history can know that His return must be even more imminent, i.e., just around the corner.

Author and Date

According to the book itself, the author's name was John (1:4, 9; 22:8). He was a prophet (22:9), and a leader who was known in the churches of Asia Minor to whom he writes the book of Revelation (1:4).

Traditionally, this John has been identified as John the apostle, one of the disciples of our Lord. That the style is different from the style of the Gospel of John stems only from the difference in the nature of this book as apocalyptic literature.

An early church father, Irenaeus, states that John first settled in Ephesus, that he was later arrested and banished to the Isle of Patmos in the Aegean Sea to work in the mines, and that this occurred during the reign of the Roman emperor, Domitian. This supports the author's own claim to have written from Patmos because of his witness for Christ (1:9).

Domitian reigned in Rome from A.D. 81-96. Since Irenaeus tells us that John wrote from Patmos during the reign of Domitian, and since this is confirmed by other early church writers, such as Clement of Alexandria and Eusebius, most conservative scholars believe the book was written between A.D. 81-96. This would make it the last book of the New Testament, just shortly after John's gospel and his epistles (1, 2, and 3 John). Others conservative scholars believe it was written much earlier, around 68, or before Jerusalem was destroyed.

Interpretation of the Book

(1) This book is a part of the canon—a part of that which God has spoken. It belongs in the Bible.

Early church history supports the apostle John as the author of the book. This is one of the requirements or tests for inclusion into the canon of Scripture. The book refers to the human author simply as John without further identification. This would imply the author was well known to the readers of Asia Minor, as would be the case with the apostle John who lived in Ephesus. This further supports the apostle John as the author.

This book was widely circulated and received as inspired Scripture by the beginning of the third century, the early 200s. There were a few small groups who did not accept it as Scripture, but this was primarily from opposition to the thousand year reign so clearly taught in chapter 20. Much of this came from heretical groups, but on the whole, the early church accepted it as inspired Scripture.

(2) As a part of the Bible, this book is what God has spoken through the apostle, the human author. The principle is that God is its author and Scripture emphatically declares that God is not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33). If we accept it as Scripture, as did the early church and the majority of the church historically, we must approach the book as a book intended to be understood, not as a book to mystify and confuse. It is as Moses wrote: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and our children forever" (Deut. 29:29).

(3) The uncertainty and confusion that this book has been accused of creating is not the fault of the book or the fault of God. Rather, the confusion is the product of the way men have tried to approach this book. A great deal of confusion has been caused because of a bias against such things as: (a) a literal 1,000 year reign, (b) the coming of the terrible judgments depicted, and (c) a desire to spiritualize prophecy in general. The confusion has come from those who have tried to spiritualize or allegorize prophecy and especially this book.

In allegory, words are not taken in their literal or normal meaning. They are spiritualized which means that the interpreter looks behind the literal, plain meaning of the text for a hidden and more profound meaning. This turns exegesis or Bible study into an artful play of human ingenuity and fanciful imagination.

The result of this approach is a potpourri, a mixed bag of interpretations. One man sees one thing and another sees something else because when the normal method of interpretation is abandoned (which includes the proper use of symbols) you have no objective controls to your interpretation and no control over human imagination.

Schools of Interpretation Used with Revelation

The Preterist School

Preterist is from a Latin word meaning “past.” This school of thought sees Revelation as already fulfilled in the early history of the church by A.D. 312, with the conversion of Constantine. Note the spiritualizing nature of their interpretations: Revelation 5-11 is a record of the church’s victory over Judaism; Revelation 12-19 is record of her victory over Rome; and Revelation 20-22 is record of the glory of the church. The persecutions of Revelation, it is claimed, are those of Nero and Domitian and all was fulfilled by the time of Constantine (A.D. 312).

Revelation for the Preterist is purely symbolic history rather than prophetic of coming events in history. This not only does total injustice to the nature of the book as prophecy, but to the normal meaning of words.

The Historical Approach

This approach sees Revelation as a symbolic presentation and a panorama of the total period of church history from John’s day to the end of the age or Christ’s second advent. In this view, Revelation does not *just* deal with a future time, but covers all of history from the time of John. The problems is most adherents of this view see the book culminating in their day and as many as 50 interpretations have evolved. Why? Because the literal, normal approach of interpretation has been abandoned. Further, such a view must ignore the imminent return of the Lord.

The Idealist Approach

This approach sees the book as portraying in symbolic terms the age-old conflict of the principles of good and evil with no historic elements whether past or future.

The Futurist Approach

The term “futurist” comes from the fact this interpretation sees the book from chapter 4 on as yet to be fulfilled. This is the approach taken in this study, though I do believe it is also an extended commentary on Paul’s statement in Ephesians 6:12.² The futurist approach follows the principle of interpretation known as the literal, plain or normal method of interpretation. This method which will be defined below recognizes the use of symbols, but understands them in their plain, customary, and normal meaning just as we do in our language. The term *star*, for instance, can refer to a star in the heavens, or it can refer to a famous athlete, someone who excels in athletics. It depends of the context.

There are several reasons for the futurist approach. The prophecies found in this book have simply not taken place. There is nothing in history that comes close to the events of the majority of the book. For instance: (a) No judgments in history have ever equaled those depicted in chapters 6, 8, 9, and 16, but in these chapters, these judgments are presented as things that will occur. (b) The resurrection and judgment of chapter 20 have never occurred, but are clearly presented as future facts. (c) Obviously, the great anticipation of the book, Christ’s visible return as portrayed in chapter 20, has also not taken place.

Only the futurist approach which is based on a literal or plain method of interpretation has any objectivity about the contents of the book.

Structure of the Book

The contents of Revelation are given in terms of a series of sevens, some explicit and some implied: seven churches (chap. 2-3); seven seals (chap. 6-7); seven trumpets (chap. 8-11); seven signs (chap. 12-14); seven bowls (chap. 16-18); seven last things (chap. 19-22).

Some divide the contents of the book around four key visions: (a) The vision of the Son of man among the seven churches (chap. 1-3); (b) The vision of the seven-sealed scroll, the seven trumpets, the seven signs, and the seven

² Johnson, p. 410.

bowls (4:1-19:10); (c) The vision of the return of Christ and the consummation of the age (19:11-20:15); and (d) The vision of the new heaven and new earth (chap. 21-22).

The contents may also be divided up based on the division of 1:19: (a) “the things which you have seen,” **The Things Past** (chap. 1:1-20); (b) “the things which are,” **The Things Present** (chap. 2-3); and (c) “the things which shall take place after these things,” **The Things Future** (chap. 4-22). Some look at 1:19 differently, but the most natural way to take this verse is as it is translated in the KJV, the NAS, and the NIV.

Method of Interpretation and Use of Symbolism

One’s method of interpretation is crucial to a correct interpretation of Scripture because without a correct method, the Bible becomes putty in the hands of the interpreter. You often hear the complaint that you can prove anything you want to with the Bible. And the implication is simply that everyone comes up with a different interpretation, especially with the Book of Revelation. A further implication is that we simply cannot have a sound and objective system of doctrine. But this is incorrect on several points:

(1) The commands of Scripture to know the Word and maintain a system of sound doctrine show us that God expects us to know and come to an objective understanding of the Bible and that this is to become the foundation for sound theology in all categories of truth or doctrine, prophecy included (1 Tim 1:3, 7, 10; 4:6; 6:3; 2 Tim 1:13; 4:3; Tit 1:9, 13).

(2) Without a sound system of doctrine derived from the Bible as our authority, men are left to the shifting sands of their own experience and imaginations. We are invariably left with some form of mysticism and neo-orthodox theology in which the Bible only becomes the Word of God when it speaks to you and a passage of Scripture may do this not only in different ways with different people, but in ways that are completely contradictory.

(3) You cannot prove anything you want to with Scripture if you follow the rules of sound hermeneutics. Hermeneutics means the science and art of Biblical interpretation and it is this that provides controls over the imagination and ideas of man.

(4) Hermeneutics is called a *science* because it follows rules that guide and control the interpreter. It is called an *art* because it requires skill and practice to apply the rules correctly as in any skill. This is evident in Paul’s words to Timothy and the context for the words, “accurately handling the Word of truth” in 2 Timothy 2:15. Without an accurate handling of the Bible, we end up with error, not truth. We must, then, using the science of hermeneutics, seek to ground interpretation in fact or the objective data of Scripture—context, grammar, historical setting, meaning and use of words, literary style, etc.

Some passages of Scripture and areas of doctrine are more difficult and hard to be dogmatic on, but this does not mean that they are beyond our grasp or that we should ignore them. We should continue to study these areas being careful to apply ourselves to a careful study of the Word as the inspired Word of God always examining our position as objectively as we can (Acts 17:11; 2 Tim 2:15).

It is also true that no one comes to Scripture without certain preconceived ideas. No one is completely objective (though we must strive to be so) and this is why our method of interpretation is so important as a check (Acts 17:11). But even with that there is also the need to humbly ask God to help us deal with our preconceived notions and prejudices. We need the humble attitude and prayer of the Psalmist who prayed, “Open my eyes that I may behold wonderful things from your Law” (Ps. 119:19).

It is also obvious that men will vary in their skill and knowledge of exegesis (one’s personal examination of the text to determine its meaning in its historical and literary context) and this will affect their ability to accurately interpret the Bible. But again, the responsibility is not to give up, or ignore Scripture, or to treat it as a mystic would do. Instead, our responsibility is to be careful students, ever seeking to be as objective as possible, to be willing to say I am not sure, or I may be wrong, and to continue to grow in the art and science of the study of the Bible as our only objective guide for truth.

As Ramm so aptly put it, “That God has spoken in Holy Scripture is the very heart of our faith and without this certainty we should be left to the relativity and dubiousness of *human* knowledge. God has spoken! But what has He

said?”³ (italics his). “This is our primary and basic need in hermeneutics: *to ascertain what God has said in Sacred Scripture; to determine the meaning of the Word of God.*”⁴ (italics his). The Bible is no profit to us at all if we do not know what God has said, what it means, or if we think we know, but are wrong.

We must know and have the correct method of interpretation, a correct hermeneutic, so that we do not confuse the voice of God with the voice of man. The false methods of men are what make the Bible a source of confusion rather than a source of light and truth, not the Bible itself.

We must have a method that provides: a check on the imaginations, feelings, background, prejudices of men, a protection against the delusions and misuse of Scripture by Satan, and one that enables us to bridge the gap between the minds of the biblical writers and our minds, the minds of interpreters who live many years later, even hundreds of years later, in a different time, usually in a different place, and with a different language. This is the tremendous gap created by differences of culture, history, geography, and language.

The only method of interpretation or hermeneutic that brings such controls and that moves us toward objectivity is the literal or normal and plain method of interpretation. This is the method that I will be employing in this study of Revelation. But what does this mean?

The Literal Method of Interpretation

To *interpret* means to explain the original sense of a speaker or writer versus imposing our ideas on the text. To interpret *literally* means to explain the original sense of the speaker or writer according to the normal, customary, and proper usage of words and language.⁵ “The literal or normal interpretation of the Bible simply means to explain the original sense of the Bible according to the normal and customary usages of its language.”⁶

The Control: The literal or normal method operates by rules which help us to ground interpretation in fact. These are the rules of context, grammar, the analogy of Scripture, cultural and historical background, and the normal meaning of words according to their use in various contexts.

Spiritual or Allegorical Method Compared

“Allegorism is the method of interpreting a literary text that regards the literal sense as the vehicle for a secondary, more spiritual and more profound sense.”⁷ The spiritual or allegorical method sees the literal sense as well figures of speech as a symbol to convey some secondary or mystical, metaphorical, or spiritual idea that is hidden, but the hidden meaning is developed and controlled by the interpreter’s own ideas or ingenuity rather than by the rules and guidelines of context, grammar, the analogy of Scripture, cultural and historical background, and the normal meaning of words. Clearly there are dangers to the allegorical method of interpretation.

(1) The allegorical method does not interpret Scripture. It ignores the common meaning of words and gives rise to all manner of speculation ignoring what the author really intended to say.

(2) In the allegorical method, the authority in interpretation is the imagination of the interpreter or his mind rather than the Scripture itself. In the final analysis, in the allegorical method one is left without any means by which the conclusions of the interpreter may be tested.⁸

(3) The allegorical method results in sheer nonsense because “To understand a speaker or writer, one must assume that the speaker or writer is using words normally and without multiple meanings. This is what the literal me-

³ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, W. A. Wilde Company: Boston, 1956, pp.1-2.

⁴ Ramm p. 2.

⁵ Paul Lee Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, Assurance Publishers: Rockville, MD, 1974, p. 29.

⁶ Tan, p. 29.

⁷ Ramm, p. 21.

⁸ Pentecost, pp. 5-6.

thod of interpretation assumes of God in Scriptural revelation. It believes the Bible to be revelation, not riddle.”⁹ Again we remember Deuteronomy 29:29.

The word “literal” is sometimes taken to mean non-figurative. The literal approach, however, recognizes the fact and use of symbolism, or figures, but attempts to understand them, as with any other literary method, on the basis of their normal and plain meaning as dictated by the normal rules of interpretation. This provides a check on our imagination or prejudice. Let’s look at several illustrations:

PSALM 22: Verse 18 speaks of the casting of lots. This is a literal statement and is a prophecy of a literal happening, one that did happen when Christ was crucified, but verses 12-13 depict the fierce enemies of the Lord as strong bulls and ravenous lions. These are obviously figures or symbols, but with a very plain and literal meaning which is derived by the rules of the literal method—context, usage, culture and history. It’s important to realize a symbol only has meaning when we understand how or what it previously meant literally in the historical and cultural setting of the time.

- The Bulls of Bashan. By studying the historical background, the geography, the culture, and Scripture itself, we find that the area of Bashan lying northeast of the Sea of Galilee was a place where bulls became fat and strong. In the Bible, then, the phrase, “the rams or bulls of Bashan,” at times served as figures or symbols of Israel and especially as symbols of her leaders. It was used to portray those who had become luxurious, proud, and full of their own prosperity and importance. So this symbol pictures Christ’s enemies like the bulls of Bashan, with a full feeling of power and strength, ill natured, self satisfied and bullish in their attitude.
- The Lion symbolizes Christ’s enemies as those who stand and gape with open mouths like a lion roaring over its killed prey. They weren’t literally lions, but they acted like lions based on our knowledge of how lions behave when standing over their prey.

JOHN 1:29: “Behold the lamb of God” is obviously another symbol, but it too has a plain meaning based on historical and Scriptural facts. In the light of Old Testament teaching and Israel’s sacrificial history, it points to Christ as God’s sacrifice, the one who would die for our sin as God’s innocent substitute.

JOHN 6:25-59: In this passage John records Jesus’ feeding of the five thousand. This is an historical event, but it contains a number of spiritual truths and applications. For instance, Christ refers to Himself as “the bread of life.” The literal method understands this is symbolic but its meaning is derived from the significance of bread for our daily food for sustenance.

REVELATION 8:12: This passage speaks of judgment that will affect the sun, moon, and stars. Here there is no indication of symbolism other than one’s own bias against such catastrophes. The stars are literal because there is nothing in the context to indicate otherwise. We are imposing our imaginations on the text if we say, this is symbolical of world rulers or the loss of spiritual light in the world. Why? Because there is nothing in the passage or context to suggest this. We must let the passage speak for itself.

REVELATION 9:1-12: Here John records seeing a star fall from heaven. But in this passage, by context and the analogy of Scripture, this is plainly a symbol. How can we know this? The following are some important keys and helps:

- We should always read a passage literally and assume that the literal meaning is the prophet’s meaning unless there is adequate reason from context to read it otherwise.
- But we should always note carefully words like “as,” “like,” “as it were,” and similar expressions (cf. 6:1; 9:7) because words like “as” normally indicate a figure or symbol by way of a comparison or an analogy and *not an identification*. Compare Revelation 8:13. The text here does not say, “I heard one flying like an eagle in mid-heaven...” Some would make this refer to perhaps an angel, but I think we should take it literally. If God made a donkey speak to Balaam, why could He not, in this tremendous hour, use an eagle as a voice of woe to stress His sovereignty over creation?

⁹ Tan, p. 30.

- Always, where a figure of speech is suggested by the context, interpret by the analogy of Scripture. *Allow Scripture to interpret Scripture* while always bearing in mind the context and other rules of interpretation.
- Look for interpretive clues and identifications within the text itself which indicate a figure is being used. Note the following three examples:

REVELATION 9:1: All the English translations rightly view the star as a person rather than as a fragment of a star. This is indicated by the personal pronouns, “to him” in verse 1 and “he” in verse 2. Some would say the keys were given to the fifth angel, but word order would suggest the “him” looks back to the star who fell from heaven and not the fifth angel who sounded his trumpet. The star, who is further identified as a king in verse 11, is the subject of the passage, not the angel who simply announces this judgment by blowing his trumpet.

- The star is also connected with the Abyss which is a demonic abode according to the analogy of Scripture (cf. Luke 8:30-31; Jude 6; 2 Pet. 2:4).
- Further, he is identified as the angel of the Abyss, the king of demons. This identifies him as Satan which also perfectly fits with the analogy of Scripture which in other places refers to angels as stars (Matt. 9:34; 12:25-28; John 12:31; Eph. 2:2; 6:12; Rev. 12:7f).

ISAIAH 14:12-16: Though this is a taunt taken up against the king of Babylon, most believe, due to the strong language of the passage, that it looks beyond a human being. Ultimately it must refer to Satan whom Scripture portrays as the prince of this world and the power behind many of the world rulers (Eph. 2:2; 6:12). This speaks of Satan who controlled the king of Babylon and his system of the past and will control the system of the future. In Isaiah 14:12-14, Satan is called “star of the morning,” literally, “bright, or shining one” which refers to him as a bright morning star.

LUKE 10:18: In Luke 10:18 the Lord refers to Satan as falling from heaven, like a star, and this all fits with the context and emphasis of Revelation 9 and 12. This is totally in keeping the natural use of words in language and is even found in our own English idiom. We likewise use the term “star” in both a literal and symbolical sense. We speak of the stars in heaven, but we also speak symbolically of the star of the game, of the stars in Hollywood because, like a star, they stand out among others in some particular way. It has a symbolical meaning, but it depends on the context and its normal use for its true meaning.

The literal method of approach that will be used in this study will recognize the presence of symbols, but they will be interpreted by the normal and plain meaning of the symbol derived by historical background, context, grammar, the analogy of Scripture, and general usage.

Lesson 3: The Prologue (1:1-8)

The Superscription (1:1-3)

1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must shortly take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, 2 who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. 3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

Title and Theme of the Book (1:1a)

The title of the book is “The *Apokalupsis* of Jesus Christ.” “Revelation” is the translation of the Greek noun, *apokalupsis*, meaning “a disclosure, an unveiling.” The term “revelation” itself is derived from the Latin *revelatio* (from *revelare*, “to reveal or unveil that which has previously been hidden”).

This was the title assigned to the book in the Latin Vulgate. The Greek title is *Apocalypse*, taken directly from the first word in the Greek text, *apokalupsi*. In this noun form the word is not found anywhere else in Greek literature, but as a verb it is continually used in the Gospels and the Epistles, in many different ways, especially in reference to some form of divine revelation to man (as of the Son of Man, in Lk 17:30). It is used by Paul in referring to the same coming event (Rom 8:18; I Cor 1:7; II Thess 1:7), and frequently in I Peter (1:7, 13; 4:13; 5:1). In the Greek text of Daniel this word is often found referring to the uncovering of secrets, or the interpretation of dreams, or the revelation of God (see Dan 2:19, 22, 28, 29, 30, 47; 10:1; 11:35).¹

Apokalupsis means “to expose to full view what was before unknown, hidden, and secret.” In its first appearance in the New Testament (Luke 2:32), it is used of Simeon who, taking the baby Jesus in his arms, blessed Him and spoke of Him as “a light to lighten the Gentiles” (KJV). It reminds us that God intends for this book to bring light and to be understood by its readers. This opening clause is a mark of distinction which gives us not only the title, but the theme. Notice that it is not the revelation of John, but of Jesus Christ which was given to John. The common title sometimes used for the book, “The Revelation to John,” merely identifies John as the human author. But how are we to understand the phrase, “of Jesus Christ”?

Grammatically, the words “of Jesus Christ” can be either a genitive of object meaning a revelation “about Jesus Christ,” or a genitive of subject meaning a revelation “from Jesus Christ.” “From Jesus Christ” would point to Christ as the author who gave this to John through His angel (cf. 22:16). Writers differ with some arguing for one or the other of these views. Some would argue that as 22:16 shows, it is from Christ and that the subject is about “things which must shortly come to pass” (vs. 1b). Others say, no, it is a revelation of and about the person of Christ. But grammatically it is likely that “of Jesus Christ” is what grammarians call a plenary genitive and includes both ideas.² It is a revelation about and from the Lord Jesus. It is a revelation, a disclosure about the Christ Himself. It reveals His present work in the church, and discloses future events, but the events concern the person of Christ Himself and His return and activities associated with His second coming. In support, note the following verses:

- 1:5 — “and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness.”
- 1:7 — “Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him,” so we have an unveiling.

¹ Everett F. Harrison, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, New Testament*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1962, electronic media.

² A plenary genitive is when the noun in the genitive functions *both* as a subjective and an objective genitive due to context.

- 1:13f — Reveals Christ’s ministry in the middle of the lampstands.
- 5:5-6 — Reveals Jesus Christ as the Lion and the Lamb.
- 6:14f — Reveals the unveiling of the Lamb on the throne and His wrath.
- 19:10 — Reveals the return of the Lord as King of kings.

The Communication of the Book (1:1b-2)

The Chain of Communication

In keeping with the teaching of the New Testament regarding the procession of the ministries of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we see the headship of the Father who initiates this revelation through the Son (cf. 1 Cor. 11:3). **First, it proceeds from the Father to the Son**—“which God gave to Him.” For other Scriptures supporting the doctrine of procession see John 3:34, 35; 5:20-24; 7:16; 14:10, 24; 16:15).

Second, the communication proceeds from the Son through an angel, “and He sent and communicated it by His angel.” The term angel, angelos, is found 175 times in 171 verses of the New Testament. Though some verses refer to men, the vast majority refer to angelic beings. This prominence shows the importance of angels in the worship of God, in the communication of revelation to man, and in the execution of God’s purposes and judgments.

Angels were often God’s instruments of communication or his messengers which is the basic meaning of the word, “angel” (Heb. 2:2; Acts 7:53). They will again be used as God’s special messengers in the time described in Revelation 6-19. Angelos is used seven times of the angel or messenger to the seven churches in chapters 2-3, though in these chapters, it refers most likely to a human messenger, someone responsible for communicating the Word in each of the seven churches. The prominent idea is a messenger, an instrument of communication used by God.

There is a great deal of interest today in angels. Numerous books have been written about angels and so-called angelic encounters. Little figures of what angels are supposed to look like are a very popular item in the stores and not just around Christmas time. But we need to be careful about this interest in angels since Satan, who disguises himself as an angel of light, surely has fallen angels under his command who do the same and pose as instruments of good, even claiming revelation from God (2 Cor. 11:14-15). One of the largest cults in the world today claims it was begun because of an encounter with an angel; and shortly after the time of Paul, a false system of religion arose called gnosticism in which there was an intricate belief system in angels. Paul seems to warn about this system in its incipient form in Colossians 2:18-19.

An extremely interesting statement and a very timely one for any generation, but especially for our society, is found in Galatians 1:8. “But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed.” Since the fall of Satan, no true angel from heaven would ever preach a false gospel, but hypothetically speaking, should one do so, Paul says he is to be accursed, devoted to destruction as are all the fallen angels or demonic beings (Matt. 25:41). The good angels are servants who do many tasks for God, but above all, they are messengers, as the name implies, who are responsible to witness truthfully to the person of the Lord Jesus. Three characteristics of angels: (a) they will agree with and bear testimony to the message of the Bible regarding the person and work of Christ (Rev. 1:1-2; 19:10), (b) they will always honor God and never seek honor for themselves (Rev. 19:10), and (c) they act on God’s behalf to do His will and often for the sake of Israel and the church as is so evident in the book of Daniel (10:13f; 12:1) and Revelation (see also Heb. 1:7, 14; Ps. 103:20).

Third, the communication comes from the angel as the Lord’s messenger to John who is called His bond-servant (vs. 1) (cf. Rev. 17:1; 19:9f; 21:9; 22:6,8,16).

Finally, the communication of the book is from John to the body of Christ. This is seen in the words, “to show to his bond servants” (vs. 1), and in the words, “to the seven churches...” in verse 4. “Bondservants” is the Greek word, doulos, a significant term especially when applied to the people of God. The bondservant was one who was owned by his master lock, stock, and barrel. He was totally under the authority and power of his master and dependent on him for everything—his responsibilities, his daily food, housing, and supplies, and his purpose in life. Ironically, however, it is in this servitude to Christ that we experience true freedom—freedom from bondage to sin, self,

Satan, and the religion of the world. But it is not just a freedom from something. It is also a freedom to be something, a freedom to know, serve, and walk with God in the peace and righteousness of Christ choosing to serve Him rather than sin.

Perhaps the use of the terms “angel” (messenger) and “bondservant” should remind us of two key areas of truth that are related as root to fruit. They remind us of what both angels and men should be, especially the body of Christ which has been left on earth to represent the Lord Jesus as His messengers. We are to be instruments of light as portrayed in the symbol of the lampstand. This means we are messengers of Christ and servants of God, but our willingness and ability to be effective as messengers of the message of the Savior as was John is greatly dependent on truly living as bondservants of the Savior. We see this truth in the first verse of Paul’s message to the Romans where he identifies himself as “a bondservant of Jesus Christ” and then as one “called to be an apostle” (Rom. 1:1). The secret of Paul’s ministry to the nations as a preacher and an apostle and a teacher (2 Tim. 1:11) is indicated in the order of these words of identification in Romans 1:1. He was first and foremost a bondservant, one utterly surrendered to the ascended Christ, and then he was an apostle, one sent with the message as a preacher and a teacher.

One of the vital principles of the Christian life is that the way up is down, and the way to life is death—death to self and its control. The Lord Jesus is the perfect example of this, who, though being God of very God, took on the form of a bondservant in the form of true humanity and humbled Himself to die in our place that we might have life (Phil. 2:6-8). He, as a servant, came not to be ministered to, but to minister and give His life for our redemption (Mark 10:45). He taught us that becoming a productive servant begins with dying to ourselves as a grain of wheat. He said:

John 12:24-26 Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25 He who loves his life loses it; and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal. 26 If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall My servant also be; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.

General Eisenhower once rebuked one of his generals for referring to a soldier as “just a private.” He reminded him that the army could function better without its generals than it could without its foot soldiers. “If this war is won,” he said, “it will be won by privates.” In the same way, it is the common, servant-like believer who becomes the very backbone of the body of Christ. We are often overly impressed by our great evangelists and superstar Bible teachers and leaders who stand before large crowds, but if the glorious message of the person and work of Christ is to reach the world, it will be done by a church that functions as bondslaves of the Savior (cf. Luke 12:15; 12:32; 2 Pet. 2:19; 1 John 3:17).

One man tells this story of his experience with hummingbirds:

Recently we put up a hummingbird feeder with four feeding stations. Almost immediately it became popular with the hummingbirds that live in our area. Two, three, or even four birds would feed at one time. We refilled the feeder at least once a day. Suddenly the usage decreased to almost nothing. The feeder needed filling only about once a week. The reason for the decreased usage soon became apparent. A male bird had taken over the feeder as his property. He is now the only hummingbird who uses our feeder. He feeds and then sits in a nearby tree, rising to attack any bird that approaches his feeder. Guard duty occupies his every waking hour. He is an effective guard. The only time another bird gets to use the feeder is when the self-appointed owner is momentarily gone to chase away an intruder.

We soon realized that the hummingbird was teaching us a valuable lesson. By choosing to assume ownership of the feeder, he is forfeiting his freedom. He is no longer free to come and go as he wishes. He is tied to the work of guarding his feeder. He is possessed by his possession. His freedom of action is as circumscribed as if he were in a cage. He is caged by a situation he has created.³

Someone has said, “The true test of a servant’s heart is whether or not I am willing to act like one when I am treated like one.”

³ W. L. Barnes, *Free As a Bird*.

The Aim and Purpose of the Communication

“Show” is *deiknumi*, “to exhibit, disclose, point out.” Again we see an emphasis on disclosing the message of Revelation. God intends for this book to be communicated to His people.

“Shortly” is the Greek *en tachei* which can mean either of two things. It can mean soon as in the immediate future or in prophetic terms, it can mean imminent, i.e., they could occur at any time or in our day. One must remember the truth of 2 Peter 3:8, that one day is as a thousand years and vice versa from God’s viewpoint. It may also mean “rapidly, quickly, speedily.”

The point is, by comparison to the rest of history, once these things begin to unfold they will occur rapidly (cf. Luke 18:8; Acts 12:7; 22:18; 25:4; Rom. 16:20). There will be no more delays in the plan of God and in His long suffering (cf. Matt. 24:22). A similar word, *tachus*, is translated six times in Revelation meaning “quickly” which may illustrate the concept (cf. 2:16; 3:11; 11:14; 22:7,12,20). In view of the words “the time is near” in verse 3 (cf. 22:10), it may be best to take *en tachei* as “soon” and understand it to refer to the imminent return of the Lord. Imminent means “ready to take place, impending.” “The church in every age has always lived with the expectancy of the consummation of all things in its day. Imminency describes an event possible any day, impossible no day.”⁴ (See Appendix 1 for reasons in support of imminency.)

The Manner of the Communication

“Communicated” is *semaino*, meaning “to show, signify, reveal by signs or symbols” as is often the case in this book. But it can also mean to reveal by words without the use of signs or symbols. John was communicated to by both the spoken word and by visions in which he saw things that were full of symbolic meaning as in 1:10-12, but these symbols are designed to be understood according to the normal meaning of the symbols.

The Things Communicated

That which is communicated is first of all defined as the “witness” of John. This is *martureo*, “to be a witness, act as a witness, testify or bear witness.” It carries the idea of “attestation, verification, validation” and stresses that John was bearing testimony as a witness of what he received. That witness is defined and described in a three-fold way which shows its importance and why we need to pay attention to its message:

(1) “The Word of God”—This book with its visions is called the Word of God and is part of the whole canon of Scripture. It stands in harmony with the rest of Scripture and provides us with the culmination and conclusion. This description stresses its authority and importance to the church. It brings out the concepts of inspiration, canonicity, preservation, and illumination (cf. 1:9; 3:8, 10; 6:9; 12:11; 17:17; 19:9; 20:4).

(2) “The testimony of Jesus Christ”—The word “testimony,” *marturia*, a noun form of the above *martureo*, also carries the idea of “attestation, verification, validation.” This could mean “the testimony about Jesus Christ,” an objective genitive, or “the testimony from Jesus Christ,” a subjective genitive. The latter is preferable because of the phrase, “the Word of (from) God,” and the context. The point is John testifies to both the Word of God and to the validation of his message from Jesus himself.⁵

(3) “And of all the things which he saw”—The first two defined and described his testimony from the standpoint of its nature or character and source. This calls attention to the many details and areas that he saw and that will be found in the book—the great events and personages which precede and surround Christ’s coming, His kingdom, and His eternal glory.

⁴ Alan Johnson, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12, Frank E. Gaebelein, general editor, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1981, p. 417.

⁵ Johnson, p. 417.

The Promise, Plan, and Value of the Book (1:3)

The Promise—Blessing

“Blessed” is makairos, “happy, blessed” (cf. Matt. 5:3). This is a promise of the happiness, spiritual blessing, and joy that will come from knowing and responding to the truth of the book. There are seven beatitudes, the word “blessed” appearing 7 times in the book of Revelation.

Lehman Strauss defines them as: The Blessed Challenge (1:3), The Blessed Comfort (14:13), The Blessed Cautionness (16:15), The Blessed Calling (19:9), The Blessed Conquest (20:6), The Blessed Cherishing (22:7), The Blessed Conformity (22:14).⁶

The Plan—Exposition and Application

“He who reads.” Note that this is singular while the next clause, “those who hear,” is plural. This reflects the early form of worship and one of God’s primary plans for taking in the Word. The Scripture was publicly read to the congregation. The early church didn’t have a large number of copies of the Scripture nor any books of the New Testament when they were received, so they would be read and undoubtedly also, expounded on by the pastor and teachers given to the body.

“And those who hear.” In this we see the responsibility of the flock to hear and respond. It is these who are blessed. “Hear” is akouo,, “to hear, listen, attend, perceive by hearing, comprehend by hearing.” It includes concentration and learning, and of course, to hear, one must be present when the Word is taught (Heb. 10:25).

“And heed the things...” “Heed” is te,reo,, “to guard, watch over, preserve” or “observe, apply, obey.” In this context, the main idea is that of personal application with obedience.

“The words of this prophecy” and “the things which are written.” Note that “words” and “things” are plural. They point us to the content of the book, but include the various categories and truths that make up the content of Revelation—the person of Christ, the church, the saints, the Tribulation, witnessing, faithfulness, overcoming, the angelic warfare, Israel, Satan, demons, judgments, the millennium, the resurrection, the eternal state, etc.

“Of this prophecy.” In addition to being called the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, it is called “prophecy.” Prophecy involves not only future events, but also moral and spiritual things that train, exhort, and comfort. It particularly refers to truth received by direct revelation from God (1 Cor. 14:30).

“Which are written in it.” “Written” is in the perfect tense and means “stands written.” The perfect tense stresses the permanence of the record and perhaps its availability. God has made His Word available to us and preserved it in the Canon of Scripture. In the New Testament, the concept of the Word which stands written is found over sixty times.

The Value—Its Timeliness

“For the time is as hand.” “Time” is kairos and refers to a definite season or period of time, but one that is marked out by its contents or characteristics. The time in mind is the time of Christ’s return marked out by all that will happen just before, during, and after (1:19).

“Is near” is engus which includes: (1) near as to place, close by, like the car near the garage, and (2), near as to time, soon. The idea is “near from the standpoint of prophetic revelation, i.e., next.” Again we see God’s reckoning of time (2 Pet. 3:8-9). The next phase of God’s program for the earth will be the events of this Revelation. The world is ever coming closer to this awesome time. The value of this book is that it provides orientation to the times, motivation to ministry and godliness, comfort, and instruction.

⁶ Lehman Strauss, *The Book of Revelation*, Loizeaux Brothers: Neptune, NJ, 1964, p. 23.

The Salutation (1:4-8)

4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne; 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood, 6 and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father; to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 7 Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so. Amen. 8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

The Writer (1:4a)

“John.” The human author is John the apostle (1:4a). “The Hebrew idioms in the book, the authority of the author in relation to the churches, the use of distinctively Johannine terms like *logos* and “Lamb of God,” and the corroboration of Irenaeus, Origen, Tertullian and Clement all affirm that the apostle John was the author of this book.”⁷ Every New Testament book was written by an apostle or by one who was closely associated with an apostle, i.e., like Luke who was a companion of the apostle Paul. This was one of the marks of inspiration and necessary for recognition of a book into the canon of Scripture.

The Recipients (1:4a)

“To the seven churches in Asia” (1:4b). The whole book is addressed to seven historical churches in the province of Asia Minor. This fact should prevent anyone from saying that Revelation is nothing more than a piece of poetic idealism.⁸ As will be discussed later, these seven in their historical situation are representative of the church at any particular point in history. Chapters two and three contain specific letters to these seven churches with special warnings, exhortations, commendations, and instructions.

The Greeting (1:4b)

“Grace to you and peace.” First, we should note the order of God’s blessings: Grace, then peace. Peace is always the product of knowing and appropriating the grace of God in Christ. This order can never be changed. Ignore the grace of God and you forfeit the peace of God (cf. Heb. 12:14 with vs. 15). Peace is the product of grace (2 Pet. 1:2-4; 1 Pet. 3:18). Peter exhorts us, “but grow in the grace and knowledge of...” The more we experience the grace of God, the more capacity we have to experience the variegated aspects of God’s peace. Though the message of Revelation is primarily one of judgment, this benediction of grace and peace is notable. God here seeks to comfort and strengthen His people. Knowing this book brings a greater capacity to understand God’s grace in his patience during this age and even in the events of the future for God does not wish for any to perish, but to come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9). Having a grasp of God’s program for the future also gives peace.

For an overview of the nature of grace and peace, see Appendix 2.

The Source of the Divine Blessings (1:4d-8)

Note that the preposition, “from,” is used three times in verses 4 and 5. This points us to three distinct and separate ministries found in the distinct ministries of the trinity.

From the Timeless and Eternal One

We should note in passing that this designation of God corresponds to the division of the book given in Revelation 1:19, the things past, the things present, and the things to come. It reminds us that He is the God of history. This

⁷ Charles C. Ryrie, *Revelation*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1968, p.14.

⁸ Ryrie, *Revelation*, p. 14.

should comfort and strengthen as we study about all that has, is, and will happen in the future. Behind it all is the eternal and sovereign God of the Bible.

“Who is” is literally “the one who is.” It ascribes the fact and quality of continual existence as a distinctive and emphatic quality of God’s being and essence. He is the “I Am” of the Old Testament.

“And who was.” “Was” is the imperfect of the verb “to be” and refers to God’s continual existence in past time. It stresses the Father has always been.

“And is to come” is literally “the one coming” or “the coming one.” The Greek construction again describes a fact and quality that characterizes God. It speaks of the future coming of God to take control of all things in a world that has been in open rebellion. He is coming to put down His enemies and establish His reign through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (see 1 Cor. 15:20-28).

From the Seven Spirits

Ryrie comments,

The number seven, occurring 54 times in the book, appears more frequently than any other number. In the Bible it is associated with completion, fulfillment, and perfection (cf. Gen. 2:2; Ex. 20:10; Lev. 14:7; Acts 6:3). In Revelation there are seven churches and seven spirits (1:4), seven lampstands (1:12), seven stars (1:16), seven seals on the scroll (5:1), seven horns and seven eyes of the Lamb (5:6), seven angels and seven trumpets (8:2), seven thunders (10:3), seven heads of the dragon (12:3), seven heads of the beast (13:1), seven golden bowls (15:7), and seven kings (17:10).⁹

“The seven Spirits.” Some take this to refer to the seven angels who are before the throne, but it seems best to understand this as a reference to the Holy Spirit and the perfection or fullness of His actions and the manifold nature of His ministry. This fits both the context and the analogy of Scripture.

The book is presented as coming from three sources who seem to be presented as equal with one another. The last of these is clearly defined as Jesus Christ, the third member of the trinity. If the first is the Father, and the third is the Son, the second would in all probability be the Holy Spirit rather than seven angels. First, because only the Holy Spirit is equal with the Father and the Son, and second, though angels are involved in the visions of the revelation, only one angel was really involved in specific communication of the book to John (cf. 1:1).

There is an obvious parallel to the seven-fold ministries portrayed in Isaiah 11:2. Why is the Holy Spirit referred to as seven spirits? There is only one Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:4), but in the Bible, seven is consistently associated with perfection, fulfillment, and completeness. Evidently, because Revelation is the final book of the Bible, the culmination, the fulfillment, and climax of the ages. The number seven becomes prominent to demonstrate this.

From Jesus Christ, the God-man Savior

In verses 5a-7 there is a three-fold emphasis on Christ’s person and work to draw attention to who He is, what He has done, and will do.

Appellatives (titles) of Jesus Christ (1:5a)

(1) Our Prophet—the faithful witness. The Greek text is very emphatic. Literally it reads, “the witness, the faithful One.” This stresses the character of His witness as faithful. The Lord Jesus is the logos, the very revelation of God to man (cf. John 1:1, 14, 18). He answers man’s need of the ideal prophet or spokesman and revelation from and for God (Deut. 18:15-22).

(2) Our Priest—the firstborn of the dead. First, since He could not be the firstborn from among the dead without dying, this statement must first look back to Christ’s substitutionary death for the sin of the world (Heb. 5:1-10; 9:11-14; 10:14). Second, the firstborn from the dead is also an obvious reference to the fact of the resurrection. By the resurrection God the Father verified His acceptance of Christ’s offering of Himself by raising Him to prove

⁹ Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible, Expanded Edition*, p. 2013.

our justification (Acts 2:23-24, 31-32; 4:25), prove to the world that He is God's Son (Rom. 1:4), and prove that this Jesus will judge the world (Rom. 17:31). Third, the mention of the firstborn points to Him as our forerunner in resurrection. The first one brought forth from the dead in a glorified body is a promise that more will follow. The Lord Jesus is God's guarantee of our resurrection and glorification (John 11:24-26).

(3) Our King—the ruler of the kings of the earth. “The ruler” is literally “the one who rules...” or “the ruling one...” It ascribes the quality of rule to Him and characterizes Him as the one who rules, the ruler (cf. 19:16). It is a rule that is going on now and it is a rule over all governments even though the world lies in rebellion and unbelief. Nations, kings, and governments rise and fall by His sovereign authority and power (cf. Matt. 28:18). Compare Daniel 2:20,21; 4:17; 5:18.

So Christ is now seated at God's right hand, having spoiled Satan and Satan's demonic hosts by His death and resurrection. But one day He will rise from His seat and begin to take the reigns of control through the events of the Tribulation (cf. Dan. 2:44; Rev. 4; 5; 11:15-17).

Accolades (praise) to Jesus Christ (1:5b-7)

(1) For His present ministry—“who loves us.” The Greek text uses one article with two adjectival participles which descriptively portray the person, work, and ministry of the Lord. Literally—“the one who loves,...and who released us,...” The construction of the Greek text ascribes Christ's love for us as a constant quality and characteristic. It speaks of His constant care and ministry on our behalf.

(2) For His past ministry—“who released us...and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father.” “Released” looks at a past historic fact. It looks at this as an accomplished fact, as something that does not need repeating and Scripture strongly stresses this in the truth of the finished work of Christ. Again, it is a descriptive participle only now in the aorist tense. It is descriptive, classifying Christ as the Releaser, the one and only one who has accomplished what is necessary to release men from the penalty and power of sin.

The object of the releasing is “us,” a reference to believers in Christ, but it is available to any who will put their trust in the Savior (John 3:16).

The verb is *luo*, “to untie, set free, release.” It stresses that man, apart from Jesus Christ and His work on the cross is in bondage, chained to his sin problem: both its penalty (physical, spiritual, and eternal death) and its power (weakness and domination by a sinful nature). Some MSS have “washed us” from *louo*, “to wash.”

“From” is the Greek word *ek*, a preposition meaning “from, out of, away from.” It is a preposition of separation.

“Our sins” stresses two things: First, that the problem facing man is sin, imputed sin, inherent sin, and individual. Man's problem is not the lack of a great society. Man is a fallen creature and this has caused both man's separation from a holy God and the corruption of society. In himself, mankind does not have what it needs to rectify its problems. Only Christ, the sin releaser can do that. Second, it stresses that the sin problem is personal. Every person is up against the eight ball of sin and needs the saving grace of God (Rom. 3:23).

“By His blood” is a metonymy for the work of the Christ on the cross, His substitutionary death by which He dealt with the sin problem. Compare for instance, “the pen (a symbol of literary power) is mightier than the sword” (a symbol of military power).

As we think about this, we should be reminded of the total effects of what we have been separated from by His death in our place. The separation includes: (a) the **PLACE** from which separation takes place—**Satan's Kingdom** (Col. 1:13), (b) the **COMPANY** from which separation takes place—**Satan's World System** (John 17:15-17), (c) the **CIRCUMSTANCES** out of which one is brought—**the Penalty and Power of sin and death**—(Rom. 6:1f; Eph. 2:1f; Heb. 2:14, 15), and (d) the **PERSONS** with whom a connection is severed—**the Son's of disobedience** (Eph. 2:2f; 5:6f).

“And He has made us a kingdom...” “Kingdom” is singular. Not kings, but a kingdom. It is collective and stresses our relationship to each other as believers and to Christ as our king. A kingdom is a place of rule. We are a kingdom, a people in whom God is to rule and who will one day reign with Christ, but because of the word “priests,” that's not the focus here.

“Priests” is plural. Here we see our individual position, responsibility, and the purpose of this kingdom. We are a kingdom of priests to God who are to represent Him to the world. We have a collective priesthood, but every believer is a ministering priest before God. This is a far cry from what we so often see in churches today where the pastor is viewed as the minister and the people see themselves only as laymen or lay people.

“To Him be glory and dominion...” Before John turns to His future ministry and the keynote of the book—Christ’s coming again—there is a doxology of praise which both concludes what has been said and introduces what is about to be said regarding Christ’s return.

“To Him” is what we can call a dative of possession. It points us to that which rightly belongs to Christ. In this we see the great purpose of our lives.

“Be the glory.” This is the Greek *doxa* and refers to that which should accrue to Christ, the praise, the adoration, the rule, the respect and worship because of who He is and what He has done.

“And the dominion.” This is the Greek *kratos*. It means (a) power, might, and (b) rule, sovereignty.

“For ever and ever.” Man’s rule as given to him by God was lost in the garden of Eden, but never again once the Lord, the God-Man Savior, assumes His reign on earth at His second coming.

(3) For His future ministry—“Behold, He is coming with the clouds...”

“Behold” is designed to arrest our attention and get us to focus on this as the great theme of Revelation. He is coming for us (1 Thess. 4:13-18) and then with us to earth (Rev. 19:11-16), but in between, He is coming to judge the world for its rebellion (Rev. 6-19:10).

“Is coming” is the present tense of the verb, *erchomai*, “to come, go.” This is a future present used to denote an event which has not yet occurred, but which is regarded as so certain that in thought it is viewed as already occurring or accomplished.

“With the clouds” reminds us of Acts 1:9f and the promise of the angels at the ascension of the Lord Jesus. This may have been the *Shekinah* glory of God and it could be so here. There will be clouds, but clouds of the glory of God manifesting the coming glory of the Lord to rule and take up the reigns of government over the earth in a visible way (cf. Matt. 24:30).

“Every eye” simply points out that all mankind will see this in contrast to the ascension which was seen only by the disciples.

“Those who pierced Him.” In the light of Zechariah 12:10, this refers primarily to the Jews who asked for His death, but it could also refer to the Romans who carried out the sentence. In essence we all caused His death because of our sin.

“And all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him.” Literally “and they shall wail over Him” (Matt. 24:30). The Greek word is *kopto*, and means literally “to beat the breast in wailing and mourning.” For some it will be the mourning of repentance. For others it will be the mourning over the judgments that He will pour out on the earth and sinners.

The Benediction to the Greeting (1:7c-8)

The benediction begins with the words of verse 7, “even so, amen.” This confirms what has been said and introduces what is to follow.

“Even so” is the Greek *nai*, a particle of affirmation. It confirms the sure return of the Lord and the statements made about Him.

“Amen” means “to be firm, sure, true.” It is a further affirmation of the promise of the verse.

There is some disagreement about who is here speaking. Ryrie thinks this verse refers to the Father and is His affirmation of the Son. Others as Walvoord, believe it speaks of the Son.

Reasons in favor of this as a reference to the Son are: (a) He is the central person of the first chapter, and (b) in verse 17 Christ uses a similar expression of Himself when he says, “I am the first and the last.” (c) Finally, toward

the close of the book two expressions are united and applied by Christ to Himself which seems to identify Him as the one speaking here (cf. 22:6, 22:13, and Isa. 44:6). This authenticates who He is—God Almighty.

However, since this follows the salutation which comes from the trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, perhaps it could be from the Godhead itself.

“I Am the Alpha and Omega.” Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. It is equivalent to our A and Z. This does not relate so much to time but to truth. It expressed the extent of God’s knowledge and wisdom (Col. 2:3). It stresses Christ’s or the Godhead’s omniscience or infinite knowledge and wisdom. This stands then as a strong authentication of the book of Revelation because it comes from the Alpha (α) and Omega (ω).

“The Almighty” is the Greek pantokrator, from pas, “all” and kratos, “might, power.” It stresses God’s omnipotence, but also God’s sovereign supremacy over all things. It declares God’s supremacy over all the universe. The word was used in secular literature to describe the attributes of the gods and John is probably using it here in contrast to the Roman emperor’s self-designation as the autokrator.¹⁰

Walvoord has an excellent summary of these opening verses.

Jesus Christ is the central figure of the opening eight verses of Revelation. As the Source of revelation He is presented in verse 1. As the Channel of the word and testimony of God He is cited in verse 2. His blessings through His revealed word are promised in verse 3. In verse 5 He is the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth. He is revealed to be the source of all grace who loves us and cleanses us from our sins through His shed blood. He is the source of our royal priesthood who has the right to gather in Himself all glory and dominion forever. He is promised to come with clouds, attended with great display of power and glory, and every eye shall see the One who died for men. He is the Almighty One of eternity past and eternity future. If no more had been written than that contained in this introductory portion of chapter 1, it would have constituted a tremendous restatement of the person and work of Christ such as found in no comparable section of Scripture.¹¹

Application Questions:

- (1) How well does my life exhibit the character of a bondsman?
- (2) Am I a careful messenger who accurately bears testimony to the person and work of Jesus Christ?
- (3) Am I involved in ministry as a believer priest or am I more of a spectator?
- (4) Am I living as a sojourner who looks with great anticipation for the Lord’s return, or have I become more of an earth dweller whose primary goals are in this world?

¹⁰ Fritz Rienecker, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, edited by Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1980, p. 812.

¹¹ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1966, p. 40.

Lesson 4: The Things Past (1:9-20)

Revelation can obviously be outlined or divided in a number of ways, but most commentators see 1:19 as a divinely-given outline. Walvoord writes:

The advantage of this outline is that it deals in a natural way with the material rather than seizing on incidentals as some expositors have done or avoiding any outline at all, as is true of other expositors. It is not too much to claim that this outline is the only one which allows the book to speak for itself without artificial manipulation...¹

The point is that this God-given outline supports and demonstrates the futuristic approach of the book. Revelation 1:19 becomes a key to how we should interpret the book. Verse nineteen gives a three-part division: Following the prologue or introduction, we have what John calls “the things which you have seen,” i.e., **the things past**. This is followed by “the things which are,” **the things present**, and then “the things which will take place after these things,” **the things future**. Based on this breakdown, Revelation falls into the following three divisions:

(1) **The things past** are the things which John had seen from verse 9-19 including verse 20 which is an explanation of part of this vision, the vision of the glorified Christ (1:9-20).

(2) **The things present** are “the things which are.” This deals with the messages to the seven churches and the state of the church or the church age (2:1-3:22).

(3) **The things future** refer to “the things which shall take place after these things.” This takes us the reader into the future or things to come, and deals with the things that will occur after the church: the tribulation, the millennium, and the eternal state (4:1-22:21).

Remember that,

If one follows the plain, literal or normal principle of interpretation he concludes that most of the book is yet in the future. No judgments in history have ever equaled those described in chapters 6, 8, 9, and 16. The resurrections and judgment described in chapter 20 have not yet occurred. There has been no visible return of Christ as portrayed in chapter 19.²

Circumstances of the Vision (1:9-11)

9 I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos, because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, 11 saying, “Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”

In verses 9-11 John provides us with those facts which are pertinent to the nature of the book and how John came to write it.

The Receiver of the Vision (1:9a)

“I John, your brother and fellow partaker in the...” John, of course, was well known among the churches of Asia Minor. He refers to himself as simply John in 1:1 and 1:4, but twice he says, “I John” (1:9; 22:8) which seems to add emphasis for the purpose of authenticating his witness.

¹ Walvoord, p. 48.

² Charles C. Ryrie, *Revelation*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1968, p. 9.

In his epistles John described himself as an elder (2 John 1; 3 John 1), but here he simply calls himself “a brother and fellow partaker...”

“Brother” is the Greek adelphos, a word often used as a technical term for believers in Christ because we are all born again into God’s family. It stresses the close relationship we all have regardless of our position or gifts in the church or in society. We are still brothers under the authority and care of the Father and our older Brother, the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Fellow partaker” is the Greek sunkoino,,nos, “to share jointly, to have in common with others.” It reminds us of the doctrine of koino,,nia or fellowship and how we, as believers in Christ, share many things in common—a common hope, common blessings, common sufferings, and common responsibilities.

“In Jesus” is the uniting factor and the basis of our brotherhood or fellowship (1 Cor. 1:9). It calls to mind our union or position in Christ or the co-identification that we share together in Him. Note, three things are mentioned that he had in common with the seven churches.

First, John speaks of himself as “a fellow partaker in tribulation.” “Tribulation” is the Greek thlipsis from thli-bo,, “to crush, press hard.” Thlipsis means “trouble, affliction, distress.” The Greek has the article with the word “tribulation,” but it goes with all three nouns linking them together as three related things that often come simultaneously to believers in Christ. Literally, “the affliction, kingdom, and endurance in Jesus.” It does not refer to “the tribulation” to come as though it had already begun. Specifically, “tribulation” in this verse refers to the persecutions and distress that John was facing on the isle of Patmos and that much of the church was experiencing for their faith in Jesus Christ because of the persecutions of the Roman emperor, Domitian.

Second, John then spoke of a “kingdom”: Though we may experience tribulation, we also share in a kingdom that enables us to become overcomers in affliction. This refers to Christ’s kingdom and rule. There are three aspects of this in which all believers in Christ share:

(1) There is the present mystery form, the kingdom of God within you which includes God’s sovereign provision, control, and deliverance: Compare Col. 1:12-13 with the mystery parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13 which describes the present mystery form between Christ’s first and second comings.

(2) There is the predicted millennial reign on earth in which all believers will take part with varying degrees of responsibility and rewards depending on their faithfulness to walk with the Lord (cf. Rom. 8:17; 1 Cor. 3:12f; Rev. 2:26; 3:12, 21; 20:4).

(3) There is the eternal form of the kingdom, the eternal state (Rev. 22:1-22:5).

However, not only do we share in tribulation, but as sharers in Christ’s kingdom and rule, we can also share in the endurance that comes to us in Christ. So...

Third, John referred to “perseverance” as further common thing we share in Jesus. This is hupomone,, from hupo, “under” and mone,, “to abide.” It means endurance, the ability to abide under pressure regardless of the intensity or length of time. This is a joint ability that all believers have in Christ if they will walk in faith and keep their eyes on the Savior (cf. Col. 1:9; Heb. 12:1-2). This is especially true when we fix our gaze on the future glory and the blessings to come (cf. the close of each message to the seven churches).

The Place of the Vision (1:9b)

John was on an island called “Patmos.” Patmos was a small, bleak, and rocky island about ten miles long and six miles wide. It was a place where prisoners and undesirables were banished and forced to work in the mines. According to early church fathers like Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Eusebius, John was sent here and forced to work in the mines though way up in years. This points to the source of his affliction and endurance as a partaker of Christ’s rule and reign in his life.

“Because of the Word of God” points us to the cause or reason for John’s banishment as an undesirable—his unswerving faithfulness to proclaim the Word and share Jesus Christ with men. Please note, though men could circumscribe his human activities, they could not bind the Spirit of God nor the testimony of Jesus Christ nor the power of the Word of God (2 Tim. 2:9).

Moses wrote the Pentateuch in the wilderness. David wrote many psalms while being pursued by Saul. Isaiah lived in difficult days and died a martyr's death. Ezekiel wrote in exile. Jeremiah's life was one of trial and persecution. Peter wrote his two letters shortly before martyrdom. Thus in the will of God the final written revelation was given to John while suffering for Christ and the gospel.³

The Spiritual Circumstances (1:10-11)

“And I was in the Spirit.” The tense, the verb used, and the fact of this statement pointing us to the reason for the visions of this book all suggests this refers to something unusual instead of the normal experience of the Spirit controlled walk.

Such visions as depicted in this book are never stated to be one of the products or promises of the Spirit filled walk (Gal. 5:22f). Rather, it refers to a state where God could supernaturally reveal the special contents of this book. The verb here can be classified as an ingressive aorist describing an entrance into a condition. The verb is ginomai, “to come to be, become.” Literally, “I came to be in the Spirit.” It refers to an entrance into an unusual state. “Such was the experience of Ezekiel (Ezek. 2:2; 3:12, 14; etc.), Peter (Acts 10:10-11; 11:5), and Paul (Acts 22:17-18).”⁴

The Time of the Vision

“On the Lord's day” is taken by interpreters in two different ways: (a) the Lord's day as the first day of the week or Sunday, or (b) as a reference to the Day of the Lord, the Tribulation.

“Lord” is the Greek kuriakos, an adjective meaning “belonging to the Lord, lordian, imperial.” And though the Day of the Lord in other places is always written differently (he,mera kuriou), due to the unique emphasis of this book, a number of writers as Walvoord, Ryrie, and Pentecost and others believe this word does not refer to Sunday, but rather to the Day of the Lord of the Old Testament, an extended period of time when God will deal in judgment and sovereign rule over the earth.⁵

John, through this spiritual state, was projected into the Day of the Lord, that imperial day and time when the Lord would return in His kingly glory and take the reins of earthly government via the events and conditions of chapters 4-22. Support for this is as follows:

(1) Unless this is the exception, the expression, “the Lord's day,” as a reference to Sunday is nowhere else used in the Bible. This word, kuriakos is used only here and in 1 Cor. 11:20 where it is used of the Lord's supper, but not a day. Outside the New Testament it meant “imperial.”

(2) The day that the early church regularly met, the day of Christ's resurrection, was consistently called “the first day of the week,” and never “the Lord's day” (cf. Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2,9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1,19; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2).

(3) Walvoord adds, “it is questionable in any case whether the amazing revelation given in the entire book could have been conveyed to John in one twenty-four-hour day, and it is more probable that it consisted of a series of revelations.”⁶

(4) “And I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet” calls attention to the awesome nature of what John was about to see, a vision of the glorified Christ. Trumpets are used in the Bible to announce important occasions and to assemble God's people for some kind of preparation. The important occasion here is the vision of Christ which is preparatory to all that follows.

³ Walvoord, p. 41.

⁴ Walvoord, p. 42.

⁵ Taken from Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 42; Ryrie, *Revelation*, p. 17; J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, and class notes taken at Dallas Theological Seminary, 1965.

⁶ Walvoord, p. 42.

The Command to Record the Vision

“Write in a book what you see” is one of twelve times John was told to write in the book what he saw. This indicates John was to write after seeing each vision. In 10:4, John was told not to write, but seal up what was spoken.

“And send it to the seven churches” shows us again that God’s intends for the church to have and know the contents of the book of Revelation. The entire book along with the individual messages were to be written for and sent to the seven churches.

Content of the Vision (1:12-16)

12 And I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; 13 and in the middle of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His breast with a golden girdle. 14 And His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire; 15 and His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been caused to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 And in His right hand He held seven stars; and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.

The Position of the Lord (1:12-13a)

Having turned to see the voice, a figure for the one who was speaking to John, he was then given and recorded the vision of the seven golden lampstands and the glorified Christ seen in the very center of the vision. The Position of the Lord in the middle of the seven golden lampstands (1:12-13a), is of course, the most striking feature of this vision. It draws our attention not only to His glorious appearance, but to the central place He has and deserves in the life of the church.

The meaning of the seven golden lampstands with Christ in the center:

(1) The vision is for the seven churches of Asia Minor (vs. 20) who represent the church at large throughout the ages. *Its truth is for our comfort, encouragement, challenge, and instruction.*

(2) In the Old Testament, the lampstands of the tabernacle and the temple consisted of a seven-branched lampstand, a single stand with one center lamp and three on each side. Here, however, we have seven separate lampstands arranged in a circle with Christ standing in the center.

(3) The lampstands are made of gold, a symbol of the deity of Christ who gives beauty to the church when it exhibits His character. He is the reason for our value. In ourselves, we are only clay vessels.

(4) The lampstands are filled with olive oil, a symbol of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and they are responsible to give out light, their principle function, in the power of the indwelling Spirit.

(5) But the key note is the circle of lamps with Christ in the center pointing emphatically to the centrality and priority of Christ. He is the center, the hub, and the heart of the church at large and of each individual local church. Note that the Lord has a direct relationship with each church. He is in our midst to minister to us, to search us, and to enable us and we are in the world to give off light to point men to Christ.

The Description of the Lord (1:13b-16)

The description which follows symbolically represents the attributes and traits of Christ which demonstrate His relationship to the events of the book of Revelation and His qualifications to carry out and accomplish all that will follow. But before the description of His glory or deity begins, note how He is defined: as “one like a son of man.” This title points to his true humanity and Messianic character. Though portrayed in all the glory of His deity in the similes that follow, He is still the Son of Man, one made like His brethren that He might be a faithful high priest and reclaim what Adam lost in the fall (cf. Heb. 2:9f). Note also, as the Son of Man, He is seen “clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His breast with a golden girdle.”

This vision is introductory to chapters 2 and 3, the letters to the churches, and the events that follow dealing with the judgments of the Tribulation. This portrays Him in His role as the Son of Man who is also a priest and judge. His role as priest and judge is a somber and significant note as He stands in the midst of the seven churches because it calls our attention to just exactly who He is.

(1) His head and hair (14a)— “were white like wool, like snow.” This corresponds and is designed to remind us of the vision in Daniel of “the Ancient of Days” (Dan. 7:9). This represents (a) His eternal wisdom, the wisdom of age as the one whose “goings forth are from old, from everlasting” (Mic. 5:2), and (b) His complete purity or holiness symbolized in the white wool and snow.

(2) His eyes (14b)— “were like a flame of fire.” This speaks of His penetrating vision, searching righteousness, and judgment into the affairs of the church and mankind as a whole. Perhaps there is in this a connection with the Bema, the judgment seat of Christ for believers, and the Great White Throne Judgment (GWTJ) for unbelievers. The fire which will try men’s works at the Bema and prove the condition of their heart at the GWTJ will be the penetrating and holy gaze of Christ (1 Cor. 3:12f; 2 Cor. 5:10,11; Rev. 20:11-12 and Rom. 3:23; 4:2).

(3) His feet (15a)— “were like burnished bronze.” Literally, the Greek says, “his feet like fine brass (or refined bronze) as when it has been burned (refined—the perfect tense of completed action) in the furnace or oven.” “The idea may be ‘glowing’ and it would indicate that the metal is not only the finest and brightest, but it is aglow as if still in the crucible.”⁷

In Scripture both brass and fire stand for divine judgment as seen in the Old Testament types of the brazen altar and other items of brass used in connection with sacrifice for sin (Ex. 38:30).⁸

Christ is able to stand in the midst of the church as priest and judge and will be able to execute the world wide judgments that follow on the basis of the divine judgments He Himself endured through His life and sufferings on earth as the Lamb of God without spot or blemish.

(4) His voice (15c)— “was like the sound of many waters.” His voice as John heard it was like a mighty waterfall. As the water of Niagara Falls is so loud that it silences all voices around, so this portrays Jesus Christ as the absolute voice of authority to which all human authority must bow.

(5) His right hand (16a)— “And in His right hand He held seven stars.” Verse 20 will explain the mystery of the seven stars in the right hand of the Savior. For now, it is enough to recognize that the right hand is a symbol of strength, power, and honor. The stars, the angels or messengers, are in a place of honor, but they are also under His authority, strength and protection.

(6) His sword (1:16b)— “and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword.” Sword is mentioned a total of nine times in Revelation. Here, it is the Greek *rhomphaia*, mentioned five times in Revelation. Another Greek word for sword, *makaira*, the short Roman two-edged sword, is mentioned four times.

The *rhomphaia* was the long and heavy broad sword of the Thracians and other barbarous nations who often marched as God’s instruments of judgment over one country after another. It symbolizes the irresistible authority and devastating force of our Lord’s judgment (cf. 19:15). Hebrews 4:12 speaks of the Word of God as “quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword.” In Hebrews 4:12, however, the Greek word is *machaira* which speaks of the penetrating power of God’s Word to uncover our inner lives and to get to the root of our needs.

However, it is this same word which, proceeding out of His mouth, will be the basis of Christ’s judgment of men (cf. John 12:48). So, this may also be in view since this sword comes out of the mouth of Christ. *It is thus, an instrument of judgment, of war, of death and destruction.*

(7) His countenance or face (16c)— “and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.” This is undoubtedly a reference or symbol of the brilliance of the divine glory of Christ portraying His holiness and deity. It was this that blinded Paul on the Damascus road and which here caused John to fall at Christ’s feet as a dead man (vs. 17). Here is the Sun shining in the midst of the church. He and He alone is our source of light and righteousness. Paul describes

⁷ Fritz Rienecker, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, edited by Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1980, p. 814 quoting Henry Barclay Swete in *The Apocalypse of St. John*, Macmillan: London, 1907.

⁸ Walvoord, p. 44.

us as heavenly luminaries in Philippians 2:15. The Greek word there is *phos*, which can refer to the sun, but also to the moon or planets that get their light from their sun. He is to us what our sun is to the moon. He is our light, our holiness, and our means of becoming light to the world. Do we take His holiness for granted or do we fall prostrate before Him in humble submission and adoration? This naturally brings us to our next point:

Consequences of the Vision (1:17-20)

17 And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. 19 Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall take place after these things. 20 As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.”

The Word of Comfort (1:17-18)

On several occasions when men have had a glimpse of the glory of God, they rightly fell on their face in humble submission and reverence or responded in some way that showed the effect on man the creature when faced with the awesomeness of the Creator’s glory. But when they did this, God spoke or touched them or both (cf. Dan. 10:8-10, 15-16; Matt. 17:6-7). And so here, the Lord Jesus placed His right hand upon John and spoke words of comfort.

Why did the Lord do this? Because the sovereignty and holiness of God that becomes terror and judgment to the unbelieving world becomes a source of comfort and protection to the believer in Christ because He stands cleansed and purified in the merit and love of Christ (Isa. 6:1-8).

The basis for having no fear— **“I am the first and the last.”** This is similar to 1:8 and both of these statements are applied to Christ later in the book (21:6; 22:13; 2:8). But we need to ask why does the Lord describe Himself as the first and the last? A couple of Old Testament passages point us to the meaning and significance of this.

Isaiah 41:4, 48:12-13 “Who has performed and accomplished *it*, Calling forth the generations from the beginning? ‘I, the LORD, am the first, and with the last. I am He.’”... 12 “Listen to Me, O Jacob, even Israel whom I called; I am He, I am the first, I am also the last. 13 Surely My hand founded the earth, And My right hand spread out the heavens; When I call to them, they stand together.”

By the context we can see that this description stands for God’s independent, self-existence, and self-sufficiency as the transcendent and sovereign God of the universe. He stands outside and independent of all creation. This same designation is used in Revelation 2:8 to comfort a church in affliction because it stands for Christ’s deity and sovereignty over all our affairs. Christ, our Savior and Lord, is God, the origin and goal, the self-existent one who sees the beginning from the end, in whom all the treasure of wisdom and knowledge abide, and who is in total control.

“And the living One; and I became dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore.” In these words we see His assurance of eternal life and resurrection. He is the one who, as the eternal God, became man and died, but who conquered death by His death for sin and by His resurrection.

“And I have the keys of death and of Hades.” As the one who conquered death, He has the keys of death and Hades. “Keys” means authority and power. In Scripture a key is a sign of authority and power. While going through seminary in Dallas, Texas, I worked in the Dallas Juvenile Detention Home and carried a large key that was attached to my belt with a chain that was used to unlock and lock juvenile inmates. It was a sign of authority. So, the Lord Jesus has control over both death and Hades. What does this mean?

(1) He is the Lord over physical death which terminates life in this world. By His death for sin and His resurrection, Christ has wrenched from Satan’s hands any authority the devil had over death (cf. Heb. 2:14-15). This means

“no man can die apart from divine permission even though afflicted by Satan and in trial or trouble”⁹ (cf. Ps. 68:19-20).

(2) He is the sovereign over hell or life after death. “Hell” (KJV) and “Hades” (NASB) is the Greek *hades*. The Greek word *hades*, commonly translated “hell,” refers to the intermediate state and is to be distinguished from the lake of fire or Gehenna, which refers to the eternal state. To avoid confusion it is better to transliterate the word *hades* (as does the NASB) and to use the word “hell” as referring to the eternal state only.¹⁰

As the one who has the keys over death and *hades*, Christ is sovereign over death in this life and over the life to come.

Please refer to the Glossary in Appendix 7 for definitions of hell and related terms.

The Word of Command (1:19-20)

Now the apostle is commanded to write the things which he had seen and would see in the visions to follow. As pointed out previously, this gives us God’s outline for the book and shows us we should have a futuristic approach to the great majority of the book of Revelation.

Verse 20 explains the mystery of the seven golden lampstands and seven stars. In Scripture, “mystery” refers to what was before unknown but is then revealed by revelation from God. It is not something mysterious, but previously unknown. The lampstands are the churches portraying their function and purpose in the world and the stars are the angels or messengers of the seven churches.

But, how do we take the word “angels”? “Angels” is the Greek *angelos* which means “messenger.” In scripture, it is used of both men (Luke 7:27; 9:52; Jam. 2:25) and angelic beings. So, is this a reference to angelic beings who function somewhat like guardian angels? Or do we take this as a reference to human messengers who either carry the message of these letters or who are leaders of the seven churches? Much more will be said on this in the next chapter, but Walvoord has a good summary:

It is possible that these messengers had come actually to the Isle of Patmos, but it is more probable that they refer to the leaders in these churches to whom the messages primarily are addressed. The spiritual significance is that these angels are messengers who are responsible for the spiritual welfare of these seven churches and are in the right hand of the Son of Man, indicating possession, protection, and sovereign control. As the churches were to emit light as a lampstand, the leaders of the churches were to project light as stars.¹¹

⁹ Walvoord, p. 47.

¹⁰ Walvoord, p. 47.

¹¹ Walvoord, p. 45.

Lesson 5: The Message to Ephesus (2:1-7)

“Forsaken First Love”

Distinctive Features of the Seven Churches

Before actually beginning the exposition of the message to Ephesus, it would be helpful to consider a few of the distinctive and common features that can be observed in each of the messages to the churches of Asia Minor as we find them in Revelation 2 and 3.

The Selection of These Particular Churches

Why seven and why these? These were letters to seven historical churches at the time of John’s writing. The letters each dealt with actual conditions of church life in John’s day. But as God’s Word is written to the whole body of Christ for all history, they are also representative of all churches both in John’s day and at any time in the history of the church. Just as the letters to the Corinthians concern not only the church at Corinth, but all churches past, present, and future, so do these letters. Reasons:

(1) The fact there are seven, but only seven listed. Though many other churches existed and many were larger and better known, only these seven were selected. Seven is the number of completion and it is suggested that these seven perfectly represent conditions that would be characteristic of various churches throughout history.

(2) Though each letter is written to a specific church, all the letters close with the words “let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches (pl.)” Each message is pertinent to all the churches, not only of John’s day, but of ours as well.

The Sufficiency of Christ

It should be noted that each message with its warning or counsel or comfort begins by calling attention to some aspect of the majesty and glory of Christ as to His person and work as it is revealed in the vision of chapter one. But, significantly, this is always in some way related to the needs, problems, and conditions within the local assembly. This serves to stress how Jesus Christ perfectly meets our need, and is the source of our strength. All the problems and needs of the church are met in Jesus Christ. He and He alone is the ANSWER to our needs and the SOLUTION to our problems. Please note:

- (1) Christ is the **Author** of each message: it is a special word from Him.
- (2) Christ is the **Answer** for our every problem: He is our need and solution.
- (3) Christ is the **Authority** for our lives: we are all answerable to Him.

The Omniscience of Christ

Each letter begins with a statement of the Lord’s omniscience like “I know your works or deeds” (cf. 2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 8, and 15). How awesome this is and how careful this should make us. This should make us careful to walk by the Spirit for it is Christ Himself, whose searching eyes, like a flame of fire, tries our works. Yet, how comforting for there is no problem and no condition that we face that He does not know or care about.

Our Susceptibility to Local Conditions

In each letter to the churches, there is a unique relationship between the problems they faced and the particular nature and character of the environment in which they lived. It is these conditions that presented particular temptations, testings, and problems.

Chapters 2 and 3 contain seven messages that are extremely practical for us today both on a personal and a corporate level. For the most part, each letter contains six divisions:

1. A reference to the City or *Assembly*, the destination of the letter
2. A description of Christ, the *Author* and *Answer*
3. A Commendation or *Approval*
4. A Condemnation or the *Ailment*
5. A Counsel or *Admonition*
6. A Challenge and an *Assurance*

Now let's look at the church at Ephesus and the problem of forsaken first love in verses 1-7.

The City and the Assembly (2:1a)

2a "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:"

Ephesus was located near the mouth of the Cayster River only three miles from the coast. It became the capitol of Asia Minor, was connected by highways with the interior of Asia and all her chief cities, and became a great commercial center. The emperor had made Ephesus a free city and it was given the title "Supreme Metropolis of Asia." It also contained one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the temple of Diana, and was a center of mystical cult worship. "The temple was 425 feet long, 220 feet wide, and 60 feet high, with great folding doors and 127 marble pillars, some of them covered with gold. The worship of Diana was 'religious immorality' at its worst."¹

The church of Ephesus was established by Paul on his third missionary journey (read Acts 19-20), and it was from this church that Paul called the elders of Ephesus to meet him at Miletus when he was on his way to Jerusalem (Acts 20:16f). After that, Ephesus became the residence of the apostle John before and after his exile, but no church stands there today. Many believe this church may well represent the apostolic age in its moral and doctrinal purity.

The Author and the Answer (2:1b)

"The One who holds the seven stars." This is a note of warning and comfort. It stresses Christ's authority, control, possession, and provision for the messengers of the local churches who have the responsibility to lead and teach God's Word. They are in the hand of the risen Savior to whom all authority in heaven and earth has been given (Matt. 28:18). As the one who holds them, He will provide for, protect and enable them for their ministry. But this also stresses the messenger's need to be both submissive to and dependent upon his Lord for all that is needed for his ministry.

"The One who walks among the seven lampstands." "Who walks." In the vision of chapter one, He is evidently standing, but here we see not only Christ's constant presence in our midst, but His active ministry. In that ministry, He examines us for the quality of our production, He provides for our needs, and He is always available to us seeking to minister and to have fellowship. Our need is to be available to Him! This is also a note of warning and comfort.

The Commendation or Approval (2:2-3)

- 2 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;
- 3 and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament*, Victor Books: electronic publishing.

The Lord's Knowledge

The opening words of verse 2, "I know," serve to stress Christ's omniscience, interest, and evaluation of the works, life, and activity of the church. Nothing escapes Him, nothing! Compare 1 Corinthians 3:12f; 2 Corinthians 5:9-10; Psalm 139:1-12.

Their Works

"Deeds" is the noun, *erga*, the plural of *ergon*, and refers to "a deed or action or task (this was an active church), to occupational or official activity or service (shows Christ was aware of their official ministries and service, i.e., elder, deacon, teacher, helps, etc.), and of achievements, accomplishments (Christ knew what they had done on His behalf). Compare 1 Corinthians 15:51.

"Toil" is *kopos*, and referred to a toil or labor to the point of weariness. It stresses the depth and degree of their labor for the Lord. Compare Colossians 1:29-2:1.

"Perseverance" is *hupomeno*,, from *hupo* meaning "under" and *meno*,, meaning "to abide." It refers to the *capacity or ability* to endure, to remain under pressure or pain over the long haul. It looks at staying power. Compare James 1:2-4. This word stressed the extent of their labor whereas "toil," *kopos*, stressed the degree. Verse 3 will expand on this.

Their Moral and Doctrinal Purity

"That you cannot endure evil men." "Endure" is the Greek *bastazo*,, "to bear, carry as a burden," and then, "to endure," "tolerate." Now compare Galatians 6:1-5. However, when men refuse to respond to the Word and personal rebuke, there comes a time when believers should no longer tolerate their actions and must take the necessary steps as outlined in the Word. Point: The Ephesian church had refused to allow apostasy and immorality to go on in the church. They exercised church discipline when men refused to respond to God's Word (Matt. 18:15-18; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; 2 Thess. 3:6-15; 1 Tim. 5:19-20; Titus 3:10-11).

Their Spiritual Discernment

"And have put to test..." *peirazo*,, "to make proof of, to test, try, prove." They remembered the word of the apostles regarding false teachers (Acts 20:20-31; Jude 17-18). There are three major areas to test: (1) the message and doctrinal belief (1 John 4:1-2); (2) the manner of life (1 John 3:10; 4:8; Jude; Matt. 7:15f); (3) the audience, to whom do they appeal? (1 John 4:5-6).

Verse 3 summarizes their perseverance. They endured. They had not grown weary but things were not as they should be. Ephesus was orthodox in theology, practice, and service, yet something was missing which, if not corrected, would ruin their light-bearing capacity. This is followed, then, by condemnation. A key to their problem can be observed by comparing the deeds, labor and perseverance here with that of the church at Thessalonica (1 Thess. 1:3) where the same Greek words are used, only we should note the accompanying phrases—work of faith, labor of love, and endurance of hope. Faith, love and hope were the sources of the work, the labor, and the endurance. This stressed production from a vital spiritual life.

The Condemnation or Ailment (2:4)

4 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.'

"Forsaken first love." The word "left" is the Greek word *aphie*,mi, "to leave, forsake, depart." It stresses an act for which one is personally responsible. This is not *LOST LOVE*, but *LEFT LOVE* and suggest three particular problems: (a) they had moved away from their original position of devotion and fervor for the Savior by a gradual departure (Heb. 3:7f); (b) they came to put service for the Lord ahead of love, devotion, and fellowship with Him (remember 1 Thessalonians 1:3 and compare Proverbs 4:23); (c) their labor gradually came to be *merely mechanical*, the thing they were responsible to do, but the Savior wants it to be the result of the abiding life, the result of an intimate walk with Him through the Spirit of God (John 15:1-7; Gal. 5:1-5, 16-26; Eph. 5:18).

But the Man in the midst of the churches saw what was missing: they had left (not “lost”) their first love (Jer. 2:2). The local church is espoused to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2), but there is always the danger of that love growing cold. Like Martha, we can be so busy working for Christ that we have no time to love Him (Luke 10:38–42). Christ is more concerned about what we do with Him than for Him. Labor is no substitute for love. To the public, the Ephesian church was successful; to Christ, it had fallen.²

When the Lord first appointed the twelve disciples, it is significant that Mark tells us that Jesus appointed them for two main purposes marked off by two hina purpose clauses in the Greek text: (a) *to be with Him* and (b) *to send them forth* to preach and to cast out demons, and the order here is very significant. The first order of His appointment was their fellowship, being with the Lord Jesus, with their ministry in the world being the product of that fellowship as root to fruit or enablement to activity.

With this in mind, we come to the Lord’s loving counsel and admonition.

The Counsel or Admonition (2:5a, b)

5 ‘Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first;...’

The church as Ephesus from all outward appearances was a very spiritual church for it was certainly a church that was very active in the work of God. They toiled for the Lord, endured much, were doctrinally sound, and took a strong stand against the deeds of the Nicolaitans (vss. 2-3, 6). Nevertheless, something was wrong. They were guilty of a sin that is sometimes hard to detect. But the Lord, who knows our hearts as well as our outward deeds, counsels Ephesus to do three things that were desperately needed to reestablish their closeness and walk with the Savior, or they would lose their witness. There is a very important lesson in this message for God’s people in any period of history, but the message here is particularly important for our performance oriented society. It is the warning that, if we are not ever so careful, we can lose our spiritual vitality, the abiding life principle where we live and serve out of our awareness of Him, and slip into mere orthodox routine. Someone has rightly said that a routine can become like a rut which can be nothing more than a grave with the ends knocked out.

The three things they needed:

(1) Remember. This is a call to reflect, to go back and recall the past. The Savior is saying, “remember the way it used to be in your relationship with Me.” Undoubtedly, the process of looking back is also a call to recognize one’s true condition. We can’t very well confess sin if we don’t clearly see it for what it is. Has our Christian life lost some of its excitement and joy? Are we finding our Christian work rather boring and dull, even to the point of drudgery? Have we lost the joy of the Lord, if so, it is because we have left the position of devotion and occupation with Christ.

“Are fallen” is the perfect tense in the Greek. It looks at a completed act with existing results, a state, and not a process. We are in a fallen condition (are out of fellowship) and working in the energy of the flesh whenever we move away or cease to operate out of condition of love and devotion that stems from personal fellowship or a walk of faith with the Lord Jesus.

(2) Repent. Repent is the Greek word, *metanoeo*,. This word means to change the mind or purpose, to change one’s decision. It means to recognize one’s previous decision, opinion, or condition as wrong, and to accept and move toward a new and right path in its place. The verb is in the aorist tense in the Greek which may look at a single, decisive act. Repentance includes confession of sin with a view to stopping the bad behavior so it can be replaced with what was right.

(3) Repeat. “Do the deeds you did at first.” This is not a call to more Christian service or to renewed Christian activity. They had plenty of that. Then what does the Lord mean and how does this apply to us?

² Wiersbe.

“First” is pro, tos which means “first in time, place, or rank.” It clearly looks back to the beginning of a Christian’s life, but could it not include those deeds which should be first in a believer’s life and are the most important because of what they mean to us, to God, and our fellowship with Him?

So, what are the first deeds? John does not say, but in the light of the above mentioned passages they include the basic techniques and disciplines of fellowship and abiding in the Lord. It would include such things as honest confession of sin, prayer, Bible study, reading, meditation, memorization, fellowship with believers, being occupied with Christ and refocusing all of our life on Him, the faith rest life, reckoning on our position in Christ, etc. (cf. Mark 3:14; 6:30-32; John 15:4-8; Ps. 119).

The Alternative—Removal (2:5c)

5c ‘...or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.’

Removal of their lampstand or witness is the alternative. Our Lord was and is saying, either do the above three or else you will lose your light-bearing capacity. *Left love* means *lost light*. The church of Ephesus does not stand today. Its light has been not just dimmed, but completely snuffed out.

A Second Commendation or Approval (2:6)

6 ‘Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.’

They hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans. Scholars differ on their understanding of this group. Some think they were the followers of Nicolas according to early church Fathers (cf. Acts 6:5). Since their heresy seems to be associated with the doctrine of Balaam in 2:14-15, some believe this was an antinomian sect that advocated license in matters of Christian conduct, including free love. Others believe, based on the etymology of the word which can mean, “one who rules the laity” or “laity-conqueror,” that it was an error that exalted the clergy over the laity. Regardless, the church at Ephesus took a strong stand against the heresy and is commended by the Lord for doing so. Note that what was merely a matter of deeds in Ephesus, became an accepted doctrine in Pergamum because it was tolerated. An important lesson. If we do not correct our practices by the Word, they will become traditions that become the doctrines of men who nullify the Word of God.

The Call or Appeal (2:7a)

7a ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches...’

A final exhortation (2:7a). “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” This is a loving call to hear what the Holy Spirit is teaching in these seven messages. Note the change from an appeal to the individual, “he who has an ear,” to the plural, “what the Spirit says to the churches.” This change broadens the appeal of each message to all the churches because the messages are representative and applicable to all of us. Here the Spirit of God who is the Spirit of truth and the author and teacher of Scripture is calling on us to evaluate our openness to respond to the things that need to be learned and applied in these messages.

The Certainty or Assurance (2:7b)

7b ‘...To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.’

Each message of Revelation 2 and 3 concludes with a promise to the overcomer, but there is a great deal of disagreement over the meaning of the overcomer promises. “Overcome” is the nikao,, “to conquer, prevail, triumph, overcome.” But the question is how exactly are we to understand these promises to those who overcome? This is where the disagreement exists. There are four primary views of these passages:

(1) The loss of salvation view: The promises are written to believers to encourage them to overcome lest they lose their salvation. To fail to overcome is to lose salvation.

(2) The ultimate triumph of faith or the perseverance of the saints view: According to this view all genuine believers persevere and overcome the world by living godly and obedient lives. Overcoming equals faithfulness or obedience which proves the genuineness of salvation.

(3) The all believers view: According to this view, all believers become overcomers the moment they believe in Jesus Christ. The very act of believing overcomes the world: “Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:5). Faith, not faithfulness is the primary focus in this position.

(4) The rewards view: According to this view, the overcomer passages are promises of rewards given to believers to encourage them to be faithful by overcoming the trials and temptations of life through faith in their new life in Christ.

For a discussion of the various views and some of the issues involved, see Appendix 3. For reasons discussed in Appendix 3, the fourth view is the position that is presented in this study.

The promise regarding the tree of life: “To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7b).

“Paradise,” *paradeisos*, is a Persian word meaning, “a pleasure park, or garden.” The Septuagint uses it to translate the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2:8-10. To the oriental mind it meant the sum of blessedness. Christ, as the “last Adam,” is the restorer of paradise lost as is seen clearly in Revelation 22:1-4, and 14.

But what about “the tree of Life”? **First, the tree of life is literal.** It is not just a symbol for eternal life or for the person of Christ. In Revelation 21:1-22:5, John is describing the eternal state which includes the new heaven and the new earth with the new Jerusalem, a literal place with some 25 verses devoted to its description. It is not a symbol.

Second, it is probably not just one tree, but a collective term referring to a whole row of trees that exist between the river and the avenue described in Revelation 22. This is all a part of the beautiful park or paradise of God.

Third, having a right to the tree of life is not equivalent to salvation, nor is it necessary for the maintenance of life. Why? Because possession of eternal life and the maintenance of eternal life comes from possession of Jesus Christ who is our eternal life. All believers possess eternal life at the point of believing in Christ (John 3:16). Furthermore, eternal life, as God’s gift to those who believe, is never maintained by what we do. Compare 1 John 5:11-12; John 1:12; 3:16, 18, 36; 5:24; 6:47; 11:25, 26; 20:31; 17:3.

Fourth, the tree of life, then, must offer some kind of superlative experience and blessing though the details are simply not explained to us. It is left with a certain vagueness, but in 2 Corinthians 12:4 we read that Paul, when he was caught up to Paradise, heard inexpressible words which a man is not permitted to speak. Hodges writes, “The vagueness surrounding the promise of the tree of life is an example of the deliberate inexplicitness of the rewards which are mentioned. Almost all of the other promises have something of the same undefined, but numinous, character.”³

It is simply a special reward for those who overcome through a walk of faith that results in faithfulness; it is a special reward of special blessing that will somehow enrich the blessings of paradise. I am reminded of Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 15:58 which promise:

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord.

³ Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, Redención Viva: Dallas, TX, 1982, p. 118.

Lesson 6:
The Message to Smyrna
(2:8-11)

“The Church in Suffering”

The City and the Assembly
(2:8a)

8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write:...”

Again we should note that it is the risen and ascended, but active Savior who addresses the church in these messages. He walks about in the midst of the church (2:1) and as the one whose penetrating eyes are like a flame of fire (1:14), He knows every detail and situation of His church, individually and corporately. He knows all about the society in which we live and how it affects us and our testimony for Him, but as the all-knowing Savior, He comes and lovingly speaks to us where we live and calls us to find our source of happiness and strength and life in Him.

The City of Smyrna

Its location

Smyrna lay just 35 miles north of Ephesus on the west coast of Asia on the Aegean Sea. It was the loveliest of all the cities and was sometimes called “the Ornament of Asia,” “the Crown of Asia,” or sometimes “the Flower of Asia.” It was beautifully situated. It stood at the end of a road that journeyed westward across the lands of Lydia (western Asia Minor) and Phrygia (a land in the center of Asia Minor, our modern Turkey) and traveled out to the east.

In relation to the sea, it stood at the end of a long arm of the sea which ended in a small land-locked harbor in the very heart of the city making it one of the safest harbors. It controlled the trade of the rich Hermus Valley and was a great, wealthy, and important city. The city itself began at the harbor and traversed the narrow foothills. Behind the city rose a hill covered with temples and noble buildings which encircled a hill named the Pagos, but the hill was also called the “the Crown of Smyrna” because of the way the buildings formed a crown around the hill.

Its history

Smyrna had been a Greek colony as far back as 1000 B.C. Around 600 B.C. it was invaded and destroyed by the Lydeans and for 400 years there was no city there at all. Then around 200 B.C. Lysimachus had it rebuilt as a planned and unified whole. It was built with streets that were broad, straight, sweeping, and beautifully paved. The city had experienced death and had literally been brought back to life. It is undoubtedly because of Smyrna’s historical past, Christ refers to Himself as, “He who was dead and has come to life.”

Smyrna was a free city, one that knew the meaning of loyalty and fidelity to Rome unlike most cities. Cicero called it, “one of our most faithful and our most ancient allies.” It was the first city in the world to erect a temple to the goddess Roma and to the spirit of Rome. Her fidelity to Rome was famous in the ancient world. So again, Christ said to the church there, “be faithful unto death.”

In all of this there existed what was called “municipal vanity” and it was known for its “municipal rivalry and pride.” Everyone there wished to exalt Smyrna. So, it was not without reason that Christ spoke of Himself as “the first and the last.” In comparison with His glory, all earthly distinctions are pure emptiness and strife for being first in something pales into insignificance in view of His eternal glories.

There was a population of Jews in the city who were not only numerous, but influential and who did everything they could to hurt the church in Smyrna. So, the Lord also addresses this issue in this letter as well (vs. 9-10).

Another interesting fact is that the city received its name from one of its principle products, a sweet perfume called myrrh. This was a gum resin taken from a shrub-like tree. Though it had a bitter taste, the resin of the tree was used in making perfume (Ps. 45:8), was one of the ingredients used in the anointing oil of the priests (Ex. 30:23), and in the embalming of the dead (John 19:39). Smyrna is Ionic Greek for myrrh, a fragrant perfume used in burial. Many believe this church represents the martyrs of all time and the sweet smelling fragrance of their devotion until death (cf. 2Cor. 4:14-16).

Finally, Smyrna, unlike the city of Ephesus, stands today. Though many of these believers died a martyr's death, Satan could not stamp out their testimony. Suffering has a way of keeping us pure in our devotion to Christ and it was evidently so with this church.

The Christ, the Author and Answer (2:8b)

8b "...The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:"

Again we see how the perfections of Christ's person and work answers to the needs, problems, and conditions in each church. Since many in this church died for their faith, Christ assures them of their resurrection and future rewards because He is the first and last, the eternal God who became man, died and rose again (1 Pet. 1:3; Acts 2:24).

Literally, the Greek says, "He came to be dead and began to live, or came to life again," an obvious reference to the cross and the resurrection. It describes what we might call an experience, an episode, a passing phase He went through for us, death. He passed **into** death, **through** death and **out of** death, and came to life in a triumphant event, the resurrection.

By way of application, the risen Christ is one who has *experienced the worst* that life could do to Him. No matter then what might happen to the Christians at Smyrna or to us, our Savior has gone through the worst life can bring. As such, He is one who feels for us in our suffering with special love and compassion and is ever present to come to our aid and comfort (Heb. 2:15-18; 4:15).

The risen Christ has *conquered the worst* that life can do. He triumphed over pain, the cross, the devil, sin, and death. He defeated all the enemies and He offers victory and the conqueror's crown. This calls for our loyalty and commitment to Him, not simply for rewards, but because of what we have in Him and love Him.

The Church and Its Affairs (2:9-11)

9 'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.10 'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.'

The Comfort and Approval (2:9)

He knows your tribulation (2:9). The word "tribulation" is *thlipsis* which means "pressure, a literal crushing beneath a weight." "The pressure of events is on the Church at Smyrna, and the force of circumstances is trying to crush the Christianity out of them."¹

He knows your poverty (2:9). The word "poverty" is *pto,cheia*, and describes absolute poverty or complete destitution. To grasp this word, we might compare it with another, *penia*. *Penia* refers to one who has the necessities, but nothing superfluous; *pto,cheia* describes the state of one who has nothing at all.² Christ offers no criticism of this church. The saints were faithful in spite of suffering at the hands of their Jewish persecutors and I am sure they

¹ William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, Vol. I, Westminster Press: Philadelphia, p. 95.

² Barclay, p. 95.

thought they were poor, but in contrast to Laodicea, which thought it was rich and was poor, these saints were rich (3:17).

Our Lord, so faithful to know and observe our lives and needs, first assures them He knows and cares for their condition and the great suffering on His behalf, and then commends them for their spiritual wealth in the midst of their physical poverty and suffering, much of which was brought about by the religious Jews of Smyrna. So, while poor, they were rich. They were rich positionally in Christ (Eph. 1:3) which, of course, was by grace. They were also rich in that God had counted them worthy to suffer for Him (1 Pet. 3:14-17; 1:6; 4:13-14). Finally, it appears they were rich in their spiritual lives because they were living close to God by faith.

He knows your persecutors (2:9b). These were the religious Jews who claimed to be the seed of Abraham. They were, but only physically. Spiritually they were of Satan and under his power and control (John 8:33-34). In Numbers 16:3, Israel was called the congregation of the Lord, but here Christ calls these unbelieving Jews, the congregation of Satan (cf. John 8:33 with 8:44).

The Counsel and Admonition (2:10)

Concerning fear and suffering. “Do not fear” is literally “fear nothing.” No matter how small or how severe, the One who has overcome death says, “fear nothing.” They could cast their burden on the Lord. He cared and He had overcome (Phil. 4:6-8; 1 Pet. 5:7; Isa. 41:10).

Concerning the future and testing. Some would face prison and severe testing, even death. It would be for ten days, a rather short period, or perhaps a reference to ten principle persecutions under the Roman emperors from Nero to Diocletian. But note the connection of this with Satan. This persecution is attributed to the Devil. It is a continuation of the serpent’s battle with the Lord Jesus Christ and those who belong to Him (Gen. 3:15; John 15:18-21). Human means and men are those we see persecuting the church of Jesus Christ, but invariably, behind the scenes is the old arch enemy, the prince of the power of the air. But never fear, the binder of believers in prison shall be bound, he is a defeated foe (Rev. 20:1-3; Rom. 16:20; Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14-15).

Concerning faithfulness and rewards. Be faithful until death. This means, be faithful to the point of martyrdom. Continue to trust the Lord, be faithful to Him and the truth of His Word even in the face of death.

The promise: “I will give you the crown of life.” The reward here is not eternal life. Eternal life is a gift through faith or personal belief in Jesus Christ (John 1:11-12; 3:16; 1 John 5:11-12). This is a special reward for endurance under persecution.

Note that victory in this present life is closely associated with occupation and orientation to the weightier things of eternity and the glories which shall follow (2 Cor. 4:16-18). Here is one of those things which should distinguish believers from unbelievers. Believers are to be sojourners who live with a view to eternity, while unbelievers are scripturally classified as earthdwellers (1 Pet. 1:17; 2:11; Rev. 3:10; Isa. 24:17).

The Challenge and Assurance (2:11)

The promise to the overcomer is that he shall not be hurt by the second death. The second death is eternal separation from God in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:1, 14). Believers may face physical death, but because they have had a second birth (John 3:3-7), no believer will ever face the second death (Eph. 2:1, 5; John 5:24; 11:25). Then, why this promise? Does this imply the possibility of the loss of eternal life? Regardless of what this passage means, it is an emphatic negation of the possibility. Some in Smyrna, as Polycarp, would die a martyr’s death, so the Lord is reminding them of this fact.

To overcome means here to remain faithful to the Lord even if it meant death. Here our Lord was simply reminding them that though some would die for Him, the second death could never touch them. The use of this negative promise, “will not be hurt...” is a literary device known as litotes. This is a rhetorical device used to affirm the positive by a negation. Hodges has a good explanation of litotes.

If someone says to me, “His request presented me with no small problem,” I know exactly what he means. The person who made the request of him had presented him a BIG problem!

In the phrase “no small problem” we have a very common figure of speech. Its technical name is “litotes” (pronounced, lie’-tuh-tease’). Litotes occurs when an affirmative idea is expressed by the negation of its opposite. In the sentence we started with, the affirmative idea is that the problem is very large. The phrase “no small problem” negates the opposite idea.³

Concerning the positive or affirmative emphasis behind the use of litotes, Hodges continues and writes:

What is the positive idea which it understates? Fortunately, the context helps us. In verse 10 we read: “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” The Smyrnan Christians are challenged to face possible martyrdom with courage and fidelity to God. Their reward for doing so will be a superlative experience of life in the world to come. So to speak, they will be “crowned” with the enjoyment of life “more abundant” (see John 10:10).

In this light, Revelation 2:11 can be seen as truly an understatement. The overcomer (that is, the faithful Christian) will be more than amply repaid for whatever sacrifice he may make for Christ’s sake. His experience will be truly wonderful—far, far beyond the reach—the touch—of the second death. That is to say, this conquering Christian is as far above the experience-level of eternal death as it is possible to be.

In a masterly understatement, the Lord Jesus says in effect: “The first death may ‘hurt’ you briefly, the second not at all!”⁴

But perhaps there is something else here. The word “hurt” is the Greek *adikeo*,,, “to injure, to hurt or do harm” (cf. Rev. 6:6; 7:2-3; 9:4, 10, 19; 11:5). It may also be used in a broader sense of “do wrong” (cf. Rev. 22:11). So, is there a way in which a believer can be said to be hurt or harmed by the second death? Unbelievers who persecute believers and who seek to get them to recant or renounce their faith in Christ are in some ways the personification of the second death and are not only acting out of their spiritual death against the believer, but are themselves, headed for the second death. So, when a believer fails to overcome the trial and recants because of the pain of the persecution, would he not then be hurt or harmed by the second death because he would then have lost his reward (2:11)?

Many believe that Smyrna represents the martyr period of the church, the church in extreme persecution under the Roman emperors. One classic illustration of this is in the true story of one of the great church fathers named, Polycarp. According to Ignatius, not long after the book of Revelation was written, he became the pastor of Smyrna and died a martyr’s death for his faith. The following is from the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, translated by J. B. Lightfoot.

9:3 But when the magistrate pressed him hard and said, ‘Swear the oath, and I will release thee; revile the Christ,’ Polycarp said, ‘Fourscore and six years have I been His servant, and He hath done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King who saved me?’

10:1 But on his persisting again and saying, ‘Swear by the genius of Caesar,’ he answered, ‘If thou supposest vainly that I will swear by the genius of Caesar, as thou sayest, and feignest that thou art ignorant who I am, hear thou plainly, I am a Christian. But if thou wouldest learn the doctrine of Christianity, assign a day and give me a hearing.’

10:2 The proconsul said; ‘Prevail upon the people.’ But Polycarp said; ‘As for thyself, I should have held thee worthy of discourse; for we have been taught to render, as is meet, to princes and authorities appointed by God such honor as does us no harm; but as for these, I do not hold them worthy, that I should defend myself before them.’

11:1 Whereupon the proconsul said; ‘I have wild beasts here and I will throw thee to them, except thou repent’ But he said, ‘Call for them: for the repentance from better to worse is a change not permitted to us; but it is a noble thing to change from untowardness to righteousness.’

11:2 Then he said to him again, ‘I will cause thee to be consumed by fire, if thou despisest the wild beasts, unless thou repent.’ But Polycarp said; ‘Thou threatenest that fire which burneth for a season and after a little while is quenched: for thou art ignorant of the fire of the future judgment and

³ Zane C. Hodges, *Grace Evangelical News*, electronic version.

⁴ Hodges, *Grace Evangelical News*, electronic version.

eternal punishment, which is reserved for the ungodly. But why delayest thou? Come, do what thou wilt.⁵

Walvoord writes:

The Faithfulness of Polycarp to the end seems to have characterized this church in Smyrna in its entire testimony and resulted in this church's continuous faithful witness for God after many others of the early churches had long lost their...

... The purifying fires of affliction caused the lamp of testimony to burn all the more brilliantly. The length of their trial, described here as being ten days, whether interpreted literally or not, is short in comparison with the eternal blessings which would be theirs when their days of trial were over. They could be comforted by the fact that the sufferings of this present time do not continue forever, and the blessings that are ours in Christ through His salvation and precious promises will go on through eternity.⁶

⁵ *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, translated by J. B. Lightfoot, electronic format.

⁶ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1966, pp. 64-65.

Lesson 7:
The Message to Pergamum
(2:12-17)

“A Church Married to the World”

The City and the Assembly
(2:12a)

12a “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write:...”

Pergamum, a city of the Roman province of Asia, in the west of what is now Asiatic Turkey, occupied a commanding position near the seaward end of the broad valley of the Caicus. It was probably the site of a settlement from a very early date. Pergamum was one of the most prominent cities of Asia, located in the western part of Asia-Minor, about 45 miles north of Smyrna and about 20 miles from the Aegean Sea. The modern village of Bergama, Turkey, now covers part of the ancient site.

The first temple of the imperial cult was built in Pergamum (c. 29 B.C.) in honor of Rome and Augustus. The city thus boasted a religious primacy in the province, though Ephesus became its main commercial center. Pergamum is listed third of the ‘seven churches of Asia’ (Rev. 1:11) and forms the third letter, an order which suits its position in geographical sequence.

Pergamum was very wealthy, the center of emperor worship with many temples devoted to idolatry. This was the place ‘where Satan’s throne is’ (Rev. 2:13). The phrase has been applied to the complex of pagan cults, of Zeus, Athena, Dionysus and Asclepius (Esculapius), established by the Attalid kings, that of Asclepius Soter (the ‘saviour,’ ‘healer’) being of special importance. These cults are illustrative of the religious history of Pergamum, but “Satan’s throne” could be an allusion to emperor worship. This was where the worship of the divine emperor had been made the touchstone of civic loyalty under Domitian.

Here was the magnificent temple of Esculapius, a pagan god whose idol was in the form of a serpent. The inhabitants were known as the chief temple keepers of Asia. When the Babylonian cult of the Magians was driven out of Babylon, they found a haven in Pergamum.

It marked a crisis for the church in Asia. Antipas who is called, “My witness, My faithful one” (v. 13), is probably cited as a representative (probably the first to be put to death by the Roman state) of those who were brought to judgment and executed there for their faith.

Pergamum was a university town with a large library of 200,000 volumes given as a gift from Anthony to Cleopatra.

The title of the Magian high priest was “Chief Bridge Builder” meaning the one who spans the gap between mortals and Satan and his hosts. In Latin this title was written “Pontifex Maximus,” the title now used by the Pope. This title goes all the way back to Babylon and the beginnings of the mother-child cult under Nimrod of Genesis 10 and his wife Sumerimus. Later, Julius Caesar was elected Pontifex Maximus and when he became Emperor, he became the supreme civil and religious ruler and head of Rome politically and religiously with all the power and functions of the Babylonian pontiff.

Today a small village called Bergama is located here with a Christian testimony which continued into modern times. This church may depict the history of the church from the time of Constantine until the rise of the papacy from the time of Constantine forward.

The Christ, the Author
(2:12b)

12b “...The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:”

Again, as in each of the seven messages, the message is related to the picture of the glorified Savior in chapter one. This serves to stress His sufficiency and our need to live in the light of His person and work, past, present, and future.

“Sword” is *rhomphaia*, a long spear-like sword, but here it is seen with two edges to emphasize the double-edged, sharp, penetrating character of the Word of God or God’s truth as it is found in the person and work of Christ and God’s holy Word as it reveals Him.

The word “sword” is mentioned a total of nine times in Revelation. *Rhomphaia* is mentioned five times and *makaira*, the short Roman two edged sword, is mentioned four times. The *rhomphaia* was the long and heavy, broad sword used by the Thracians and other barbarous nations who often marched irresistibly over one country after another as God’s instruments of judgment. First of all, then, it symbolizes the irresistible authority and devastating force of our Lord’s judgment (cf. 19:15).

In Revelation 1:16 and 19:15 the *rhomphaia* is described as proceeding out of the mouth of Christ. The mouth, an instrument of speech, portrays this as the Word of Christ. In Revelation 19:13 Christ is called the Word of God and then, in verse 15, we have the statement about the sword that proceeds out of His mouth and by which He will slay the wicked.

Interestingly, John 5:24f and 12:48 teaches us that Christ’s acts of judgment will be carried out on the basis of His Word. It seems clear the sword coming out of Christ’s mouth is a reference to the Word and is a symbol of its truth, penetrating power and authority, severity, and the fact that Christ judges men on the basis of the Word.

The sword is the symbol of the Word of Christ which separates believers from condemnation and from conformity with the world (Rom. 12:2; 8:1; 1 Pet. 1:23; Heb. 4:12). But this same sword, the Word of Christ, also guarantees judgment to the world on the basis of its absolute truth.

Here again we see the sufficiency of Christ in His capacity to meet our needs and deal with our failures. Pergamum was a church that was married to the world. They were in compromise with the world, but it is the Word of Christ which transforms us from the world.

Romans 12:1-2. I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

The Commendation and Approval (2:13)

13 ‘I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

Again, as in each of the letters, we have the statement made about our Lord’s knowledge of our affairs. This repetition is not without significance. Here the Lord assures them He knows of their steadfastness in the midst of Satan’s headquarters or dominion. Satanic activity was rampant here spreading to all parts of the world because of the extreme amount of pagan idolatry and emperor worship carried on in this city.

“Where you dwell” is the Greek *katoikeo*, from *kata*, “down,” and *oikeo*, “to dwell.” It means, “to settle down, dwell permanently, be at home.” Another word group used of believers is the *paroikos* group (*paroikia*, *paroikeo*,,) “to be a stranger, sojourner in a place, or a visitor,” (1 Pet. 1:17; 2:11; Heb. 11:9; [cf. Luke 24:18; Acts 13:17; 7:6, 29; Eph. 2:19]). Similarly, we might also compare *parepides*, “stranger, resident in a strange place, alien” (Heb. 11:13; 1 Pet. 1:1; 2:11).

First, there may be here a note of warning regarding their attitude toward this life and the world. This is especially true for the book of Revelation because of the use of what practically becomes a technical term for those who have settled down in the world as “earth dwellers” (cf. Rev. 3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 14; and 17:8). Believers are to view themselves and live: (a) as sojourners, (b) as aliens, and (c) as ambassadors with their citizenship in heaven. We are never to be at home in the world in the same way that unbelievers are (cf. Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Pet. 1:17; 2:11; 2 Cor. 5:19-20 with Rev. 3:10). The story of Abraham and Lot provide us with a good illustration of this

truth. Abraham dwelt in tents by faith (Heb. 11:8-10), but Lot lived by sight, he became wedded to the world and wanted to settle down there (Gen. 13:9-13).

Second, there is also a note of exhortation here as well as comfort. It reminds us that God not only knows our pressures, our temptations, and the problems we face, but that He is always there to help us if we want it. He noted they had remained steadfast regardless of the Satanic depths and atrocities of their environment and was there for them to enable them to overcome if they would only continue to walk by faith in dependence on Him.

The principle of the Christian life is not escape, but endurance and conquest by faith. It may be much easier to live somewhere else in easier circumstances, but our duty is generally to stay and become a testimony for the Lord and overcome the world in which we live. We should always remember that the grass usually looks greener somewhere else, but until we are with the Lord or in the millennium, life will be full of trials of some sort and to some degree. The call is for strength with all power, according to His glorious might, for attaining of all steadfastness and patience, joyously giving thanks... (cf. Col. 1:11-12a).

The mention of the fact they had held fast to Christ's name, and the death of Antipas would suggest persecution and attack by Satan to destroy this church. Since this was unsuccessful, Satan turned to other methods as we will see in what follows.

"Where Satan's throne is," not simply seat. This statement stems from the fact of the extreme idolatry and demonic nature of the religious activity connected with the worship of the serpent god of Esculapius, the worship of the Emperor of Rome, and the persecution these Christians faced as a result.

The situation at Pergamum reminds us of the reality of the angelic conflict or the spiritual warfare of this present form of the world (Eph. 6:10). In the past, because of its godly heritage, America has been sheltered from some of the more obvious forms of demonic conflict that we have only read and heard about from missionaries. But Satan, though a defeated foe, is still alive and well and, as a roaring lion, is carrying on his havoc in the world which is now rampant in America. We are now facing Satan's activities as never before and many believe this is in part preparing the world for the Tribulation. Satanism, devil worship, ritual murders, sacrifices to Satan, and gross immorality are no longer unheard of, but are occurring in our cities all across America. The New Age movement with its mysticism, channeling, belief in mystical forces, etc. is rampant in book stores, in schools, in our government, on TV, in the movies, in politics; it is literally everywhere. For an excellent resource regarding our present world scene as it pertains to culture, current issues, cults, and the occult, see Probe Ministries web site at <http://www.probe.org>.

As mentioned above, the reference here in verse 13 is a reference to Satanic power manifested in the particular religious, political, and idolatrous character of Pergamum. It became the seat of emperor worship and, according to Hyslop who wrote *The Two Babylons*, it also became the new home of the mother-child cult of Babylon which was moved from Babylon after the death of Belshazzar. It was later moved to Rome.

One of the prominent features we find in Revelation is a prophetic picture of the revival of ancient Babylonianism (Rev. 17-18). This means that one of the things that will occur in preparation for the events of the coming Tribulation will be a rise, not only in Satanic activity, but of his activity in the various forms of ancient eastern mysticism and occult activity that was so much a part of this cult. We are seeing it today in the New Age Movement.

The Condemnation and Admonition (2:14-15)

14 'But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit *acts of* immorality.15 'Thus you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

After approving what He could, the Lord proceeded to admonish. Like them, most believers have things in their lives that are good, but there is always room for improvement. There are things that are wrong! Do we have ears to hear?

The Doctrine of Balaam (2:14)

Balaamism, as we might call it, was a compromise in the realm of morals. For people in this city to eat things sacrificed to idols meant to engage in the feasting and orgies of the various idolatrous temples. It meant to commit fornication. The teaching or doctrine of Balaam was a perversion of the Christian doctrine of liberty (see 1 Cor. 8-10; Rom. 14-15:3; Gal. 5:13). Let's compare the following three ways we can look at the subject of Balaam.

The Way of Balaam (2 Peter 2:15)

The way of Balaam is really the way of covetousness and refers to one who hires himself out to do religious work merely for personal gain; it's the merchandising of one's spiritual gifts for personal gain out of covetousness.

The Error of Balaam (Jude 11)

This refers to Balaam's error in thinking that he could get God to curse His covenant people and bypass His covenant promises because of their evil. Seeing their evil, Balaam supposed that a righteous God must curse Israel. But he was blind to God's faithfulness to His promises which was based on the higher morality of the cross and God's grace through the sacrifices that pointed to the cross.

The Doctrine of Balaam (Revelation 2:14)

Since Balaam found out he could not curse Israel, he realized he would be able to corrupt them by getting them to marry the beautiful women of Moab. So he taught or advised Balak to tempt Israel in marrying the daughters of Moab. This would defile their separation and cause them to abandon their pilgrim character. It was a teaching that promoted a breakdown in separation from the world. Note that Pergamum comes from two words, per, which has the idea of "completely, thoroughly," and gamos, "marriage." The church at Pergamum began to lose their pilgrim character and was becoming thoroughly married to the world (cf. Jam 4:4; 1 Pet. 1:18; 2:11).

The Teaching of the Nicolaitans (2:15)

The reference to the Nicolaitans identifies the group who were teaching Balaamism. Note the words "thus...in the same way" of verse 15. As mentioned earlier, some think this refers to the followers of Nicolas (so say some of the church fathers), while others believe the word comes from nikao,, "to rule," plus laos meaning "people." Scholars are divided on the precise problem here, but it seems clear that they were subjugating the people to Satan's authority by teaching compromise with the world which always neutralizes the church by compromise. The church loses its pilgrim perspective and adopts the viewpoint, values, priorities, and pursuits of the world.

Christians often reject the overt acts of what they think of as worldliness defined by a list of prohibitions or obligations both negative and positive, while retaining the viewpoint or attitude of worldliness. But worldliness is found more in attitudes and values than in acts because what we do is really the product of our thinking or belief system. Millions of people go through all the motions of worship each week but maintain a heart that is completely out of touch with God and end up, in reality, worshipping themselves. We can meticulously avoid all overt acts of worldliness as we might define them, and still have a heart full of hypocrisy, criticism of others, jealousy, bitterness, envy, and preoccupation with the details of life rather than eternal treasures. There are many examples we might mention of worldliness, but one example that comes to mind is the Madison Avenue gimmickry which so often goes on in the name of evangelism or church growth. See Appendix 4, on the subtle snares of worldliness.

Whoever the Nicolaitans were, they were conquering the people by bringing them under Satan's authority through influential teachers who were tolerating or even promoting evil or license. In our study of the messages to the seven churches, we have gone, then, from "**murder**" to "**mixture**." Martyrdom tends to **purify** the church, but mixture, a breakdown in biblical separation into worldliness, **putrefies** the church.

The Counsel and Appeal (2:16)

16 ‘Repent therefore; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.

In verse 16, the Lord called this church to repentance with a sharp warning of judgment with the sword out of His mouth, suggesting that the judgment is based on the truth of His Word. Remember, the sword symbolically represents the two-fold ability of the Word of God to separate believers from the world while at the same time to condemn the world for its sin. It was the sword of salvation and deliverance as well as the sword of death.

Worldly thinking must be dealt with positively and quickly or it eats into our lives individually and corporately (cf. 1 Cor. 5:7-9). Like cancer, worldliness eats deeply into our viewpoint of life and what we expect from it. This impacts our values, and then our priorities and pursuits. And while we may begin to recognize much of its presence and seek to root it out, some of its remnants often remain below the surface, hidden like barnacles below the water-line on a ship.

The Lord counsels the church to repent. The verb “repent” is here an aorist imperative in the Greek text which carries with it an element of urgency. It calls for an immediate response, one designed to arrest the direction in which the church was going. “Repent” is *metanoeo*,, “to change the mind.” Here is one of those generic terms that must be understood within the context in which it is found just as with the word *salvation* (cf. in Phil. 1:19 the Greek *so,,te,,ria*, “salvation, deliverance, preservation”). “In both the New and Old Testaments, repentance means ‘to change one’s mind.’ But the question must be asked, about what do you change your mind? Answering that question will focus the basic meaning on the particular change involved.... Biblical repentance also involves changing one’s mind in a way that affects some change in the person. Repentance is not merely an intellectual assent to something; it also includes a resultant change, usually in actions.”¹ Repentance is used in Scripture in at least three ways:

(1) A repentance that is merely a change of mind about something in a context that does not deal with salvation (Matt. 21:28-32). It is a real repentance, a change of mind, with a real result, but it has nothing to do with salvation.

(2) A repentance that is unto salvation. In a context dealing with salvation or eternal life, etc., it has to do with changing one’s mind about one’s condition in sin and need of the saving work of God in Christ. It is equivalent to faith or a part of faith like two sides of a coin (cf. Acts 2:38 with 11:17; Acts 5:31 with Eph. 1:7, and Acts 19:14). First, we acknowledge our sinfulness and inability to save ourselves, and then (the other side of the coin) we turn to Christ in faith as the only means of salvation.

(3) Then there is a repentance that deals with some spiritual issue in the Christian life in which repentance is a change of mind concerning the path we are following and is equivalent to confession of specific sins with a view to spiritual change, pursuing the path of godliness. This is the usage in these letters.

The Issue: Either we repent of our worldliness, acknowledge its presence and evil and commit to moving in a godly direction, or we face divine discipline and the loss of our light bearing capacity—our very purpose for existence as a church. It appears they did. A Christian church has continued into modern times in the modern city of Bergamo.

The Solution: The Christian needs to live in the Word, the two-edged sword, which penetrates and transforms us by the renewing of the mind with the mind of Christ (Rom. 12:1-2; 1 Cor. 2:16). This includes keeping our focus on eternal treasures (Matt. 6:19f; 1 Pet. 1:12f). The alternative is divine discipline on the basis of that same Word, which, if neglected, results in our discipline according to the warnings and principles of Scripture (John 15:1f; Heb. 12:5f).

This warning is immediately followed by a special exhortation and assurance.

¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, Victor Books: Wheaton, IL, 1989, p. 92.

The Challenge and Assurance (2:17)

17 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give *some* of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.'

The Challenge

"He who has an ear..." is again an appeal to the individual for spiritual change. Spiritual change in a church has to begin with the individual.

"To him who overcomes..." Here is God's challenge to believers to overcome by faith in the Savior's victory and provision. Specifically, overcoming in this context meant to refuse to eat of things sacrificed to idols and to remain sexually pure, to avoid fornication, and remain distinct and separate from the world. While initial faith that is genuine brings one into union with Christ, it is the continuation of an active faith from living in the Word, feeding on the things of Christ, that overcomes and leads us into the abundance and sufficiency of Christ's life with great reward both now and in the future.

The Assurance

The Hidden Manna

"The hidden manna" is literally, "of the manna, the hidden." It is a restrictive attributive which defines the distinctive identity of the manna. With this construction, there is some emphasis on the hidden character of the manna. In the Old Testament, the manna stood for God's faithfulness to provide and sustain His people through the wilderness wanderings in place of the leeks, melons, garlic, and onions of their old life in Egypt, an apt picture for the world system. As a memorial to God's faithfulness, a portion of the manna was placed and thus hidden in the Ark of the Covenant (Ex. 16:32-34; Heb. 9:4). Trench calls our attention to the fact that it was after this manna was laid up in the Ark that it obtained the name, "hidden."²

Manna was also called, "food from heaven" (Ps. 78:24). In John 6:48-51, the Lord spoke of Himself as the true bread from heaven that gives eternal life in contrast with the manna in the Old Testament. He said, "your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died" (John 6:49). While the manna sustained their physical life for a time, it was only a picture of the one who would come and who would give life and life abundant (John 10:10).

From the use of manna in Scripture and from the nature of the promises to the overcomer, I would suggest there is a two-fold meaning and application here:

(1) It has a present meaning or application. It refers to the sufficiency of the person and work of Jesus Christ as He is revealed in the Word which the world does not know or see since the natural man does not see or discern the things of Christ (1 Cor. 2:14). Therefore, believers need to daily feed upon His life in the Word for daily sustenance and blessing (cf. Heb. 3:7f). This and this alone can make us fruitful believers, and provide true happiness and stability of life, something which the allurements of the world simply cannot give.

(2) It has a future meaning. The promise of manna looked forward to a greater capacity to enjoy all the manifold blessings and glories of the kingdom in the presence of Christ that would come to the overcomer who refused to eat of the things sacrificed to idols.

A White Stone

By repeating "I will give," there is an emphasis on the grace of the Savior and the second gift is highlighted as distinct from the first. Though rewards are promised for faithfulness, they are still a matter of the grace of God for it is by His grace and strength that we experience the capacity for faithfulness.

² Trench, *Epistles to the Seven Churches*.

“A white stone.” This is perhaps the most difficult to interpret of all the rewards mentioned in chapters 2 and 3 because of the various uses of white stones and because no other passage tells us anything about white stones.

Stones were used in the secret societies as amulets of protection and by judges who determined a verdict by placing a white and black stone in an urn. If the white one came out it meant acquittal of all charges. But, since there will be no need of protection in eternity and because I believe these are rewards to believers who already stand acquitted, justified in Christ, neither of these seem to fit with what John had in mind.

“Stone” is *lithos* and may be used to designate a precious stone, like a diamond. This idea is supported in this verse by the word *leukos* which may mean more than just white, and can be equivalent to “splendid, shining,” or even, “glistening.” Compare the following verses which support this interpretation (Matt. 17:2; Rev. 3:4, 5; 6:11; 7:9, 13; 19:14). Some seek to connect it in some way to the promise of the hidden manna, the Ark of the Covenant, and the priesthood. They see it as a diamond which corresponds to the Urim and Thummim worn by the high priest and would speak of special priestly prerogatives and access into the very presence of God. Others see an analogy to the stone awarded to victorious gladiators or warriors when they returned from battle. It would be much like a ‘well done’ for service rendered.

There was also a custom in John’s day in which special stones were given which entitled the bearer to special hospitality and friendship. As you can see, there were many customs and several possibilities for the meaning of the stone. Whatever, it clearly symbolized special blessing and privilege that will be given to those believers who overcome the influx of the world on their lives.

A New Name

“A new name which no one knows...” Here the Lord promises us a special name. Why? It could show intimacy and God’s personal love and concern for each one of us, but as a special reward for believers who overcome, it probably has a different significance.

It undoubtedly demonstrates something of the character of the overcomer or something of his new responsibilities or both. Abram’s name was changed to Abraham to portray the fact that he was to become the father of a multitude. Jacob, which means supplanter, was changed to Israel, the one over whom God would henceforth rule. Unstable Simon became Peter the little rock. Similarly, the overcoming believer is promised a new name which may show something of what God has accomplished in his or her life through a walk of faith in faithfulness.

The custom of giving a new name to mark a new status was known in the heathen world as well.

The name of the first of the Roman Emperors was Octavius; but when he became the first of the Emperors he was given the name Augustus. This very name marked his new status; he was now unique and superhuman and more than man.³

The significance of a new name, then, would not be lost on readers living in John’s day since only recently the title of the Roman emperor had been changed. Thus, the new name to be awarded faithful believers was an assurance that they would one day be elevated to a position superior even to that of Augustus. The gift of this new name marks the believer’s entrance to a new and higher stage of responsibility symbolizing new and greater authority. Regardless of the meaning, for our day when we are often identified by an impersonal number, it highlights the fact we are not just impersonal numbers, but those who are personally known and loved by God.

³ William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, Vol. 1, The Westminster Press: Philadelphia, p. 122.

Lesson 8: The Message to Thyatira (2:18-29)

“The Church in Compromise”

The City and Its Affairs (2:18a)

18a “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write:...”

Thyatira was smaller than Pergamum and 40 miles southeast, but it too was another city in the Roman province of Asia, in the west of what is now Asiatic Turkey. It passed under Roman rule in 133 B.C. and was an important point in the Roman road system, for it lay on the road from Pergamum to Laodicea.

It was also an important center of manufacture; dyeing, garment-making, pottery and brass-working are among the trades known to have existed there. A large town (Akhisar) still stands on the same site.

The Thyatiran woman Lydia, the ‘seller of purple’ whom Paul met at Philippi (Acts 16:14), was probably the overseas agent of a Thyatiran manufacturer; she may have been arranging the sale of dyed woolen goods which were known simply by the name of the dye. This ‘purple’ was obtained from the madder root, and was still produced in the district, under the name ‘Turkey red,’ into the present century.¹

Because of its industry, the city was known for its trade guilds, or organized groups and associations for potters, tanners, dyers and bronze workers. It was particularly known for its wool and dyeing industry as illustrated in the life of Lydia, a distributor of the purple garments for which this city was famous (Acts 16:14). These guilds created a tremendous problem because it was extremely hard for a merchant to pursue his or her trade without belonging to one of these guilds. To belong to these guilds put a Christian in a compromising position because of the pressure from the guilds to participate in their pagan, idolatrous feasts. “Each guild had its own patron deity, feasts, and seasonal festivities that included sexual revelries.”²

Some of the symbols in the letter to the church (Rev. 2:18-29) seem to allude to the circumstances of the city. The description of the Christ (v. 18) is appropriate for a city renowned for its brass-working (*chalkolibanos*, translated ‘fine brass’, may be a technical term for some local type of brassware). The terms of the promise (vv. 26-27) may reflect the long military history of the city.³

This church may portray the period of the church during the middle ages and the time of the papacy.

The Christ, The Author and Answer (2:18b)

18b “...The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this:”

Again, we are pointed to the Lord Jesus as the issue and answer to every need and problem in life, no matter where we live and what our conditions. Walvoord writes:

In keeping with what follows, Christ is introduced as the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. This description of Christ is similar to that in

¹ *The New Bible Dictionary*, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.: Wheaton, Illinois, 1962, electronic media.

² Alan Johnson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12, Frank E. Gaebelein, general editor, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1981, p. 443.

³ *New Bible Dictionary*.

1:13-15, but here He is called the Son of God rather than the Son of Man. The situation required reaffirmation of His deity and His righteous indignation at their sins. The words “burnished bronze,” which describe His feet, translate a rare Greek word *chalkoliban*, also used in 1:15. It seems to have been an alloy of a number of metals characterized by brilliance when polished. The reference to His eyes being “like blazing fire” and the brilliant reflections of His feet emphasize the indignation and righteous judgment of Christ.⁴

Obviously, this description of our Lord stresses His authority in discipline and judgment as the Son of God, an expression found only here in the book, and the penetrating power of His knowledge along with the swiftness of His judgment. Thyatira was standing in idolatrous compromise and allowing a false authority to supplant the authority of Christ.

The Church and Its Affairs (2:19-23)

19 ‘I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.²⁰ ‘But I have *this* against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so that they commit *acts of* immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.²¹ ‘And I gave her time to repent; and she does not want to repent of her immorality.²² ‘Behold, I will cast her upon a bed *of* sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds.²³ ‘And I will kill her children with pestilence; and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.

The Commendation or Approval (2:19)

As the One who has infinite knowledge of all the affairs of His people, this church is commended for its works and service, and for the fact this had even increased. But please note a contrast which has a special lesson for us. Ephesus had a godly zeal for sound doctrine and holiness (2:12), but she was lacking in devotion and love to Christ—cold orthodoxy.

Thyatira had a definite and even greater ministry of service and endurance, one that seemed to be motivated by faith and love (cf. vs. 19), but Thyatira lacked on the side of zeal for sound doctrine, moral purity, holiness of life, and zeal against false teaching and practice. Obviously, the church needs to have both, it needs a balance or it must eventually lose its testimony and capacity for ministry.

The Condemnation or Ailment (2:20-23)

The church is strongly rebuked for tolerating a false prophetess with her teaching which promoted immorality and idolatry. She was evidently teaching that a believer’s freedom in Christ allowed them to not only belong to the trade guilds, but to participate in the immoral and idolatrous feasts that very often included cultic prostitution.

Jezebel refers to a literal woman who falsely claimed prophetic powers and who had somehow taken a position of leadership, perhaps because of her unusual gifts. Her actual name was probably not Jezebel, but she was a virtual Jezebel in her actions (1 Kings 16:31-33; 2 Kings 9:30-37). As the Jezebel of the Old Testament enticed God’s servants to abandon their loyalty to the Lord and to participate in her idolatrous practices, so this woman of Thyatira was enticing Christians to abandon their loyalty to Christ and a separated life. Her teaching was probably similar to that of the Nicolaitans.

In His grace, the Lord gave her time to repent, but she had no time nor interest in it. The fact she was called Jezebel suggests she not only was a false prophetess, but an unbeliever. The issue here then was a call to repent in the sense of changing her mind about her present evil course and condition and about her need of Christ so that she would turn to Him in faith.

⁴ John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Scripture Press: Wheaton, IL, 1983, 1985, electronic media.

Verse 22 refers to her judgment for failure to repent. While this refers to a literal judgment God would bring upon this woman, it also forms a prophecy of the Lord's judgment on those churches which follow her adulterous ways.

“Bed of sickness” forms a sharp contrast between her luxurious and licentious couch of immorality and the pain of God's divine judgment that awaited her for her rebellion.

“And those who...into great tribulation” simply refers to the severe judgment God would bring on her followers. It should not be taken as a reference to the future unprecedented time spoken of in Matthew 24:21 and literally called, “the tribulation, the great one” in Revelation 7:14.

The adultery mentioned here includes both spiritual adultery (idolatry), and physical adultery (fornication in cultic prostitution). This is the only place adultery is indicated. The fact adultery constitutes a violation of the marriage vow could indicate that some of those who had been seduced by this Jezebel's teaching were believers, those who had been betrothed to Christ as His bride (cf. 2 Cor. 11:2; Jam. 4:4).

“Unless **they** repent of **her** deeds.” Note the change from “they” to “her.” This stresses that their deeds of immorality were really the product of her teaching, example, and error. It reminds us of what a great responsibility those in places of leadership have (cf. Luke 6:40; Jam. 3:1), but also of how we need to be sure that the lives and teaching of our leaders truly line up with the Word of God.

Verse 23 gives the effects. But we need to distinguish between two groups seen in the church at Thyatira. Compare “And I will kill her children” with verse 24 “But I say to you...” In verse 24 the Lord addresses the faithful remnant, those who would not tolerate her and who rejected both her doctrine and her practice. In verse 23, He speaks about those who followed her.

Some see these as unbelievers, mere professing Christians who were totally entangled in her doctrine and practice, but that they were unbelievers seems to me to be an unnecessary assumption as suggested by the use of the term “adultery” and in view of the problems at Corinth (1 Cor. 10-11). Certainly, some may have been only professing Christians, but others were likely to have been true believers, people who had put their faith in Christ, but who had been seduced by this woman's trickery, and who refused to listen to the truth on this matter so as to repent of their actions.

First, there were those who tolerated her (verse 20). In other words, they rejected her teaching, refused to follow her, and refused to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols. But, contrary to the believers in Ephesus, they refused to deal with her through church discipline. What she was teaching was clearly license versus true Christian liberty. This teaching was contrary to Scripture, but they tolerated her presence rather than deal with the problem.

Second, there were those who were her children—her spiritual progeny. These are referred to in verses 20b-23. Evidently, these were those who accepted her teaching and, like Ahab who was influenced by Jezebel of old, followed her example by participating in the activities of the labor guilds which meant involvement in eating things sacrificed to idols and fornication. Some of these could have been true believers who were judged and died the sin unto physical death (1 Cor. 11:28-32; 1 John 5:16-17).

The Counsel and Admonition (2:24-25)

24 ‘But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place no other burden on you. 25 ‘Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come.

Verse 24. This counsel is to those believers who will hear, repent and break off the compromise. “The deep things of Satan” in verse 24 most likely refers to the false doctrine being taught. They taught moral evil and that its experience was necessary to truly appreciate good. Note the words “as they call them.” They were evidently teaching license as good and bragging about the debts of their sin.

No other burden, i.e., command is placed upon them—they were only to reject Jezebel, and avoid immorality and idolatry. They were then told to hold fast to what they had. This is no minor warning. The tendency of believers is to lose ground rather than hold fast and move ahead.

In verse 25 the words, “what you have, hold fast until I come,” warns against the universal principle that things always tend to degenerate rather regenerate. It’s much like the second law of thermodynamics which simply put says, life goes from order to disorder and not vice versa. Things naturally go downhill unless there is great effort against those forces that, like gravity, tend to pull us downward. So there is always the need to cling to the Lord and hold tightly through a close walk with Him in the Word, regardless of the many blessing we possess in Christ and where we are in our spiritual journey, babe in Christ or mature (cf. 1 Cor. 10:1-13; Phil. 3:12-14).

The Challenges and Assurances (2:26-28)

26 ‘And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; 27 and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received *authority* from My Father; 28 and I will give him the morning star.

Verse 26 speaks of the promises and assurances to the overcomer.

“The overcomer,” as suggested previously, refers to those believers who overcome the specific challenges of these verses and are rewarded for their faithfulness. This is suggested by the exhortation to hold fast in verse 25 and by the words, “who keeps My deeds until the end,” in verse 26.

“And he who keeps My deeds.” “My deeds” undoubtedly refers to Christ’s way of life and to obedience to NT principles and imperatives. To keep Christ’s deeds means to experience Christ’s life and character in contrast to Jezebel’s works. Keeping His deeds is a result of overcoming through the walk of faith and daily fellowship or the abiding life. We must remember that Christ is not calling us to overcome in our own strength, which is really weakness, but to appropriate His strength and power through the knowledge of the Word and by faith. The issue is that of Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” But overcoming is also the basis for special rewards like positions of authority and responsibility the Lord promises believers in the millennial kingdom like authority over nations, etc. Undoubtedly, it is because we overcome in His strength and grace and never by our own strength that we find the elders, representatives of the body of Christ, casting their victors’ stephonos crowns, (emblems of rewards) before the throne (see Rev. 4:10-11).

Verse 27. After mentioning authority over the nations, the Lord Jesus immediately speaks of return and promises He will return, rule, and reign to remind the overcomers that they will share in all of this with Him at second advent to earth. All believers will be in the reign of Christ and in the kingdom, but not all will share in that reign in the sense of verse 26.

“The Morning Star” is referred to in three passages:

(1) In Revelation 22:16 it is a reference to the Lord Himself.

(2) In 2 Pet. 1:19 it seems to be a reference to the fuller understanding we will receive at the return of the Lord for the church when the Lord is personally present to enlighten us.

(3) In Rev. 2:28 (our passage) the context suggests that in some way it relates to the overcomers and their reward in ruling with the Savior. Perhaps it is the assurance of His presence and provision to be able to handle the authority given over the nations assigned. As a promise to the overcomer, the one who keeps the Lord’s deeds to the end, it can hardly be a symbol of Christ’s return since all believers will share in His return regardless of their spiritual state. Paul teaches us a similar truth in 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11. The apostle shows us that all believers, whether awake (spiritually alert and sober) or asleep (spiritually out of fellowship), will be delivered from the coming wrath of the Tribulation and taken up to be with the Lord if they are living on earth when He returns. It is significant that the words Paul uses for awake and asleep have a moral connotation and are different words entirely from those used in chapter 4:13-17.

More than likely, the key to the meaning of the morning star is found in Revelation 22:16 which says, “I am the root and offspring of David, the bright morning star.” Literally, the text says as in 2:28, “the star, the morning one.” This means the brilliant or bright one, the brightest of all the stars. Note: this links Jesus with the throne of David and describes Christ as the star. Jesus is descended from the royal line of David and is the star, the King himself, who was prophesied in Numbers 24:14-19 as the star who would come out of Jacob and possess the scepter.

The Lord is promising the overcomer that he will share His royalty and splendor as the morning star. First, the Lord said that the overcomer would be given a dominion like His own (cf. 2:27b, “as I have received authority from My Father”), and so here in 2:28, the overcomer will be given a rule and splendor like that of the Lord’s. In this promise, the Lord promises a dominion and a splendor just like His own.

Verse 29 again repeats the familiar call to hear, a call that goes beyond this one church to all the churches. Only here as in all the rest of the messages, the call to hear follows the promises to the overcomers whereas in the previous three letters, it precedes it. Again we see the personal and loving concern of the Spirit of God for His people and His desire that we all respond in faith and obedience.

Lesson 9:
The Message to Sardis
(3:1-6)

“Deadness in the Church”

The City and the Assembly
(3:1a)

1a “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write:...”

The City of Sardis

Sardis was a city exceedingly famed for its past wealth and splendor, but it had deteriorated greatly. Its greatness lay in the past. Sardis had, at one time, been considered to be impregnable because of its ideal physical arrangement and topography for defense. It sat on a hill or mountain surrounded by steep cliffs almost impossible to scale with only one narrow way of approach. Yet Sardis had been attacked and conquered twice because of its arrogance manifested in its lack of watchfulness (3:2-3). The city was also famous for its woolen, textile, and jewelry industry.

Sardis was devoted to the worship of the mother-goddess Cybele and no temple worshipper was allowed to approach the temple of the gods with soiled or unclean garments. A white and clean robe was required to approach its so-called gods. Yet note the following account of the actual moral conditions of this idolatry. Andrew Tate writes,

Her worship was of the most debasing character and orgies like those of Dionysos were practiced at the festivals held in her honour. Sins of the foulest and darkest impurity were committed on those occasions; and when we think of a small community of Christians rescued from such abominable idolatry, living in the midst of scenes of the grossest depravity, with early associations, and companionships, and connections, all exerting a force in the direction of heathenism, it may be wondered that the few members of the church in Sardis were not drawn away altogether, and swallowed up in the great vortex.¹

From this, you can see the obvious allusions to the historical setting in the Lord’s words in 3:4-5.

The Church of Sardis

Though filled with external works and activity, this church is known as the sleeping church. As Paul put it in 2 Timothy 3:5, they had a form of godliness, but, because of their failure to walk with the Lord, they were denying the real power of God through their hypocrisy. They were out of touch with elements of true spirituality. Some may have been only professing Christians engaged in religious activities who had never truly trusted in Jesus Christ. More than likely, however, they were carnal believers who had made a good start, but had failed to move on, to grow and experience true spirituality. They were active, engaged in works, but temporally dead, out of fellowship with Christ (Eph. 5:14-18).

The Christ, the Author and Answer
(3:1b)

1b “...He who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars, says this:

The answer, as always, is centered in Who Christ is—The Savior who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars. These two aspects of Christ’s ministry to the church are brought immediately to the forefront because they give us the key to both the problem of this church and its solution.

¹ Andrew Tate, *The Messages to the Seven Churches of Asia Minor*, p. 299, quoted by Walvoord in *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1966, p. 79.

The Seven Spirits of God

“The seven Spirits of God” is a reference to the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son to the believer (John 7:37-39; 15:16, 26). He is the Son’s gift to enable believers to experience genuine spirituality through the multiple ministries and work of the Spirit symbolized here in the number seven which is a clear allusion to the seven-fold ministries of the Spirit mentioned in Isaiah 11:2-5. But believers have a responsibility to walk by the Spirit who indwells them. The responsibility is to walk by faith in His enabling power and to deal with the sin in their lives through honest confession or they will hinder (grieve and quench) the work of the Spirit. So part of the problem was the believers in the church at Sardis were grieving and quenching the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19).

The Seven Stars

In the introduction I shared my reasons why I, along with many others, have believed the seven stars referred to the spiritual leadership which is primarily responsible to hold forth the light of the Word to the local flock of believers. Here, it appears, was another key area of weakness; the failure to communicate and receive the Word in a consistent and an in-depth way with personal application and response of the mind, heart and will. Therefore, the two life-giving provisions of God for man—the Holy Spirit and the Word—were being neglected. The result was spiritual deadness (Zech. 4:6; Heb. 4:12; Eph. 3:16-19; 1 Thess. 2:13).

The Church and its Affairs (3:1c-6)

1c ‘...I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. 2 ‘Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. 3 ‘Remember therefore what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. If therefore you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you. 4 ‘But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white; for they are worthy. 5 ‘He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels. 6 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

The Condemnation Declared (3:1c)

As with all the churches, the Lord declares, “I know your deeds.” That which is invisible to men is perfectly clear to the Lord who is in the business of revealing our true condition regardless of how spiritual we may think we are. He uses His Word, the convicting work of the Spirit, and other agents (trials and members of the body of Christ) as mirrors of reproof to show us our need and draw us to Himself. The question is, as He will challenge us in verse 6, do we have eyes to see and ears to hear?

So, in the very next words, we see a rude awakening and reality:

- We see that they had a name, a reputation—**what men thought**.
- We see they were alive, that is, they were an active church full of programs and church activity—**what men see**.
- But, regardless, they were dead, without true spiritual vitality—**what the Lord saw and knew**.

The point is they had a reputation, they were known far and wide, and they were active, filled with activity, action, and programs, just like a great deal of the church today all across America. By the world’s standards they were successful and they were probably proud of their church, but our Lord says not so, “you are dead.” So what does He mean by “dead?”

In Scripture, death stands for the concept of separation as well as the absence of life.

- For the unbeliever, death means without spiritual life, unregenerate, and without God—separated from relationship with God.
- But for the believer, death, like sleep, is sometimes used as a symbol for carnality, for being out of fellowship with God, separated from Christ as the source of the abundant life (Eph. 5:14).

Some could have been only professing believers, and so they were spiritually dead, just professing believers involved in an active church. But I don't think that is the emphasis here. He was talking to true believers who were spiritually carnal and working from the energy of their own resources rather than from His (the Word and the Holy Spirit).

This is a warning. A church is in danger of death:

- When it begins to worship its own past or history, its reputation or name, or the names in the church.
- When it is more concerned with forms than with function and life.
- When it is more concerned with numbers and noses, than with the spiritual quality of life it is producing in its people.
- When it is more involved with management than with ministry or with the physical over the spiritual.

This illustrates the problem of institutionalism in the church, but today, we also have a new scenario that can be a part of this picture, the megachurch which has become a part of American jargon with megabucks, megatrends, and the megamall. Our megamalls have been styled as “cathedrals of consumption” because they are designed to feed the consumer appetites of our lifestyle today. But if we are not careful, churches can become “cathedrals of consumption” as well.

The Counsel Advised (3:2-3)

“Be watchful.” We could translate this, “become and stay awake” or “get awake.” By the analogy of Scripture this was a command for believers to get back into fellowship, i.e., to repent or confess their sin and start walking in the Spirit and in the light of the Word (Eph. 5:14-18).

For the unbeliever or the merely apparent believer, this becomes a call to become genuine with Christ, to put one's faith in the Savior (cf. 1 Thess. 5:4-8).

“And strengthen the things that remain.” Strengthen is an aorist imperative of the verb *strenizo*, which means “to strengthen, make stable, firm.” The aspect of the verb (an aorist imperative in the Greek) carries the idea of urgency like, do it now, before it is too late. This is basically a command to get with God's plan for spiritual stabilization and strength. And what is that? A life in the Word. If you have any doubt about that, spend some time reading and meditating on Psalm 119.

Note the following verses where *strenizo* is used:

(1) Romans 1:11, compare this with Luke 22:32 (Christ's warning and command to Peter) and John 21:15-17. Here is the principle of pastors and teachers strengthening believers by feeding the lambs and the sheep with the Word.

(2) Romans 16:25-26. Here we have the principle of believers receiving the Word in the assembly as well as from personal study.

“The things which remain.” When people stop operating from the base of God's Word and from the power of His Spirit, spiritual decline always begins. It's a kind of law of spiritual degeneration. But even in such a state there is at first some semblance of what is right in a man's life—good habits, traditions and actions, a remembrance of morality, even though people forget the source. Remember, the church of Ephesus had good works (Rev. 2:2), even though it appears they too lacked the right spiritual source when we compare them with 1 Thess. 1:4, but eventually even this was lost because Ephesus failed to go back to do the first works.

Even human good is better than evil and God uses such morality to benefit society and even His own church. This is one of the purposes of good government, to restrain evil and promote good. Morality in parents helps to pro-

duce the same in their children. But the point is, without the proper spiritual base and the absolute guide of Bible doctrine even this will be finally lost. So, He quickly warns, “which were about to die.”

“For I have not found your deeds completed...” “Perfect” is the verb *pleroo*, which may mean “to fill, make full,” or “complete.” The verb is in the perfect tense which means its aspect (how the writer perceives its verbal action or state) is stative, resultative, or completed. It conceives the verbal idea as completed, or as completed with continuing results and looks at an existing condition. The word “complete” refers to “the deeds” done. This is what was incomplete or not completed. But does this mean they need more works, or that there was something incomplete about the works accomplished, or both? The context suggests both, but perhaps the focus is on the second, a missing element in their deeds. Their works were incomplete in that they lacked the proper source and motive. They had not measured up to God’s standards. They were not Spirit produced and could not stand the test of His examination. At the judgment seat of Christ they would fall under the category of wood, hay and stubble (1 Cor. 3:12-15). They were imperfect either in quality (works of the flesh) or they were imperfect in content.

“Remember therefore what you have received (perfect aspect) and heard (aorist)” (3:3). This represents faith and the truth they had received as a trust and the perfect aspect of the verb “received” calls attention to the abiding responsibility incumbent upon the receiver.

“And keep *it*, and repent.” Compare this verse with Colossians 2:6 and 1 Thessalonians 2:13. They were to remember the early days of their life in the Word, when the Word was received by faith and was their source of strength and wisdom for all of life. This former life of faith they were to keep, to hold fast to continually, but it was also vital that they repent carefully because a true change of mind and heart is necessary for a genuine and consistent walk with the Lord (Prov. 4:23, 26).

The Commendation Stated (3:4a)

They are comforted and commended because there were a few who had not fallen into the above condemnation.

“Soiled garments” speaks of the contamination of the life and witness by accommodation to the standards of the world prevalent in any society. More precisely, it refers to the unrighteousness of men in immorality, apostasy, idolatry, or of their own religious works of righteousness in mere external religion and legalism (Isa. 64:6; John 6:63).

The Certainties Promised (3:4b-5)

They are next comforted and assured by calling their attention to certain verities or certainties that the Lord promises to every believer in Christ. The certainties come in three distinct parts: (a) arrayed in white garments, (b) name not to be blotted out, and (c) their name confessed before His Father.

The White Garments (3:5a)

“Walking with Christ in white” is a reward for faithfulness. Note that the reason given in 3:4 is stated in the words, “for (the causal use of *hoti*, “because”) they are worthy.” The worthiness here is linked to the fact that these were believers “who have not defiled their garments.” This shows us that walking with Him in white is a reward for personal righteousness or deeds of righteousness. Note also how this fits with Revelation 19:8. Walking in white must refer to the white garment of fine linen mentioned in Revelation 19:8. There we are told the bride of Christ (the church) is “... to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean.” This is then declared to be the righteous acts of the saints, a reference to deeds or acts of righteousness produced in the life of the believer by the Holy Spirit because only these deeds will stand the test of the Judgment (Bema) Seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:13).

No person is ever worthy of salvation righteousness. Justification, or salvation righteousness, is a gift given through faith in the finished work of Christ. It is based on His worthiness and record, not ours (Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 3:4-7), but the white garment mentioned in 3:5 is related to the garment of 3:4 and is given as a reward for a worthy walk. While some writers assume that *all* Christians will wear these white garments in the kingdom, this verse teaches us that only overcoming believers, those who haven’t defiled their garments (verse 4), will wear these particular garments representative of the righteous acts of the saints in the kingdom.

His Name Never to be Erased (3:5b)

In verse 5, the overcomer is also promised he can never have his name erased from the Book of life. Could this suggest the possibility of the loss of salvation? Such a concept is totally contrary to the analogy of the faith in the New Testament which teaches us all believers are kept secure by the power of God and the finished work of Christ (cf. John 10:28-29; Rom. 8:38-39). As Charles Stanley so aptly put it, “Does it make any sense to say that salvation is offered as a solution for our sin and then to turn around and teach that salvation can be taken away because of our sin as well?”²

Because so many do not understand the nature of salvation as a finished work of God in Christ and are insecure in their faith, verses such as this are misunderstood as suggesting the possibility of the loss of salvation, or as a proof for the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. This results in a fixation on what the verse does not say rather than on what it is saying in the context biblically, historically, and culturally. This verse was never intended as a warning. Instead, it is a promise of encouragement in view of the historical setting of John’s day. To say that verse 5 suggests the possibility of losing salvation is at best, an argument from silence.

If we understand the promise of 3:5 in its historical and contextual context, we will find that it is not dealing with the issue of losing or proving salvation at all. By the use of a figure of speech known as litotes (an affirmation expressed in negative terms), we have an emphatic declaration that stresses the certainty of the promise. In other words, a positive point is made by denying its opposite. This not only stresses the security of the believer—for every believer’s name is written in the book of life—but is a way of promising something special to the overcomer in the kingdom and eternal future. Bob Wilkin, who agrees with this view, quotes William Fuller and writes:

William Fuller, who defends this understanding of Rev 3:5, writes, “A command that everyone keeps is superfluous, and a reward that everyone receives for a virtue that everyone has is nonsense.” The eternal-rewards interpretation takes the command seriously, views the reward as a powerful motivation to obedience, and doesn’t distort the Gospel!³

Tatford also interprets Revelation 3:5 in a similar way when he writes,

Practically every city of that day kept a role or register of its citizens...one who had performed some great exploit, deserving of special distinction, was honoured by having his name inscribed in golden letters in the citizens’ roll. Our Lord’s emphatic statement, therefore, implies not merely that the name of the overcomer shall not be expunged, but per contra that it shall be inscribed in golden letters in the heavenly roll.⁴

There is even evidence that a person’s name was sometimes removed from the city register before death if he had been convicted of a crime.⁵ When these messages were written, Christians were under the constant threat of being branded as social rebels and stripped of their citizenship if they refused to recant or denounce their faith in Christ. So here, as a source of motivation and encouragement, the Lord personally reminds the overcomer not only of the safety of his heavenly citizenship, but of the special acknowledgment the Lord Himself will give before the Father and before His angels.

His Name Confessed Before the Father and His Angels (3:5c)

As just indicated, this promise is related to the previous promise and may really be a part of that promise. It is likewise not dealing with salvation, but with reward by way of an accolade, a special acknowledgment or public recognition for faithfulness. Again we need to keep in mind the historical background mentioned above. Though the overcomer may experience blame and ridicule and loss of citizenship before the world because he or she refuses to

² Charles Stanley, *Eternal Security, Can You Be Sure?* Thomas Nelson: Nashville, 1990, p. 181.

³ J. William Fuller, “I Will Not Erase His Name from the Book of Life (Rev 3:5),” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (Sept. 1983), p. 299, quoted by Bob Wilkin, *Grace Evangelical News*, March, 1995.

⁴ Fredk. A. Tatford, *Prophecy’s Last Word*, p. 63.

⁵ Alan Johnson, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12, Frank E. Gaebelien, general editor, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1981, p. 450.

follow after the world or bow to its threats, the overcomer will experience special reward in the form of public recognition. Undoubtedly, special accolades like, “well done, you good and faithful servant,” is in mind.

The Challenge Needed (3:6)

See the preceding studies for the nature of this challenge to have ears to hear.

Some final lessons:

(1) The means for living the Christian life, so vital for spiritual reality, is a knowledge and a careful application of the Word through the various ministries of the Spirit (vs. 1).

(2) The sign of a successful church, one truly in touch with God, is Christlikeness. How much do the people of the church demonstrate the Savior in their personal lives, in their families, in their values, priorities, ministries, etc.? It is never just activity or works or size or reputation. Activities and reputations by themselves are never a proof of true spirituality.

(3) Genuine godliness is the foundation of moral goodness. Moral goodness is always incomplete and on the verge of degeneration without godliness through the Spirit and the Word with its absolute truth.

(4) God is always faithful to reward His people for their faithfulness to Him. Salvation is by faith alone, *sola fide*, in Christ alone, but rewards are the product of overcoming faith in the life of Christ appropriated in the Christian's life.

Lesson 10:
The Message to Philadelphia
(3:7-13)

“The Church of the Open Door”

The City and the Assembly
(3:7a)

7 “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:”

Philadelphia, which means “brotherly love,” was situated in Lydia along the Hermus River valley about 38 miles southeast of Sardis. It was backed by volcanic cliffs and though the land was rich and fertile from the volcanic residue, Philadelphia was a dangerous place to live due the many earthquakes experienced by the region. Because of its location, the city was in constant danger of earthquakes and experienced shocks as an everyday occurrence according to Strabo. As a result, many of its inhabitants chose to live in huts outside the city in the open country. Note the allusion to this in the promise of 3:12, “and he will not go out from it any more.” Like Athens, Philadelphia was a temple warden and gave to the emperor the title “The Son of the Holy One.” It is undoubtedly for this reason the Lord is called, “He who is holy, who is true” in verse 7.

Barclay points out another important historical feature about this city and one also alluded to in the statements of the message to the church there:

Philadelphia was founded for a special purpose and with a special intention. It was situated where the borders of Mysia, Lydia and Phrygia met. It was a border town. But it was not as a garrison town that Philadelphia was founded, for there was little danger there. It was founded with the deliberated intention that it might be a missionary of Greek culture and the Greek language to Lydia and Phrygia; and so well did it to its work that by A.D. 19 the Lydians had forgotten their own Lydian language and were all but Greeks... That is what the Risen Christ means when he speaks of the open door that is set before Philadelphia. Three centuries before Philadelphia had been given an open door to spread Greek ideas in the lands beyond; and now there has come to it another great missionary opportunity, an open door to carry to men who never knew it the message of the love of Jesus Christ.¹

The symbols of the ‘crown’ and the ‘temple’ mentioned in verses 11 and 12 are undoubtedly allusions by way of contrast with the games and religious festivals that were a part of life in the city of Philadelphia. In contrast with the instability of life in a city prone to daily earthquakes, those who ‘overcome’ are promised the ultimate stability of being rewarded with special privileges in the temple of God. This church may picture the modern missionary era of church history.

The Christ, the Author and Answer
(3:7b)

7b “...He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this:”

Once again our risen Lord presents Himself in an aspect of His person and work which is fitting to the needs and problems of the assembly to ever remind us of the sufficiency of His life.

“He who is holy” asserts the Savior’s deity as the absolutely righteous One, the One totally set apart from sin. In Isaiah 40:25, *Yahweh* calls Himself “The Holy One.” It is a title of deity and contrasts Him with the claims of Emperor worship.

¹ William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, Volume I, The Westminster Press: Philadelphia, p. 158.

“Who is true.” “True” is the Greek word *alethinos*. It means “the real, the genuine, the ideal,” and stands opposed to what is false and to what is only a picture or type of the real.

(1) He is the One of whom all the Old Testament spoke. There we find only pictures and shadows, but He is the reality and the substance (Col. 2:16-17).

(2) This places Him in contrast to all the deceptions of the world and the false and futile answers it offers to man. God’s answer for man is Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6).

“Who has the key of David.” In Revelation 1:18 the keys speak of Christ’s power to give salvation and victory over death and the unseen Satanic world which tenaciously tries to hold men under the dominion of sin and death (Heb. 2:14). Here, however, the key speaks of (1) His royal claims as Lord and Head of David’s house. It anticipates and looks to His rule and kingdom on earth. (2) But it also reminds us of His royal authority or sovereignty even now over heaven and earth (Matt. 28:19).

When men by their arrogance and ecclesiastical or political position and actions would strive to shut out true Bible-believing believers from effective service, we need to remember His power and authority. Men may bind us, as they did John and Paul, but God’s Word is not bound (2 Tim. 2:9). Further, when we think we must compromise God’s principles of the ministry and resort to human gimmicks, Madison Avenue techniques, or any kind of worldly means to accomplish spiritual objectives or as the keys to open doors, we need to again reflect on the truth of this passage. The Lord holds the key to opening doors to ministry as well as the door to the hearts of men. Note the following description.

“The One opening...” (3:7b) In the final analysis it is always our Lord who opens all true doors of ministry to us. This church had a little strength, i.e., they were small in numbers by man’s standards as man counts success, but this must never disturb or discourage us.

“And who shuts and no one opens...” There is also an important lesson here as believers seek God’s guidance for ministry. Paul and His missionary team had planned to minister first in Asia, but were forbidden by the Holy Spirit (Acts 16:6). Then they wanted to minister in Bithynia, but they were not permitted to minister there either (vs. 7). Instead, they were called to Macedonia. In other words, at that point at least, the Lord shut the doors to Asia and Bithynia, but opened them in other places. Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 16, Paul expressed his plans to eventually visit Corinth (16:5-7), but he carefully qualified this with “if the Lord permits” (vs. 7). However, for the moment, he was committed to staying at Ephesus to minister. Why? Because “a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries (evidently a sign to Paul of God’s hand on his work at Ephesus)” (cf. vs. 8-9). But when we turn to 2 Corinthians, we find that Paul had to change his plans in regard to Corinth due to circumstances beyond his control and the sovereign leading of the Lord, the One who opens and closes doors. The obvious lesson is that we must learn to grab the opportunities when they come, but not push and get frustrated when the Lord isn’t opening the door. For other passages using the open door image see Acts 14:27; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3.

The Church and its Affairs (3:8-13)

8 ‘I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name.9 ‘Behold, I will cause *those* of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews, and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them to come and bow down at your feet, and to know that I have loved you.10 ‘Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that *hour* which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth.11 ‘I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown.12 ‘He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.13 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

The Commendation Stated (3:8)

(1) For Faithfulness with opportunities given to them

The statements of commendation flow out of the truth of Christ as the One who opens in verse 7. They were using the opportunities (the open doors) the Lord had given them as the door opener. This is implied in verse 8a. Christ knew their deeds, and so He put before them an open door of ministry. We should note that “put” of the NASB, or “set” of the KJV, or “placed” of the NIV is the perfect tense of Greek *dido,mi* which literally means, “I give.” It is used according to context in the sense of “bestow, grant, supply, deliver, commit, and entrust.” While the idea here is clearly that of placing before the Philadelphian believers open doors of ministry, it should be noted that this word is used of entrusting something to someone for some type of stewardship: money for investment purposes (Matt. 25:14-15), the keys of the kingdom (Matt. 16:19), and someone’s care (John 6:37, 39; 17:6, 9, 12, 24; Heb. 2:13). See also Luke 19:23 where *dido,mi* is used of putting money in the bank to gain interest. There are two points to ponder here. First, open doors of opportunity—no matter how hard we think we have worked to open the doors—are gifts from the Savior because without Him, they would not open. Second, open doors are trusts given to us for faithful stewardship just as with our spiritual gifts or our finances. If we will be faithful to live in the fullness of His life, He will bring opportunities of service and ministry.

(2) For spiritual competence

“You have a little power.” They were small in number by comparison to the religious and idolatrous people of the city, but, small as they were, they did have power, spiritual capacity because they were operating from the source of Christ’s life and authority.

(3) For faithfulness to the Word

“And have kept My word.” This was the secret to their lives and ministry (Heb. 4:12). Keeping God’s Word and keeping our hearts dependent on and close to Him go hand in hand (Prov. 4:20-23). “Kept” is the Greek *te,reo,,* “to watch over, guard, keep, preserve” and “give heed to, pay attention to, observe” especially of the Law, or the Word, or teaching, etc.² Undoubtedly, both ideas are involved. They were committed to Christ’s Word or the Word about the Savior to preserve it from false ideas and adulterations, but they were also committed to observing its truth in their lives.

(4) For attestation to their faith in Christ

“And have not denied My Name.” This speaks of their spiritual fidelity and separation from the world. Remember, one may confess the Lord with his mouth and yet, in some way, deny Him with a life that is inconsistent with the truth of Scripture or the character of Christ.

The Comfort Promised (3:9-11)

(1) Comfort concerning their persecutors (3:9)

“Those of the synagogue of Satan.” The synagogue refers to the place of Jewish worship and study.

“Of Satan” is a genitive of possession, Satan’s synagogue, that which belongs to him. Satan was its head and the power behind the scenes. More crime, evil and persecution have been perpetrated in the name of religion and by the religious, self-righteous type than almost any other one source of evil. Religion is Satan’s trump card, and one of his primary weapons that he uses to both deceive and hurt mankind. This is what we have here. Religious persecution by religious Jews operating under Satan’s control whether they realized it or not. The Lord’s word to the religious leaders in John 8:41-47 is fitting here:

² G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 3rd edition, T. & T. Clark: Edinburgh, 1937, p. 445.

41 “You are doing the deeds of your father.” They said to Him, “We were not born of fornication; we have one Father, *even* God.” 42 Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me; for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. 43 Why do you not understand what I am saying? *It is* because you cannot hear My word. 44 You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*; for he is a liar, and the father of lies. 45 But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. 46 Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? 47 He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear *them*, because you are not of God.”

“Who say they are Jews and are not.” They were literal Jews, physical descendants of David and Abraham, but in claiming to be Jews they were also claiming to be God’s people, religious guides to the truth, and the means and access to God. The apostle Paul comments on what constitutes a true child of Abraham in Romans 9:6-8. There he makes the clear distinction between racial Israel and regenerate Israel.

Rom. 9:6-8 But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel; 7 neither are they all children because they are Abraham’s descendants, but: “THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED.” 8 That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.

They were not children of God regardless of their claims and religiosity. They had rejected God’s Son and revelation of God, they were of their father the Devil, as Christ plainly told them. To be a true Jew in the biblical sense one had to have the hope and faith of Abraham. Abraham was the possessor of faith in the promises of God to him and faith in the coming Messiah.

The promise: Since faithful believers will reign with Jesus Christ and share in His throne, these persecutors will in essence have to fall down at the believer’s feet in “operation footstool” (Phil. 2:10-11, Heb. 2:13).

(2) Comfort concerning the Tribulation (3:10)

The reason for deliverance

“Because you have kept the word of my patience” (3:10a). “The Word of My patience” refers to the Word, the testimony of Scripture regarding the truth of Christ as the suffering, resurrected, and so also, the victorious Savior who endured the shame of rejection and the cross and who endures today as the resurrected and ascended Lord now sitting at God’s right hand (Heb. 1:3 with 12:1-3).

“Kept” is again the Greek *tereo*,,, “to guard, watch over, protect,” or “obey, observe” as with the principles and commands of Scripture. This is a non motion verb in contrast to verbs of motion like *sozo*,,, “to save, deliver,” and *lambano*,,, “to take.” This is important because this same word is used of the promise which follows. We will see why when we consider the promise.

But what does it mean *to keep the word of His endurance*? It means to be a believer, one who has trusted in the person and work of Christ who now sits at God’s right hand for us. Rather than reject this message, they had kept it by faith.

The promise of deliverance (3:10b)

“I will also keep you from the hour of testing,...” “Testing” is the Greek *peirasmos*, “a trial, temptation, or testing.” The context must determine the exact meaning of the word. Here the context shows us the reference is to a very specific meaning, that of world-wide testing or tribulation.

“Hour” is metaphorical for a shortened period. Because of the clause that follows, this clearly refers to more than the general trials or testings or temptations which people today may encounter. The hour is defined in three ways:

- (1) It is “the” hour of trial. The presence of the Greek article specifies this as a very specific time of testing.

(2) It is to come upon the whole world. The term translated “world” is oikoumene,, meaning “the inhabited earth,” but modifying it is the adjective, holos, “whole, complete.” The testing is worldwide.

(3) Finally, it is designed to test a certain category of people defined as “those who dwell upon the earth.” The verb “dwell” is katoikeo,, from kata, “down” and oikeo,, “dwell, live.” Katoikeo,, means “to live, dwell, reside, settle (down),” or it can mean “inhabit.”³ The construction of the Greek (a substantival present articular participle) describes the inhabitants as those who are characterized as earth dwellers. As used in Revelation, “those who dwell upon the earth” is basically a technical term for unbelievers because they are earthdwellers, i.e., people bound only to this life and what it can give (6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 14; 17:8; Isa. 24:17f). In contrast to believers who are to think and live as sojourners or aliens, the earthdweller is quite at home on earth.

“The hour of trial,” sometimes referred to as “the Tribulation,” refers to the time of wrath or judgment described in chapters 6-19. This is the same as Daniel’s Seventieth Week (Dan. 9:27) and the time of Jacob’s trouble described by Jeremiah as unprecedented in its judgment (Jer. 30:7).

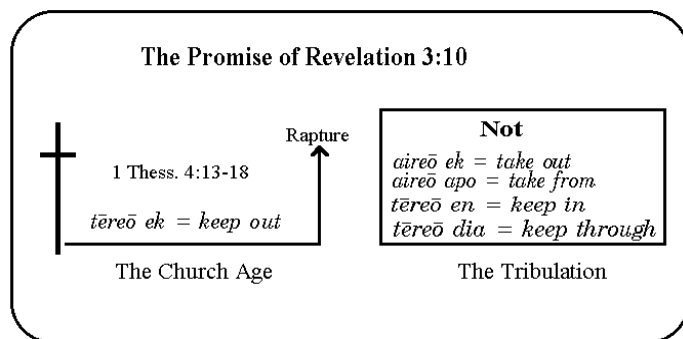
The promise:

First, note that this is not a reward to the faithful. This will come in verses 11-12. Instead, this is a promise to the church as a whole. This is clear from 3:13 which broadens this as a promise to the churches at large. All believers are to listen to these messages and their warning, exhortations, and promises and act accordingly. As in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, this is to bring comfort to the church.

Second, the promise is “I will keep you from the hour...” i.e., from the Tribulation. This is very specific and carefully described in the Greek to emphasize and clearly teach the pre-tribulation rapture of the church. The Greek words for “keep out” are te,,reo,, ek meaning “out of.” There are four other ways this could have been stated if John wanted to imply that church age believers would be in the Tribulation, but none of them were used.

- te,,reo,, en = To keep in. This would be a promise of preservation *in* the Tribulation.
- te,,reo,, dia = to keep through. This would be a promise to keep us *through* the Tribulation.
- aireo,, ek = to take out, or so,,zo,, ek = to save out. This could mean that believers would go into the Tribulation and then be taken out of the Tribulation.
- aireo,, apo = to take from. This would mean that believers would go into the Tribulation and then be taken out of the Tribulation.

Rather than any of the above, John chose to use te,,reo,, ek, which means “to keep out.” This is a promise that believers will never get into the Tribulation. But how? Paul describes this for us 1 Thessalonians 4:13f. We can chart it like this:



³ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, translated by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, University of Chicago Press: electronic version.

Some have tried to argue that this construction means just the opposite of the above interpretation. Gundry, for instance, in his book, *The Church and the Tribulation*, believes it argues for a post-tribulational emergence of the saints. He writes, “As it is, ek lays all the emphasis on emergence, in this verse on the final, victorious outcome of the keeping-guarding.”⁴ Although this is generally true with ek, if ek is related to a non-motion verb like te,,reo,, the idea of motion out of something is negated by the static nature of the verb. The fact then, that a motion verb like so,,zo,, is used here with ek shows the fallacy of Gundry’s argument. However, even if a verb of motion were used, it would not prove Gundry’s argument. A good illustration is 2 Corinthians 1:10 which has rhuomai ek, “delivered us from death.” Certainly Paul did not mean that God had delivered them out of death through resurrection, but that He had kept them from death.⁵ Another illustration of this use of ek with a verb of motion is James 5:20, “save him from (the peril) of death,” so,,zo,, plus ek.

As James 5:20 and 2 Corinthians 1:10 means saved from the peril of death, i.e., from dying. So likewise 1 Thesalonians 1:10 and Rev. 3:10 means delivered from the peril of wrath, the time of testing, the Tribulation.

(3) Comfort and admonition concerning the imminent return of the Lord (3:11)

His coming is promised to be “quickly.” This means “suddenly, unexpectedly, without announcement” and not necessarily soon. It implies imminency and so the charge here is to “hold fast,” a warning against spiritual carelessness and carnality. The warning reminds us to live in the light of His coming, to hold fast to Him in faith and service. For when He comes it will mean examination and rewards. He will not forget our service on His behalf, but we must hold fast to the hope and expectation of His coming for us or we will live carelessly, indifferently to our calling and purpose as believers. When that happens we lose our crowns, rewards for faithful service. So the Spirit quickly adds, “that no one take your crown.”

“That no one take your crown” is an interesting picture. To lose a crown is to be deprived of the honor or glory potentially available through faithful living. There are two possible ideas here:

(1) It could refer to rewards which are lost and given to others because we failed to hold fast. Swete states, “The picture is not that of a thief snatching away what is feebly held, but rather of a competitor receiving a prize which has been forfeited.”⁶ I am reminded of 1 Corinthians 9:24 where the apostle challenges us regarding rewards, “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win (lit. lay hold of).” There is also the parable of Luke 19:24 where the Lord says regarding the unfaithful servant, “Take the mina away from him, and give it to the one who has the ten minas.”

(2) Or, it could refer to rewards lost because of the evil influences that we might allow to hinder us in the race of life (cf. Matt. 13:7, 22; Col. 2:18; 2 John 8; Rev. 2:20 with 2:25f).

Actually, both concepts are true as the above Scriptures make clear.

Certainties for the overcomer (3:12)

In verse 12, then, the believer who overcomes is promised three specific things:

First, he will have as a reward a special ministry as a permanent and prominent fixture in the temple of God (Eph. 2:21f). All believers are in the spiritual building and household of God (Eph. 2:21-22), but some will be pillars as special rewards. To be a pillar is a sign of special reward with a permanent position of honor and responsibilities in the millennium and eternal state. Pillars stood for stability, ornamentation, and service.

Second, he will never be removed from this place of preeminence in the eternal temple. The overcomer has a fixed eternal place of honor in the sanctuary of God. “He will not go out from it anymore.”

⁴ Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, p. 57.

⁵ Dan Wallace, *Selected Notes on Syntax of the New Testament Greek*, 4th edition, Dallas Theological Seminary, pp. 139-141.

⁶ W. R. Ross Jr., “Dallas Theological Seminary Thesis,” p. 52.

Third, he will have three special names: he will have written on him God's name and the name of the new Jerusalem along with Christ's own new name. This would all signify the priestly dignity and prominence given to the victors.

**The Challenge and Admonition
(3:13)**

13 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

Finally the letter is closed with the usual charge to all the churches or to the church of God at large wherever it may exist in the world to hear and take this message to heart.

Lesson 11:

The Message to Laodicea

(3:14-22)

“Lukewarmness in the Church”

Introduction

All of the messages to the churches of Asia are extremely practical, but perhaps none fits the conditions in both Europe and in North America as does the message to Laodicea, the church that had become so lukewarm in its deceptive self-sufficiency. Regarding this condition, MacArthur has given us an accurate picture. He writes:

One of the remarkable sidelights in the staggering political changes in Eastern Europe is the fact of a vibrant Christianity that has emerged in the midst of the suffering, persecution, and atheism of these Communist dominated countries.

By contrast, in free Europe where there has been prosperity and democracy, the church is almost completely dead. The church has ceased to have any impact on the society. Atheism and humanism have taken over. Government and public policy is governed almost totally by philosophies that are antibiblical and even intolerant of the truth of Scripture.

If you look at the U.S., you find much the same thing. Government and the media, which affects the thinking of so much of America, are, for the most part, liberal and intolerant of Christianity. Leadership in both Europe and the U.S. are working for a one world government while the populace is preoccupied with their comfort and pleasure or the good life. The moral climate or condition of both free Europe and the U.S. is rotten to the core. According to a number of polls, if you compare the values, priorities, practices, and pursuits of professing Christians and non-Christians alike, you find very little difference on the whole.

Yet, much of free Europe and all of America owe their freedom, their prosperity, and blessings to the preaching of the Word of God, to the reformation in Europe, and to the ministries of men like the Wesleys, George Whitfield, and Jonathan Edwards in America.

What then is the problem? Is it freedom? Is it prosperity? No! But there are inherent dangers in both freedom and prosperity, subtle dangers.

It is more than a curiosity that the church has flourished behind the Iron Curtain while dying in the West. The reasons are clear. Lacking any visible external threat to our faith, many in the free world have lost any sense of the subtlety of the enemy and how he attacks. We have grown careless and apathetic. We have become concerned more with our own comfort and well-being than with the command of Christ that we should follow in His steps (1 Pet. 2:21).¹

So, what’s the problem? People simply can’t stand prosperity. With freedom and prosperity come the temptation to trust in our blessings rather than in the Blessor. We become fat, comfortable, and self-sufficient. If we have plenty, we tend to think we have need of nothing. If we do not have enough, looking at the wealth around us, we tend to think that what we need is what others have—material blessings.

The problem is that men are putting their faith in the wrong thing, in their material world, in treasures on earth. Christ told us in no uncertain terms to do the opposite, to lay up treasures in heaven. Paul instructs us in 1 Tim 6:17-19:

Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. {Instruct them} to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.

¹ John MacArthur, “Masterpiece,” May/June, p. 2.

In other words, in the words of the Savior, we need to lay up heavenly treasures (Matt. 6:19f). Scripture warns us of this very problem over and over again.

God warned Israel in Deuteronomy 6:10f against forgetting the Lord as the source of their freedom and salvation. Nine times in Deuteronomy He tells them not to forget what the Lord had done for them and 15 times He tells them to remember the Lord and His deliverance.

The Lord Himself in the letter to the church at Laodicea warns and instructs us against the deadening and lukewarm effects of trusting in material wealth (the details of life) rather than pursuing a vital faith relationship with Jesus Christ.

The Laodicean church was a church that had lost its impact on the world because it had become occupied with the world and because it had left the Lord standing outside. Whether one believes in the idea that the seven churches of Asia portray seven historical stages the church would go through or not, certainly this church illustrates conditions of the church in the 20th century in a large portion of the world.

The City and the Assembly (3:14a)

14a “And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write:...”

Laodicea was the chief city of Phrygia in the Lycus valley, strategically located where three highways converged. It was thereby a highly commercial and wealthy city. It was a city of wealthy bankers and financiers. The many millionaires combined to build theaters, a huge stadium, lavish public baths, and fabulous shopping centers. Sound familiar?

It should be obvious, but clearly, the American Mall, the big discount stores, and shopping centers define American culture in the '80s and '90s. The '80s has gone on record as the decade of consumerism and the '90s has certainly continued the trend, even adding Internet shopping to the list. Consumerism is completely out of control.

I was in the north part of Dallas not long ago and was amazed at the number of shopping centers, restaurants, strip malls, and huge enclosed malls. But it's like this all over America, especially in the big cities. There is a concentration of buyers, sellers, and products; jammed parking lots and crushing crowds with millions of dollars being spent by people buying things they don't need with money most of them don't have.

Americans spend more than 30 percent of their income on luxury items, compared to less than 10 percent just forty years ago. Statistics on personal consumption published by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis reveal that Americans' spending on recreation rose from 42.7 billion in 1970 to 246.8 billion in 1988—a 477 percent increase!

Consumer Credit outstanding in America went from 167 billion in 1975 to nearly 660 billion in 1988. That's a whopping 295 percent increase!²

In A.D. 60 Laodicea was destroyed by an earthquake. Being highly resourceful and self-sufficient, the people restored their own city rather than receive a government loan from Rome. That was very commendable and a far cry from what we find today in America. It demonstrated a self-sufficient attitude that would have detrimental spiritual results if carried over into their relationship with the Lord.

In addition to being a banking center, it was a manufacturing center for woolen garments and medicinal eye salve, powders and tablets (3:17-18).

They did have one inadequacy, however—their water supply. Laodicea received its water through an aqueduct coming from a spring four miles to the south. The waters of neighboring Hierapolis, however, were famous as hot springs and would have provided a contrast with the tepid aqueduct water in Laodicea. By contrast also there was Colossae which had ice cold springs, but nothing like this was known in Laodicea.

Certainly, this church illustrates and speaks to the church in our time, our modern period of materialism, consumerism, self-sufficiency, do-your-own-thing kind of independence and individualism, religiosity, and apostasy.

² MacArthur, p. 2.

The Christ, the Author and Answer (3:14b)

14b "...The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:"

Again, as with the previous letters, this one begins with a part of the description of the Savior as given in chapter one. So our attention is focused on the person of the risen Lord Jesus and how He alone is the answer and solution.

"The Amen." Amen is the Greek *amen*, from the Hebrew *Amen*. *Amen* is from a root meaning "to be firm, stable, sure, established, and trustworthy." It is used in Isaiah 65:16 of God as "the God of truth," literally, "the God of Amen."

The word was used to acknowledge and emphasize what was valid, sure and true, or important and significant. It is used in the Old Testament as a liturgical formula in which a congregation or individual accepts both the validity of an oath or curse and its consequences (Num. 5:22; Deut. 27:15ff.; Neh. 5:13; Jer. 11:5). Twenty five times, always in the gospel of John, John records the Lord's use of this word, *amen*, translated as, "truly truly, I say to you." Here in Revelation 3:14, the "amen" is explained with the words, "the Faithful and True Witness."

"Amen" also connoted the idea of finality or the last word; is used of our Lord as the True One, the last word and final authority in each individual's life as well as for the entire world. As used of Christ, it points to Him as the end, the finality and certainty of all things. With Him one needs no substitutes, no subtractions or additions. With Jesus Christ there is no further search needed for truth for in Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3). Thus, every promise He makes is true and every woe He pronounces shall come to pass.

"The Faithful and True Witness." As mentioned, this clause defines the word "amen." But it is especially designed to contrast Christ's statement of verses 15 and 16 with the statement of the Laodiceans about themselves in verse 17. As the "Faithful and True Witness," He stripped them and so also us of all our false appearances and pretentiousness, rationalizations and excuses. It stresses the need in each of us for honest examination followed by an honest to God confession that demonstrates a genuine desire for a change of life. It would further teach us the need to be in His Word which reveals our true condition (Heb. 4:12). The Lord said, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth" (John 17:17).

"The beginning and the creation of God." The word "beginning" is the Greek word *arche*, meaning (a) first in time or (b) first in place, cause, or origin. The point is Jesus Christ is the origin, the cause, the Creator of all things (John 1:3; Col. 1:16-17; Rev. 1:8; 21:6). He is the Creator of this earth, now fallen under the curse of sin through rebellion to Him. But He is also the Creator of the coming kingdom and the eternal state of a new heavens and earth in which dwells perfect righteousness (cf. Isa. 65:17f).

As with the world today and many, many believers, Laodicea was occupied with and trusting in the things of this fallen creation that is now passing away and slated for destruction. They were trusting in the details of this life rather than in the Creator and in heavenly treasures.

Their priorities and security lay in temporal things rather than in the eternal and in the Creator Himself (Matt. 6:19f; 1 Tim. 6:17-19). Perhaps, like much of Christianity today, their hope and faith was in a responsive Christ who is supposed to satisfy His people by quickly granting them ease and comfort. It is a Christianity that wants heaven or millennial conditions now in this present fallen world under Satan's control. But that is not the message of the Bible and certainly not the message of Revelation.

The message of Revelation is about a continuing struggle with evil both in the church age (Rev. 2-3) and in the Tribulation to come (Rev. 6-19). It's a struggle that will only get worse and worse and will not end until it is brought to an end by the personal return of the Lord.

The hope of the church and the biblical message that enables people to weather life's storms and grow through them is gratitude for what happened at the cross of Christ combined with a passionate confidence in what will yet take place at His blessed coming. Surely, the only source of real stability in this *present* (a kind of stability that does not require the character-weakening mechanism of denial nor the demand for comfort) is a deep thankfulness for the *past work of the Savior* combined with a confident expectation for the *future glories promised by Christ*.

The Church and its Affairs (3:15-22)

15 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot. 16 'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. 17 'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, 18 I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see. 19 'Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent. 20 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me. 21 'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. 22 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"

The Condemnation and Admonition (3:15-17)

Please note that in this church there was *no commendation*. This church is condemned because it is neither hot nor cold, but simply lukewarm. What does this teach us?

"I know your deeds." As before, the Lord begins with a solemn reminder of His knowledge of the true condition of our lives. Since His witness is true and He is the Amen (the final word) it is as foolish for us to run and hide, as it was for Adam and Eve. We should never run or hide from his witness to us through the Word, or from the disciplines He brings into our lives. Why? Well, not only does denial dishonor the Lord and bring with it serious consequences to our fellowship with Him (see vs. 20) and our ability to grow up spiritually, but sooner or later we are going to have to face the Lord for the way we have lived and used or abused His grace.

Rom. 14:11-12 For it is written, "AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD." So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God.

"Hot" is *zestos*, a word which means "boiling hot." It is found in Rom. 12:11 where we are first warned against "lagging behind in diligence," but also exhorted to be "fervent (*zestos*) in spirit, serving the Lord," an obvious cause and effect relationship. It refers to spiritual fervor, zest, zealousness for the things of Jesus Christ. Our word *zest* comes from this word.

"Cold." Christ says "I would that you were either cold or hot." Why cold? Why is cold preferred to lukewarm?

First, there may be an allusion to Colossae which had cold springs. The point is that cold water is refreshing, it provides refreshment for the weary, and hot water has a healing or soothing effect upon the sick or on aching and sore joints and muscles. But Laodicea had neither; in fact, it was nauseating.

Note our Savior's comment at the end of verse 16. "I will spit you out of My mouth." The translation "spit" of the NASB or NIV, or "spue" of the KJV, are not really strong enough. The Greek word here is *emeo*, which means, "to vomit." There is another word, *ptuo*, that means "to spit" that John could have used if that is what he meant.³ From the standpoint of their ministry they provided neither refreshment nor healing, they could only cause nausea. In other words, they were useless to the Lord and His purposes for the church in the world. Remember Matthew 10:42 and the cup of cold water given in the name of Christ. They were even useless for that.

Second, when a person is cold and feels its bitterness, he is more apt to seek warmth or refuge from the cold and flee to Jesus Christ for his needs. But if one is lukewarm he becomes more difficult to reach because he feels comfortable and self-sufficient (3:17b).

"I would." This is the Greek *ophelon*, a fixed form used to express an unattainable wish. It's equivalent to "would that, I wish." It assumes the nature of an interjection where one wishes that a thing had happened, but has not

³ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, translated by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, University of Chicago Press: electronic version (under *emew*).

and probably will not. They had become thoroughly hardened and indifferent to Christ through the deceitful riches of the world and their sin (cf. Heb. 3:7f).

What does it mean to be lukewarm? Verse 17 expresses what Christ means by lukewarmness. It refers to Christians who are indifferent or apathetic because they are self-sufficient and self-satisfied. Christians who are trusting in themselves and their wealth or what they thought their wealth could buy them. Note their threefold claim:

(1) “I am rich”—they had an over abundance of material blessings, but by this statement, it shows they were proud and trusting in that richness as though wealth had the power to give them security and happiness.

(2) “... and have become wealthy”—they continued to add to their wealth. Not only was wealth a sign of security, happiness, and success, but the truth is, it never really satisfies and people want more. I can’t remember who it was that said this, though I know he was a very famous wealthy man, but when asked how much is enough, the millionaire replied with one word, “more.”

(3) “... and have need of nothing”—They were so well off they thought they needed help from neither man nor God. They had bought into the satanic delusion that money can buy anything. They didn’t need to trust God. They could simply go out and buy whatever they needed or desired. There was no need to wait on the Lord, no need to put Him first.

They sought their security in their talents, abilities, human resources, and financial wealth. They thought they were protected from all dangers, were insulated from all problems, and immune to every kind of tragedy.

These are the kind of people who thought they deserved special treatment: first class accommodations, the finest clothes, the best of everything. Their real God was comfort and pleasure.

The problem was that they sought their happiness in things and their security in their wealth. As a result they neglected the Lord and biblical values. They neglected real service or ministry to others.

America has more churches per capita than any other country. Our currency reads, “In God We Trust.” But according to recent statistics, there is very little difference between the lifestyles of Christians and non-Christians. The moral degeneracy of our nation in its attitudes, values, and beliefs is everywhere obvious. The crime rate, substance abuse, the divorce rate, abuse of women and children, the secularism, rise of the occult, the new age movement, and many other signs make it clear this country is in critical condition regardless of its Christian heritage and its many churches.

We are the wealthiest nation in the world with more churches, more Bibles, Christian literature, and Christian schools than any other nation in the world, yet, we are losing the battle.

Why isn’t the church more effective in the world today? Is the problem simply with the world? Is it too stubborn and too blind to listen? Or could part of the problem be with us? Have we, because of our materialism and in spite of our religiosity, excluded the Savior? Have we literally shut Him out of our lives so He can no longer flesh out His life in ours to impart His vision, His character and values into ours?

What’s the cure for the American church? What do we need to do? In the verses that follow, we have the Lord’s counsel and advice along with His promises and rewards.

The saddest thing about the Laodicean church (and that which characterizes America today) is not just the Lord’s statement about their condition as “wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,” but the words that preceded this indictment, “and you do not know that you are...” How sad to be this numb and blind! Let’s note the description:

“Wretched” is the Greek word (*talaiporos*) which comes from the word *talai* meaning “to bear, undergo” and another word (*poros*) which means “hard, callous.” I don’t want to make too much of this because etymology (the derivation of words) is not the primary basis for understanding words, usage is. But perhaps the use of this word suggests that they were wretched in the sense that they were bearing severe calluses on their soul, hardened against the truth.

“Miserable” means “pitiable.” It describes one in such a state that he becomes the object of extreme pity, like a beggar. The real pity is that they were like a drunk in the cold, they could not feel their condition.

“Poor” is “beggarly.” This word referred to one who begs for crumbs trying to fill his hunger or craving. Those who try to find happiness and security in the details of life are like beggars trying to exist on crumbs while, as we see in verse 20, Christ stands at the door inviting us to come in out of the cold and dine with Him in fellowship.

“Blind” They were without spiritual insight or discernment. They were walking in darkness. Their eyes were bad and so their whole body was full of darkness (Matt. 6:23). Here was the crux of their problem; it was spiritual blindness, poor spiritual insight or a lack of biblical perspective or vision. Here is something we must not ignore. The problem of seeking happiness in the treasures of the world is at heart, an eyesight problem, a problem of blindness or poor spiritual eyesight (Matt. 6:19-23).

Compare Psalm 119:11-14, 99-105; 19:10; Proverbs 16:16 and note there the results of good eyesight or spiritual illumination.

In Revelation 3:17, Christ, as the True and Faithful Witness, describes the condition to which they were blind and totally insensitive because of their lukewarmness, a condition caused in part by their failure to desire (1 Pet. 2:2), know and respond to the Word (1 Thess. 2:13).

Further, the Lord says they were:

“Naked” is the Greek word *gumnos* from which we get our word *gymnasium*. It meant (a) to be totally without clothes, or (b) to be poorly clothed, dressed in rags. Though they were rich, and manufactured and wore expensive clothing, and though they made eye salve, they were, spiritually speaking, in pitiful condition.

By way of application for the unbeliever, or the mere professing Christian, this means to be without the righteousness of Christ. All our religious or moral good works, if we are without Christ, are but filthy rags (Isa. 64:6). For the believer, this means to be without the fruit of the Spirit, the genuine character of Christ. It means hypocritical Christianity.

Satan and the world wants us to think that the good life is what we all want and need. People watch shows like “Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous,” and game shows where people win large amounts of money. They follow the lotteries and think, “Wow, if only I could have that kind of luck.” The implication is that money buys the good life, but not so. There is no “good life” to be purchased for any amount of money.

Materialism is a destructive pathology. Statistics indicate the more money you have the more likely you are to commit suicide. Actuarial figures reveal life expectancy decreases as income increases. Money adds to stress and that in turn takes years off one’s life. One study shows that money also intensifies moral decline and family disintegration. Marital infidelity and divorce rates rise with income levels. Money cannot buy happiness.⁴

The Counsel or Advice (3:18-19)

“I advise you.” This word, *sumbouleuo*, means “to give counsel” or “to take counsel together.” This reminds us (or should) that the whole of the Word is the counsel of God setting forth the will of God. So He calls us to come and take counsel together with Him (Isa. 1:18). What is the Lord’s counsel or advice?

“Buy from Me.” How can you buy from Christ what is only given through faith? (cf. Rev. 21:6; 22:17). The answer is given for us in Isaiah 55:1-3.

1 Ho. Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. 2 Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And delight yourself in abundance. 3 Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, *According to* the faithful mercies shown to David.

“Buy” stands for the concept of acquire or gain. No one can actually buy these things from Christ. He only uses these words as a medium to carry their thoughts from the material world and material wealth to the spiritual world and the need of spiritual wealth that can only be received by faith. Also note the concept of the source. They can be bought only from Christ.

⁴ MacArthur, p. 2.

Note what it is that can be bought or acquired. “Gold.” Here the Lord counsels the church to turn to Him for true riches. Gold here is a picture of faith produced by God’s own Word by which men bring the spiritual riches of Christ into their lives (cf. 1 Pet. 1:7; Rom. 10:17; 5:1).

“White raiment.” Again we would divide this into two categories: (a) For the unbeliever, this refers to the righteousness of Christ which is imputed to the believer at the point of faith in Christ (Rev. 3:5; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9f). (b) For the believer it would refer to the experiential righteousness, the fruit of the Spirit. Acts of righteousness from living in the Word and walking in fellowship by abiding in Christ (John 15; Rev. 3:4; 19:8; Gal. 5:22-23).

“Eye salve.” Since this obviously has to do with spiritual sight, this most likely refers to the person and work of the Holy Spirit as God’s anointing who anoints our eyes to discern His Word (John 14:26; 1 Cor. 2:14-16).

We need to remember that these letters are written to the church, to believers in Christ. There could have been unbelievers in their midst, but unbelievers are really not a part of the church. Christ is addressing believers here and says, “those whom I love, I reprove and discipline.” He loves them and promises to reprove and discipline them to bring them out of their self sufficiency and into the sufficiency of His life. This could require severe testing, pain and heartache to bring them (or any believer in this state) to a point of personal need and dependency upon the Lord (Heb. 12:5-15).

In view of this, they are warned to become zealous and to repent of their ways. In other words, repent in order to stop the discipline before it begins.

“Be zealous” is a present imperative which commands a continual state. This is maintained by using our divine operating assets, the Word, the filling of the Holy Spirit, prayer, etc.

“Repent” is an aorist imperative which means don’t delay, do it now, but it also looks at action designed to arrest a condition, the condition of lukewarm self-sufficiency.

The verb is *metanoeo*,, “to change the mind.” It is equivalent to confession of the past or the present with a view to a change in the future.

The Call and Invitation (3:20)

Christ is represented in relation to the church locally and universally in that these letters have application locally and universally. But this appeal has special application to the individual for the church is made up of individuals. Note the words “if anyone hears.” A condition can exist in the life of a believer which necessitates inviting Christ to come in for personal fellowship. But this is not the way this passage is often used and understood.

This passage is often used in presenting the gospel and in offering salvation to a lost sinner. Such a view is based on two assumptions: (a) that the Laodiceans, or at least some of them, were indeed lost, and (b) that the Greek text *eiseleusomai pros* means “come *into*.” Both of these assumptions have little evidence to support them.

Wallace writes:

With reference to the first assumption, that those in the Laodicean church were not believers, note that in the preceding verse, the resurrected Lord declares, “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline.” Here *phileo*, is used for “love”—a term that is *never* used of God/Jesus loving unbelievers in the NT. (Indeed, it would be impossible for God to have this kind of love for an unbeliever, for it routinely speaks of enjoyment and fellowship. *agapao*,, rather, is the verb used of God’s love for unbelievers [cf. John 3:16], for it frequently, if not normally, speaks of commitment and, when used with God/Jesus as the subject, the idea is often of an unconditional love.) This *phileo*, must be applied to the Laodiceans here, for the verse concludes, “Be zealous, *therefore*, and repent.” The inferential *oun* (“therefore”) connects the two parts of the verse, indicating that the *Laodiceans* are to repent because Christ *loves* (*phileo*,) *them*!

The second assumption is that *eiseleusomai pros* means “come into.” Such an assumption is based on a less than careful reading of the *English* text. The ASV, NASB, RSV, NRSV, for example, all correctly renders it “come in to.” (Note the space between the prepositions.) The idea of “come into” would be expressed with *eis* as the independent preposition and would suggest a penetration into the person (thus, spawning the idea of entering into one’s heart). However, spatially *pros* means

toward, not *into*. In all eight instances of *eiserchomai* pros in the NT, the meaning is “come in toward/before a person” (i.e., enter a building, house, etc., so as to be in the presence of someone), *never penetration* into the person himself/herself. In some instances, such a view would not only be absurd, but inappropriate (cf. Mark 6:25; 15:43; Luke 1:28; Acts 10:3; 11:3; 16:40; 17:2; 28:8).⁵

“I stand” is in the perfect tense which points to action completed with continuing results and marks out the loving patience of the Lord and His desire for our fellowship.

“Knock” is in the present tense which looks at continuous action. What gracious condescension that the Creator—God—Savior would seek our fellowship. The Lord stands, knocks and speaks. His speech is an invitation for men to open up the doors of their hearts and to invite Christ in for fellowship.

“I will dine with him and he with Me.” Dine is a Greek word which referred to the main meal of the day—a real feast. This Greek word, *deipneo*, was used not only of the chief meal of the day—a full course dinner—but of the meal which was the occasion for hospitality and fellowship. At this meal, however, He is the host. It is He who sets the table and we are His guests dining on that which He has provided.

We can perhaps make application for the lost, for those without Christ, but we must be ever so careful in how we do this. Unbelievers are not saved by asking Jesus to come into their lives. Unbelievers can only invite Christ into their lives as personal Savior by faith in the person and work of Christ (John 1:12; 3:16, 36). Christ comes in through the ministry of the Spirit of God by believing in Jesus Christ as to both His person and work as the only means of salvation, not by simply asking Christ to come in. This means believing in Christ as the Son of God, the God-man who died on the cross as God’s substitute and payment for one’s own sin, and believing that God raised Him from the dead, the proof of His person and work (Rom. 10:9).

Actually, this passage is addressed to the church—to believers. This is a call to fellowship with the Savior. As an invitation to Christians, it’s a call to repent, as commanded in verse 19. It is a call for confession of one’s sins with a renewal of mind and heart to continue to draw upon the glorious life of Christ daily through walking by the Spirit and living in the Word. It means abiding in Christ, the vine (John 15:1-7; 1 John 1:7-10; Eph. 4:20-24; 5:14-18; Rom. 8:1-16).

The Comfort and Assurance (3:21)

Not only does He promise to come into the life of the one who invites Him (vs. 21), but again special blessing is promised to the believer who overcomes. He is promised the privilege of sitting with Christ on His throne. This means the privilege and right to share in Christ’s authority and rule in the millennium and eternal future.

But note the basis of this: “as I also overcame and sat down.” The real victory over death, sin and Satan was accomplished by Christ in His life, death and resurrection. Because of His sinless life and perfect obedience to the Father’s plan—even the death of the cross—He overcame sin, Satan and death and was granted the right and authority as the God-man to sit with the Father until operation footstool, until he makes His enemies the footstool for His feet (Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 1:3, 13).

But by our union and identification with Him in His person and work, and through our faithfulness in the conflict as we draw upon His life as the source of ours, we get to share in His reign as a reward for faithful service. This is truly amazing because, whenever we do overcome in the battles of life, it is always through Him.

The Challenge or Appeal (3:22)

Verse 22 ends the letter to Laodicea and also concludes these two chapters and the letters to the seven churches by the appeal to hear. It is an appeal which each time is made to all the churches because all seven letters are vital to us all.

⁵ Daniel B. Wallace, Th.M, Ph.D., Associate Professor of New Testament Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary, *Scripture Twisting*, The Biblical Studies Foundation web site at www.bible.org. (Note: for our non-Greek readers, I have transliterated the Greek words used by Wallace in the article on the BSF site.)

The great lesson concerns a church that is religious, but basically useless. It is a church that has excluded Christ from their fellowship in selfish, materialistic, self-dependence. It is a church where Christ stands on the outside, excluded by the church's apathy to His Word, a Word which convicts, enlightens, warms and softens hearts, and makes people productive. Thus, the call is to hear, to open our ears.

Like Laodicea, the church today is lukewarm. Am I? Are you? We have seen what it means to be lukewarm and how we are to deal with lukewarmness. We have also seen its causes and cure. Do we have ears to hear this message as the Lord challenges us in this passage? Are we blind to the effects of our own forms of greed?

Conclusion

Think for a moment about Madison Avenue with all its advertising techniques. They are designed for the financial gain of the advertisers, not that of the buyer. Regardless of their claims such as, "you need a break today," or whatever the alleged benefit of the product, it is really without much concern for the welfare of people other than they want to keep our business. It is exploitative, manipulative, and designed by greed to play on the weaknesses of the public. The goal is to get us to buy what we can't afford, what we do not need, with money we often don't have. And many times it is either harmful or wrong according to biblical standards. Advertisers often seek to reach the most vulnerable in society and intentionally market products that are both addictive and destructive.

But this greed-driven behavior is not exclusive to the world. We find it in the church among God's people too, but often we are too blind to see it. Think of how often greed, laying treasures on the earth, and desires for the good life negatively affect the body of Christ:

(1) Think of how it tarnishes the testimony of Christ when business professionals compromise integrity and biblical values to cut a less than honorable deal.

(2) Think of how greed shreds families when parents devote their best energies to dreams of the "good life" leaving little strength or time for caring for the spiritual well being of their family.

(3) Think of how greed injures the church and ministry for the same reasons because people are so engulfed in the pursuit of position, power, praise, prestige, and pleasure that there is neither time nor energy to devote themselves to the Word, to ministry, or to liberal giving.

We are not exempt from the consequences of our own forms of greed. It litters the landscape around us with victims of our self-centered drives.⁶

⁶ J. M. Stowell, "Moody Monthly," May, 1990, p. 4.

Lesson 12: Introduction to the Things Predictive (4:1-22:21)

Chapter 4 transports the reader to the things which shall take place after these things (i.e., after “the things present” in chapters 2 and 3, or the church age). In the section that follows, the apostle John points to the series of events that will occur sometime after the rapture as they are described in chapters 6-22. Following what many believe is God’s own inspired outline of the book of Revelation (Rev. 1:19), chapter four introduces us to the things future, the prophetic part of the book: the seals, the trumpets and vials; Satan and his last day activities; the future of Israel; the 144,000; Babylon; the beast and false prophet; the two witnesses; the marriage of the Lamb and the return of Christ.

Note the following natural chronological order:

As suggested previously, chapters 2 and 3 unfold the moral and spiritual condition of the churches in the time of John, but they also illustrate conditions that would be present historically in any age down through history. They may also portray various stages the church as a whole would go through during the present age of the church.

Chapters 4 and 5 are introductory in that they prepare the reader for the future events unfolded in chapters 6-22. This is evident from the words, “after these things” of 4:1. This is the Greek, *meta tauta*. “After” is the preposition *meta* which shows sequence and refers to that which follows. *Tauta*, “these things,” refers to the things of chapters 2 and 3. Specifically, according to chapter 1:19, they occur after “the things which are,” the present time, the church age. All that follows, then, is chronological in that these events follow the church age, *meta tauta*, “after these things,” (4:1), after the things of chapters 2 and 3, or the church, but chapters 4 and 5 are represented as occurring before chapter 6 and following.

Spiritually speaking chapters 4 and 5 form a prologue to the Tribulation events and give us heaven’s perspective of the terrible judgments that will be poured out on the earth. One cannot understand the nature of the Tribulation judgments without this scene. In these two chapters, John was given “heaven’s perspective of earthly events as he walked through the door that was opened to him in 4:1.”¹

While chapter 4 is a prologue to the future things of chapters 6 through 22, chapter 5 is an introduction to the seven seals, the trumpets, and the vial judgments of chapters 6 through 19. Chronologically, then, the prophetic events of chapter 6 through 22 occur after the rapture. How long we have no way of knowing. It could be days, weeks, months, or even years, though the latter is highly unlikely since the only thing keeping Satan from raising up his last day scenario through the man of sin is the presence of the Restrainer—the Holy Spirit operating through the body of Christ, the church (2 Thess. 2:5-9). Once the church is gone, Satan will undoubtedly move quickly to bring his one world system into being.

We may divide the final portion of the book into four sections:

- The Tribulation (6:1-19:21)
- The millennial reign (20:1-15)
- The eternal state (21:1-22:5)
- The epilogue and benediction (22:6-21)

The Throne in Heaven, The Prologue to the Things Future (4:1-11)

1 After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, “Come up here, and I will show

¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Revelation*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1968, p. 33.

you what must take place after these things.” 2 Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. 3 And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance. 4 And around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads.

5 And from the throne proceed flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; 6 and before the throne there was, as it were, a sea of glass like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind. 7 And the first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. 8 And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, “HOLY, HOLY, HOLY, is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME.” 9 And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11 “Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created.”

The Throne Standing in Heaven (4:1-3)

The invitation or command (4:1)

“I looked and behold a door open in heaven.” “Behold” This is the Greek *idou*, an aorist imperative of the verb *horao*,,, “to see.” It came to be used, however, as a demonstrative particle meaning “see, look, behold.” It was used much like the Hebrew, *hinneh*, “behold, look, see” to enliven the narrative or to arrest the attention of the reader, undoubtedly because of the nature of the material introduced. Here is a vision of special importance, one vital to understanding the nature of the prophetic events described.

“A door *standing* open in heaven.” The word “door” is used four times in Revelation. In 3:8 it is used in connection with the door of opportunity for ministry given to the church at Philadelphia. Then in 3:20 it is used twice of the Savior standing at the door of the heart desiring fellowship. Here, the door is opened to give John and us heaven’s insights to the earthly scene that will follow. This is an essential prerequisite if one is to comprehend the nature of the events and the purpose of God behind them.

“Standing open.” The voice of this verb is passive. God opened the door for John which serves to remind us this is divine revelation. It reveals that which we could never see or know apart from this special revelation from God.

“And the first voice which I heard.” This does not refer to the first of a successive series of voices after he arrived, but is most likely a reference to the voice John heard in 1:10.

“Come up here and I will show.” Again, true prophecy has its source in heaven and men must take their stand there, which for us is the Word, if we are to understand God’s plan for the ages. It is there that it was mapped out and it is from there that it must be received.

Note the words, “what must take place.” “Must” is the word, *dei*. It refers to what is necessary and binding. It refers to a moral necessity which arises from God’s holy purposes or appointment.

The placement of the throne (4:2a)

“Immediately I was...” This is the same as 1:10 and refers to a state of spiritual ecstasy into which he was transported to receive this revelation.

“And behold, a throne was standing open in heaven.” The KJV has “a throne set in heaven,” the ASV has “a throne set in heaven,” Phillips has “a throne had been set up in heaven,” the NIV has “there was a throne in heaven,” and the RSV has, “a throne stood in heaven.”

The verb here is the Greek verb *ekaito*, a passive imperfect of *keimai* which may be used as the passive of *titho*, "to be laid, to lie, be laid or set, stand."² So it may mean "to lay, place, or set something." It could be translated as, "a throne was being placed in heaven," or "a throne had been placed in heaven." John is telling us this throne was purposefully set in heaven for the coming events or judgments. Perhaps John saw the throne being set and then he saw the One sitting on the throne. The suggestion is that this was not the eternal throne, but one especially set for the Tribulation judgments (cf. Psalm 9:7, "He has established His throne for judgment" and Dan. 7:9, "I kept looking until thrones were set up, And the Ancient of Days took His seat...") See also Dan. 7:13-14).

It appears this is a special throne prepared for the Tribulation and from this point on the Book becomes predominantly the Book of the throne. The word throne is mentioned 45 times versus only 15 times in all the rest of the New Testament.

Perhaps this throne is somewhere in the second heaven, outer space (see Rev. 6:16). God leaves His eternal throne, the throne of the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2) to establish this one to defeat His enemies and to establish His rule on earth (cf. again Dan. 7:9-14).

God is sovereign and the ruler of the universe, yet God's rule is today hidden. The world under the power of the usurper rages against God, thinking it has jettisoned God's authority. But God still rules under what we call God's *providence* (cf. Isa. 10:5f). But now, in 4:2f, His rule and throne comes into view and later the whole world will know (Rev. 6:16).

Today when we pray, we approach the throne of grace (Heb 4:16). In Revelation 2 and 3 there is no throne other than the promise we will sit with Christ on His throne (Rom. 8:1; 1 John 5:14-15).

The Person on the throne (4:2b-3)

"And One sitting on the throne, and He who was sitting..." John is allowed to see the throne room and the thing that stood out was the One regally seated on the throne, the place where the sovereign Lord reigns. The Greek employs two present participles which stress that God is firmly seated as the supreme ruler and sovereign. The scene strongly portrays the fact that God is in control. Though the nations rage and devise their plans, He who sits in the heavens laughs (Psalm 2).

The sovereign Lord is described in terms of two precious stones, the jasper and the sardius. Rather than anthropomorphic characteristics, God is seen in gem-like colors. We should remember that God's essential glory cannot be fully communicated to man. Scripture teaches God "dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen, or can see" (1 Tim. 6:16). So these stones are used to portray something of God's eternal glory, awesome holiness, and majesty.

"Jasper." This was a clear, crystal-like gem, a translucent rock, perhaps even a diamond. It portrays the purity and brilliance of God's holiness. Since such a stone picks up and reflect light, it calls our attention to the fact that God is light, a holy God who reveals, and unmask the darkness.

"Sardius." This stone was blood red undoubtedly portraying God's wrath and justice, but it would also look at His redemptive work of love and grace in the person of the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world through His death on the cross.

In the Old Testament these stones had a special relationship to the tribes of Israel. Each tribe had a representative stone which the High Priest wore on his priestly garment. As the High Priest, he was representing each tribe before God at the altar. The Jasper was the stone representing the first tribe, the tribe of Reuben. The last tribe, Benjamin, was represented by the Sardius. So these two stones represent the whole nation, the first and the last and all in between.

Reuben means "Behold a Son" and Benjamin means "Son of my right hand." Surely, then, these two stones also pointed to God the Son whom the Father would give through the nation Israel to save mankind in the person of His beloved Son. Jasper stands for God's perfect righteousness (Hab. 1:13). As a holy and righteous God, He cannot fellowship with man in his condition of sin. Sardius stands for God's perfect justice (Rom. 3:19) which means God

² G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, T. & T. Clark: Edinburgh, 1937, p. 243.

must judge man in his sin. Being red like blood, it pictures redemption and God's love and grace to reach out in Christ to provide a substitute, God's Son (Rom. 5:8).

"And there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance." As a part of the majesty of the scene of the sovereign Lord, John also saw a beautiful rainbow of emerald green. But, unlike the partial rainbows we generally see on earth, this one completely encircled the throne. This too is significant in calling our attention to the person and work of God on behalf of man, the one who rebelled against God's grace. In Scripture the rainbow is a sign of God's faithfulness to His word and covenants. It is also a sign of God's mercy, grace and long-suffering. The fact the rainbow completely encircles the throne emphatically stresses this. Green portrays fruitfulness; what proceeds from the throne will be infinitely effective.

Who is this on the throne? In Revelation 3:21 we see both the Father and the Son on God's throne. Here we are told John saw only one sitting on the throne. Perhaps this simply illustrates the mystery of the trinity. However, in chapter 5, the Son is distinguished from the Father. Apparently, in preparation for the judgments to follow, the Son has risen from the throne and is seen standing in preparation for the scene chapter 5 is designed to depict or teach. After no one is found worthy to open and release the judgments of the seven-sealed scroll, the Lamb who is also the Lion and who has overcome so as to open the book and its seals, is then seen coming to the throne to take the seven-sealed scroll of judgment from the hand of the Father.

The Persons Around the Throne (4:4)

The subject here is the 24 elders. Note four things are stated about them: they are seated upon thrones around God's throne, they are 24 in number, they are clothed in white raiment, and they have golden crowns on their heads. There are three main views as to who the 24 elders are:

They are angels

Some say we cannot be certain they are redeemed men because in Revelation 5:9-10 some manuscripts have a change in the pronouns which has them singing of the redemption of others rather than of their own redemption. This is hardly proof, however, that they are angels. It only removes the passage as absolute proof that they are the redeemed. It in no way proves that they are not singing of the redeemed that they represent, or that they are not of the redeemed themselves.

Further in Colossians 1:16 it is argued, angels are called "thrones" and seem to have a place of rule in the governing of the universe. But Christ also said that the overcomer, believers in Christ, would share in His throne or rule (Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21, 20:6).

They are the redeemed representatives of all ages

This would include all Old Testament and New Testament saints.

They are redeemed representatives of the church only

This best fits all the details of the passage and of Scripture, as I will attempt to explain.

(1) David divided the priesthood into 24 orders. There were hundreds of priests, and obviously all could not serve at once, so each order was represented by one. By Scripture's own use, the number 24 has a representative character to it (cf. 1 Chron. 24; 25; Luke 1:5, 8, 9). Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us his family was "of the first course of the four and twenty." So there was one high priest, 24 orders of priests with 24 who served as representatives of the whole.

(2) In the New Testament believers are a spiritual house, a holy and a royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). So the elders could easily be functioning as representatives of the church.

(3) Revelation 5:11 clearly distinguishes the elders from both the four living creatures and the many angels.

(4) They are called "elders" which is the Greek word *presbuteros*. In the New Testament this is virtually a technical term for officers and leaders in the church of Jesus Christ.

(5) They are seen with golden crowns. “Crowns” is *stephanos*, the victor’s crown and the same term used throughout the New Testament for the rewards given to New Testament believers (1 Cor 9:25; 1 Thess. 2:19; 2 Tim. 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:4).

(6) They are clothed in white raiment. In Scripture this is consistently associated with and promised to the believer, the overcomer. This is terminology of the saints not angels (Rev. 3:4-5; 19:8).

(7) A share in Christ’s throne or rule is promised to believers by our Lord in Revelation 2:26-27; 3:21.

(8) Finally, only the church is raptured before the events beginning in chapter 6 (the Tribulation) and is in heaven, glorified, and eligible for reward. Israel or Old Testament believers could not be represented here until after Daniel’s 70th week. Israel’s resurrection and rewards come then, “after the time of distress such as never occurred...” which is undoubtedly a reference to the Great Tribulation (Dan. 12:1-2).

The evidence tells us that the persons around the throne are representatives of the church here prophetically foreseen by this vision given to John. This then becomes both a prophecy and a promise of the glorious experiences of all New Testament believers.

The Proceedings around the Throne (4:5)

“Flashes of lightening and sounds and peals of thunder.” This draws our attention to the judgmental element of the throne and the nature of that which will occur once the Lord begins to open the seven-sealed scroll and pour out its judgments. “These seem to be portents of judgments and are found again in 8:5; 11:19 and 16:18.”³ Psalm 29:1-2 calls us to “ascribe to the Lord the glory due to His name; worship the Lord in the splendor of His holiness” (NIV). This exhortation is then followed up with a reference to the thundering of God’s voice as in a lightening storm, an obvious reference to the power and judgments of God (29:3). Man has been in rebellion to God and has ignored God’s holiness throughout history, but here God is about to act and put an end to man’s rebellion.

“Seven lamps of fire...which are the seven Spirits of God.” The seven lamps, defined as the seven Spirits of God, speak of the fullness and perfection of the Spirit and His ministries. In this context, however, there is one particular work of the Spirit which is being stressed. The Holy Spirit is viewed, not in His ministry of saving men, though that will surely occur in the Tribulation, nor is He viewed in any of His other ministries as seen in the church. Rather, here He is set forth in connection with His holy character (righteousness and justice) as light to illuminate the perfections of the throne. Everything inconsistent with the absolute righteousness and purity of God and His throne must and will be judged.

The Praise to the Throne (4:6-11)

The four living creatures (4:6-8)

“And before the throne *there was, something* like, a sea of glass, like crystal” (4:6a). Many see an allusion here to the laver in the tabernacle (Ex. 30:18-21) and to the molten sea in Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 7:23-37), that were for the purification of the priests. They symbolized the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, God’s agents for cleansing the life. Here, however, the sea before the throne is like glass, solidified, like crystal—not water, for no cleansing is needed here. Perhaps again, as crystal sparkles and reflects the light, so this simply adds to the picture of God’s holy character.

“And in the center and around the throne, four living creatures...” The question is who or what are the four living creatures? Are they angelic beings, or are they merely symbolic manifestations of God’s glory? Again we must seek answers to such questions from the Word itself. Let’s note the facts stated about these four creatures from this passage:

(1) They are living creatures. The Greek word is *zo*, on which means “a living being,” that which is vibrant with life. This would suggest angelic creatures, yet it could represent the attributes of God’s divine essence as living, and vital entities.

³ Ryrie, *Revelation*, p. 34.

(2) “Full of eyes in front and behind.” The cherubim of Ezekiel 10 were also full of eyes signifying their intelligence and spiritual perception of the ways and judgments of God. This is most likely the emphasis here.

(3) In verse 8 they have six wings which reminds us of the seraphim of Isaiah 6. This would emphasize their quickness and availability in service to the One sitting on the throne.

(4) They, like the cherubim of Ezekiel 1:10 and 10:14, are seen in four representations: Like a lion, an ox, a man, and an eagle. This also seems to tie them to angelic creatures.

(5) In verse 8 they are seen speaking about God in unceasing acclamations of praise and they fall down in worship before the Lamb.

All of this supports the fact that they are angelic beings who are a composite of both the seraphim of Isaiah 6 and the cherubim of Ezekiel 1 and 10.

Their number is four. Three is the number of God and the Godhead and four, due to the way it is often used in Scripture, is the number of the earth, the world, and man. Scripture often points to four divisions of the race (cf. 7:9, nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues). Further, there are four elements: fire, water, earth and air; four wind directions, four seasons, four universal empires (Dan. 7), and four representations of Christ, the Savior of man in the gospels as we will show below. Thus, together they represent God’s judicial government and activities over man. They express the character of God’s throne in relation to the earth and man.

Their four-fold significance: (a) The Lion stresses kingly majesty. The lion is known as the king of beasts and highlights the attributes of majesty, strength or sovereignty. It stresses that God is King. The gospel of Matthew presents Christ as King, as the lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5). (b) A calf or ox stresses service and patience. (c) Man emphasizes intelligence. (d) The eagle because he soars in the heavens, emphasizes deity, keen sight, and quick action.

They are “full of eyes in front and behind” (4:6) and “around and within” (4:8). This signifies their constant observance and knowledge of the affairs of the earth on behalf of God, plus their spiritual perception of God’s governmental purposes and acts. “Before” and “behind” could indicate the perception of God’s dealings in the past and the future.

Their ceaseless service night and day (4:8). There is no weakness or imperfection in their worship or service. No wonder Isaiah saw his sinfulness (Isa. 6:5).

Their proclamation is seen in 4:8b. They proclaim God’s perfect holiness. The triple “Holy, Holy, Holy” also speaks of the trinity.

The divine titles used: LORD is a reference to the Old Testament name of God, Yahweh, the self-existing One. God speaks of God in relation to creation. It stands for Elohim in the Old Testament, the name so often used in Genesis chapter one of creation. The Almighty points to God’s omnipotence and sovereignty.

Finally, they ascribe praise to God’s eternity.

The 24 elders and their response of praise (4:9-11)

The Explanation and Introduction (4:9)

Here we are pointed to the worshipful activity of these four awesome and holy living beings, symbols of power and holiness. And, as in Isaiah 6, they are seen in adoration of God giving glory, honor and thanks to Him. But then immediately, we see the results of their praise in the lives of the elders who respond in their own worship and praise (cf. 4:10-11 with the response of Isaiah to the worship of the seraphim in Isaiah 6:1-8). Giving “glory and honor” calls attention to the perfections of God, while giving “thanks” calls attention to the manifold gifts of God in creation and redemption.

Satan may have seduced the world through millenniums of struggle to accept him as the prince of this world and as the god of this age, but now beings mightier than he show the way of true worship. God alone is to receive the homage of men.⁴

The Worship of the Elders (4:10-11)

They “will fall down (prostrate themselves) before Him who sits on the throne.” They had been sitting, now they prostrate themselves in worship. Worship is *proskuneo*, which means “to prostrate one’s self before another.” This naturally comes from their recognition of God’s character and being.

“They will cast their crowns before the throne.” What are the crowns? They are symbols of God’s rewards for faithful service. Why do they cast them before the throne? Though the crowns had been given to them by God for faithfulness as overcomers, when they see the worship of the living creatures, they recognize it was all by God’s grace and that no crowns rightly belong to us for we all owe our existence and lives to God. He alone is actually worthy, for all we are flows from what He is as we, by faith, allow Him to reproduce His life in us through the Spirit. They then ascribe to Him:

- Glory is that which should accrue to God because of who and what God is in His essential being and works.
- Honor is respect, reverence.
- Power refers to God’s inherent ability, capacity, strength, i.e., His omnipotence to do whatever He pleases.

They acknowledge God not only as the Creator of all things, but as the sole motivation for creation, “because of your will they existed and were created.” I am reminded of Romans 11:33-35 which reads:

33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 34 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? 35 Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? 36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

Creation is a natural voice and revelation of God. Day after day, it manifests God’s being and even His divine essence; it declares His glory (Rom. 1:18; Psalm 19).

In the town hall in Copenhagen stands the world’s most complicated clock. It took forty years to build at a cost of more than a million dollars. That clock has ten faces, fifteen thousand parts, and is accurate to two-fifths of a second every three hundred years. The clock computes the time of day, the days of the week, the months and years, and the movements of the planets for twenty-five hundred years. Some parts of the clock will not move until twenty-five centuries have passed. What is intriguing about that clock is that it is not accurate. It loses two-fifths of a second every three hundred years. Like all clocks, that timepiece in Copenhagen must be regulated by a more precise clock, the universe itself. That mighty astronomical clock with its billions of moving parts, from atoms to stars, rolls on century after century with movements so reliable that all time on earth can be measured against it.

But man in his own arrogance has rejected this clear revelation of God and so often in the process, he has also rejected God himself. Evolution, a pure figment of man’s imagination, has sought to replace the concept of creation, and in the process, it has sought to jettison God. So, in the minds of many today, humanism has replaced Theism, the belief in God. Man the rebel has believed the lie of Satan when by rights he should fall down in adoration and worship of the Creator. Instead, he stands in open rebellion and worships the creature, himself, in place of the Creator.

Chapter four concludes with this “great anthem of praise by the four living ones and the 24 elders to God as creator. In 5:11-14 the focus of worship is on God as Redeemer.”⁵

⁴ Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Revelation, An Expository Commentary*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1971, p. 98.

⁵ Charles C. Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible, Expanded Edition*, NASB, Moody Press: Chicago, 1995, p. 2020.

Lesson 13: The Seven Sealed Book and the Lion Who was Also a Lamb (5:1-14)

Chapters 6 and following will unfold the ominous events of the Tribulation and describe the outpouring of God's wrath on the earth. Over and over from this point on, what occurs will be described in terms of God's wrath and judgment as an outpouring of His holy and righteous character. But before these events occur, man is given the perspective of heaven—a perspective which demonstrates something of the justice of these events and their necessity. In chapter four our attention was focused on the throne set in heaven and its Occupant. In chapter five the scene is still in heaven and continues the vision of the throne, only now the focus is on a new item of vital importance, the seven-sealed book (actually, a scroll, the Greek biblion) and its Recipient. The book contains the prophecy of events to be unfolded in the rest of the book of Revelation.

The Seven Sealed Book (5:1)

1 And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals.

The Position of the Book

The next thing catching the attention of John was the seven-sealed scroll held in the right hand of the Throne Sitter. The importance of what is taking place in this scene is evident by the position of the scroll which is in the hand of the Almighty Sovereign and Holy God of the universe. God, whose plans must be carried out, must now bring judgment to bear upon sinful man. The period of grace and God's long-suffering has now come to an end. The "right hand" as always is a symbol of God's strength and justice.

The Portrayal of the Book

"With writing on both sides." John was impressed with the fact the book contained writing on both sides meaning that it was full, written all over. This clearly demonstrates the importance and comprehensive character of its contents. But what does this mean and teach us? While we are not told exactly what the book contains, several things suggest the following picture:

From the context of Revelation and similar portrayal in Ezekiel 2:9-10, this scroll undoubtedly contains prophecies of the judgments of the Tribulation. Writing on both sides simply emphasizes the fullness of the judgments and their ability to accomplish the purposes of God.

In the chapters that follow, the breaking of the seals result in the out-pouring of the judgments described in Revelation. This clearly shows that the seven-sealed book contains prophecies of all the judgments necessary to bring rebellious man to his knees, defeat Satan's kingdom, restore the kingdom of the earth under the visible authority of God, and to reestablish man as God had originally intended before the fall and the invasion of the tyrant, Satan (Gen. 1:26-28).

Later on, through the unfolding of the seals and the judgments that come out of the seals (like the trumpet judgments) voices in heaven are heard at the sounding of the seventh trumpet, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and He will reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). The seventh trumpet includes the seven last plagues or bowls judgments that bring an end to the kingdom of this present world under Satan's authority. See also 12:10 which anticipates the doom and final days of Satan's kingdom.

So the seventh trumpet, with the plagues that follow, will result in the defeat of the enemies of God and the establishment of God's kingdom through Messiah. One of the key features of Revelation concerns the two kingdoms:

the kingdom of the world and the kingdom of God. The words “king, kings, kingdom,” etc., occur thirty times and in twenty-five verses in this book.

Chapters 12-14 are parenthetical and halt the progress of the judgments in order to develop certain themes that are tied into the key players of the Tribulation drama (Satan, Israel, the beast, the 144,000, the angel with the everlasting gospel, the beast worshippers, and the reaping of the earth by the Lord, the One who is the true white horse rider).

When we compare 11:15-17 with 15:1-7 and 16:17, it seems evident that it is the seventh bowl which finishes the judgments and accomplishes the defeat of Satan and his end-time kingdom. This final bowl comes out of the seventh trumpet which comes out of the seventh seal. Its the telescopic effect discussed in the introduction.

All of this suggests that the seven-sealed book contains the story of man losing his lordship over the earth to Satan, the usurper, and its recovery through the God-man Savior, the Lion who is also the Lamb. He alone is able to accomplish what no one else in the universe can, and He does so through the judgments of the sealed book.

“Sealed up with seven seals.” “Sealed up” is *katasphragizo*, from *kata* meaning “down” and *sphragizo*, “to seal.” This compound verb means “tightly sealed, firmly sealed,” and so, “very hidden, very secure.” “Seven” is the number of perfection or completeness. So all of this expresses the perfection with which the hidden counsels of God are securely hidden until they are disclosed by God Himself as here. Walvoord writes, “Further, the document is made impressive by seven seals, apparently fixed on the edges of the scroll in such a way that the seals must be successively broken if the scroll is to be unrolled and read.”¹

But there is another reason for the seven seals which is suggested by a knowledge of the two cultural and historical practices of John’s day.

The Roman Custom: The Roman custom of making a will included a ceremony involving a testator and seven witnesses. For each of the seven witnesses there was a seal. In addition, a very reliable friend was selected who would, for a coin, purchase the property for the family. In this way the property would become the property of the reliable friend, however, upon the death of the testator, the very reliable friend would return the property to the rightful heirs. For such a document, a long scroll of parchment was used. The writer of the document would begin writing and after a period, he would stop, roll up the parchment enough to cover his words, and then seal the scroll with wax. He would then resume writing, stop, seal another portion, and so on until the entire scroll was sealed with seven seals. In this way, the scroll would read a section at a time after each seal was broken.

In the analogy, the Lord Jesus is the reliable Friend who has purchased our redemption and is here seen opening the seals which provide us with our inheritance. In this case, He is reclaiming that which was lost by Adam. Further, this procedure was used to keep unauthorized persons from opening the seven-sealed scroll. Only a “worthy” person, the one with the right credentials, could open the seals, read the inheritance, and give it to the inheritors.

The Jewish Custom: Criswell points out that if a Jewish family were to lose its property or possessions by some kind of misfortune or distress, their property could not be permanently taken from them (the Old Testament law of jubilee and the kinsman redeemer protected them against this).² However, their losses were listed in a scroll and sealed seven times. Then the conditions necessary to purchase back the land and their possessions were written on the outside of the scroll. When a qualified redeemer could be found, who could meet the requirements of reclamation (a kinsman like Boaz as in the story of Ruth), the one who had taken the property was required to return it to the original owner.

¹ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1968, p. 113.

² W. A. Criswell, *Expository Sermons on the Revelation*.

The Principle and Application

(1) The earth and its dominion properly belonged to Adam and to his progeny or descendants (Gen. 1:26-30; Heb. 2:7-8)	In this we see the <i>Divine Purpose for Man De-creed</i> (Heb. 2:6-8a)
(2) The earth and the human race was not meant to be ruled by angels, i.e., by Satan and the fallen Angels under his control (Heb. 2:5, 8b, 14-15; Rev. 9:1-11; 12:1-10)	In this we see the <i>Divine Purpose Delayed</i> (Heb. 2:8b), “But now we do not see all things subjected to him.”
(3) Therefore, some one must be found within humanity, a kinsman redeemer, one who is qualified to reclaim the lost inheritance, someone who was true humanity, yet free to redeem; not a sinful man, nor an angel (Heb. 2:9, 14-17). Note the elements of worthiness and redemption in Rev. 5:9-10.	In this we see the <i>Divine Purpose for Man Accomplished</i> (paradise lost regained) (Heb. 2:9, 14, 17)

So, man is faced with the big question, “Who is able?”

The Problem of the Scroll

(5:2-3)

2 And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?” 3 And no one in heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book, or to look into it.

John sees a strong angel—an angelic messenger of God—one of the unfallen angels all of whom are personally interested in man’s redemption and in this book. We also see that he speaks with a loud voice, undoubtedly to emphasize the importance of this question and in order to penetrate all of the universe with the question posed, “Who is worthy to open the book and break its seals?”

The vision opens with three notes of emphasis: a strong angel—only twice more is reference made to a strong angel in the book, viz., 10:1 and 18:21 (Greek). The angel proclaims—not merely says. The word signifies to announce as a herald. *With a loud voice* denotes urgency and great concern. . . . Who is the strong angel making the challenge? The answer is, doubtless, Gabriel, the one who ordered the closing and sealing of the book to Daniel.³

This scene dramatically calls our attention to the problem. There was no one qualified in any place in the universe to open it, or even look into it.

“No one...was able.” “Able” is an imperfect tense of a continual problem. The Greek word here is *dunamai* which means the ability to do something whether by ability, strength or power, or by authority or permission. Search was made in every conceivable place in the universe, but there was no one qualified and capable.

The Sobber

(5:4)

4 I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside (NIV).

John’s weeping stresses the effect on John, a godly man longing for the righteousness of God to be manifest in the world to rid the world of its ungodliness and the product of that—man’s stubborn rebellion and the evil, tyranny, and injustices throughout the world. John’s sobbing also demonstrates the inability of anyone else in the universe to

³ J. B. Smith, *A Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 112, quoted by Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. 113-114.

solve man’s dilemma. When the dominion was lost, man began to experience tears, pain and sorrow because of his condition in sin and the onslaught of Satan’s murderous ways and dominion.

Mankind has sought answers to its problems by searching in all the wrong places. By-in-large, man has put his trust in mankind, in human governments, in wealth, in pleasure, in human philosophies, but the tears of man’s sorrow still continue to flow like a river the world over. The daily headlines and the news on TV are a constant reminder of this. The world, from the very early history of mankind as seen in the tower of Babel, has searched among the systems of the world and looked to the wisdom of man for its solutions instead of to the Lamb who is also the Lion, the Sovereign Savior. None of man’s solutions can even begin to provide for the enormous problems facing us.

**The Solution: The Sovereign Savior
(5:5-7)**

5 and one of the elders said to me, “Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.” 6 And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth. 7 And He came, and He took it out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.

John is commanded to stop his weeping because his eyes (and ours) are turned to that One who turns tears of sorrow into tears of joy, and weeping into laughter. Note the following chart which contrasts the two pictures here given of Christ.⁴

Jesus as the Lion	Jesus as the Lamb
the lion character refers to His second coming	the lamb character refers to His first coming
the lion speaks of His majesty	the lamb speaks of His meekness
as lion He is sovereign	as lamb He is Savior
as lion He is Judge	as lamb He is judged
the lion speaks of the government of God	the lamb speaks of the grace of God

As to His Person

(1) He is “The Lion of the tribe of Judah.” The lion is the king of beasts, and Judah is the royal tribe. Here we have an allusion to Genesis 49:9-10 where it is predicted that the future Ruler of Israel and of the earth would come out of the tribe of Judah, the royal tribe. This is, of course, a reference to the Lord Jesus who was of the line of David, a legal descendent by adoption through Joseph (Matt. 1), but also a physical descendent of David through Mary (Luke 3:23f).

(2) He is “the Root of David.” This is a reference to Isaiah 11:1 where it is prophesied that from Jesse, David’s father, the future Ruler of the earth, the Messiah, would rise up like a shoot or stem from the root of a cut down tree. The Davidic line would be cut down so that no man would sit on the throne of David (cf. Jer. 22:24-30), but from David’s line or roots would come the Messiah, David’s own progeny.

As to His Work

(1) He “has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.” “Overcome” is the Greek verb *nikao*, which means “to win a victory, come off victorious, to conquer, be victorious over one’s enemies.” The tense is aorist. It is what grammarians call a culminative aorist which views an event or series of events from the standpoint of an ac-

⁴ J. Vernon McGee, *Reveling Through Revelation*, p. 47.

complished act. It is used of verbs which signify an effort, or process, and the aorist denotes the attainment of the effort as an accomplished fact.

The Lord Jesus faced many battles like that of His temptation, of His ministry, and of course of the cross. In all of these He came forth victorious. The aorist emphasizes the complete success of Christ's work in His ministry on earth, particularly the cross. This should remind us of His victorious shout just before He bowed His head and voluntarily died for the sin of the world. He cried out, "It is finished" (John 19:30).

"So as to open" is an aorist infinitive which points us to the intended results of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus in the plan of God. The results of Christ's redemptive victory is the capacity and authority to break the seals and to pour out the judgments.

"To open the book" refers to Christ's authority and right to reveal the prophecies of this book, first to John and then to the church.

"To open the seals" refers to His authority to break the seals and unleash their judgments here revealed when the time comes for the Tribulation.

Verse 6: So what else does John see?

(2) "A Lamb standing as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes..." Each part of this symbolism describes certain aspects of Christ's person and work.

"A Lamb." Since the one standing is "*the* Lamb of God," we might have expected to find the Greek article with the noun, but it is absent. Why? Because the absence of the article draws our attention to the quality or character of Christ as God's sacrificial Lamb. Further, the term used here is the Greek *arnion*. The regular word for lamb is *arnon*. *Arnion* is the diminutive form and means "little Lamb," but it came to be used as a term of endearment. The sacrificial lambs were not just lambs taken out of the flock, but those which had often been brought into the home, cared for and loved. It expresses God's love for His Son and what it cost Him to give Him for us.

The term lion is used of Christ only once in Revelation, though this is the book which reveals Christ's lion-like majestic authority and character. Yet the term "Lamb" (*arnion*) occurs in Revelation 28 times. The point is simply that His kingly crown, rule, and power lies in His Person and redemptive work as the Lamb of God who died in our place. The biggest battle was won on the cross. He could not take His place as Ruler until He had become the Kinsman Redeemer by the sacrifice of Himself as God's *arnion*. The figure of the Lamb perfectly expresses the submission and controlled gentleness (meekness) of Christ as silent before His shearers and as He was led to the cross to bear our sin. This is clearly a prominent emphasis in this chapter and declared to be one of the reasons for His worthiness to open the book and its seals (cf. 5:9-10).

"Looking as if it had been slain" (NIV), or "standing as if slain" (NASB), or better, *a lamb that appeared to have been slaughtered*.⁵

"Standing" is a perfect tense of the verb, *histē,mi*, "to stand." He had been slain, but now He is seen, not dead, but very much alive, indeed standing, firmly positioned, immovable and ready to judge. The perfect tense stresses this firm position.

"As if slain" or literally, "as slaughtered." This verb, *sphazo,,* means "to slay, slaughter" and was used especially of victims for sacrifice.⁶ The obvious reference is to the Lord Jesus as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Again the Greek text employs the perfect tense which stresses completed action with results going on in the present. The continuing results were not continued death, but the efficacious effects of Christ's substitutionary work for sin and His defeat of Satan's power (Col. 1:12-13; 2:14-15; Heb. 2:14). The position of standing points to Him as the resurrected and victorious Savior. The marks are nevertheless there, the marks of death on His resurrected body, undoubtedly everlasting symbols of His sacrifice for us (cf. John 20:24-29).

⁵ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, translated by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, University of Chicago Press: electronic version.

⁶ G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, T. & T. Clark: Edinburgh, 1937, p. 435.

“He had seven horns.” The horn is the symbol of power and of government, and seven (the number of perfection) shows us that Christ’s power and government are perfect. He will be victorious over all His enemies and rule in perfect righteousness and justice as prophesied in Isaiah 11.

“And seven eyes.” Eyes are symbolic of Christ’s omniscience, wisdom and insight. Again, seven emphasizes the totality and perfection of His knowledge and insight. In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3).

(3) “Which are the seven Spirits of God.” Though Christ Himself is omniscient, He also is the One who sends forth the Holy Spirit into the earth, who likewise knows all and sees all. None of His actions and decisions in His righteous judgments against the sin of mankind will be made on partial knowledge.

“And He came and He took it out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.” What a beautiful scene. The only one qualified is now seen moving to take the book out of the hand of the One on the throne. With the taking up of the scroll, action is now ready to begin. Once more we must notice what Christ is doing. He is not sitting in heaven at God’s right hand, making intercession. Instead, He moves forward to take the seven-sealed book containing the judgments of the Tribulation. This portrays His determination to establish the visible kingdom on earth when the time is right in the future. He is seen standing and walking between the throne and the 24 elders, the glorified, resurrected church there in heaven with Him. Walvoord writes:

In the act of receiving the book from God the Father, it is made evident that judgment and power over the earth are committed to Christ the Son of God. Daniel 7:13-14 is a parallel passage. There Daniel reveals the ultimate triumph of Christ when the kingdoms of the world are given to Christ. Daniel declares,

“I saw in the night visions, and, behold, *one* like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. 14 And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom *that* which shall not be destroyed.”

In that future day complete authority over the world will be realized by Christ, an authority which He will exercise both in the judgments which precede His second coming and in His reign for one thousand years which will follow His second advent.⁷

The Singers (5:8-10)

8 And when He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. 10 “And Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”

Now the solution to man’s dilemma has been found in the Lion who was also a Lamb. This recipient of the scroll is worshipped, first by the four living beings and then by the twenty-four elders (5:8-10). Following this, these two groups are joined by an innumerable host of angels, and finally by all creation in recognition of the worthiness of the Lamb and in praise of His accomplishments (5:11-14).

We must not pass on to this scene without understanding the nature or the reason for what is taking place here. Remember, this chapter is a prologue to the terrible events of the great Tribulation by which all the enemies of Christ and of God’s purposes for Him are defeated and made the footstool of His feet. It is then that Christ will begin to reign as the God-man, but also as the King of kings in fulfillment of all Old and New Testament expectations. But when do the events of this chapter occur? I believe they will occur sometime after the rapture, with the church in heaven, but just before Daniel’s Seventieth Week or the time of Jacob’s distress.

⁷ Walvoord, p. 116.

So let's review for a moment to get the perspective so that we can properly gain the impact of this scene.

(1) This section (chapters four and five) began with meta tauta, "after these things." They deal with events which must take place after these things, or after the church age (4:1).

(2) The elders who represent the church are seen in heaven, glorified, robed and crowned.

(3) Also around the throne in heaven is a sea of crystal portraying not only God's perfect holiness but the Old Testament laver which is now like crystal, and a symbol that there is no more need for daily cleansing of sin due to the finished work of Christ.

(4) There is also seen a new throne set in heaven, a throne of judgment for coming events rather than a throne of intercession. In this regard Christ is seen not sitting as our advocate and intercessor, but standing and moving to take the book or scroll full of judgments. The picture of Christ here with the titles given to Him (5:5) show that He has laid aside His role as intercessor and advocate for the church (who is now with Him in heaven) and is taking up a new work on behalf of Israel, to fulfill Israel's kingdom promises.

Let's also look back into some other New Testament verses to properly get the picture here.

(1) After Christ died on the cross for our sins and was raised from the dead, He was taken into heaven where He sat down at God's right hand as our advocate and intercessor (Heb. 1:3; Rom. 8:34).

(2) Here Christ was to sit and serve as our intercessor until it was time for what we can call "operation footstool," the time when Christ will move to defeat all His enemies and have all things brought into subjection to Him (Heb. 1:13; 10:12-14).

(3) Because of His humble submission to the Father's plan to become man and die on the cross for man's sin (i.e., His humiliation), God has highly exalted Him above all, giving Him a Name above all names with the purpose that all creation would one day worship at His feet and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God (Phil. 2:9-11).

(4) Now, we do not see all things subjected to Him. Instead, Satan, the usurper, is still walking about, the nations are still in an uproar (Ps. 2), and Israel is still in unbelief as a nation (cf. Rom. 11). We now see Christ in His humiliation, made lower than the angels as true humanity, suffering and dying for man's sin on the cross, and then ascended and seated as our intercessor (Heb. 2: 8, 9, 14, 17, 18). But this is all temporary, until his enemies are made his footstool (Heb. 10:13).

Now back to our scene in Revelation five. The church is no longer on earth. Christ's intercession and advocacy is no longer needed, so Christ is no longer seated on the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16). Instead He is seen standing and then moving to take the scroll full of Judgment. This is a clear sign that Christ, looking prophetically to the future, is about to proceed with His work as King and Judge; it is now time for "Operation Footstool."

Is there any wonder therefore that the Lamb is here so greatly revered for what He is about to do. Note that it is when the Lion/Lamb takes the scroll that the actions of worship immediately follow.

Their Actions of Worship (5:8a)

(1) "Fell down before the Lamb." In the previous chapter God is worshipped as the sovereign Creator, but here the center of heaven's worship is the Redeemer of mankind. The living beings and the elders fall down before the Lamb in profound prostration of worship and recognition of the Lamb's finished work of redemption and His worthiness to now accomplish what He is about to do.

(2) "And they sang" (5:9). Literally, the Greek text say, "and they sing a new song," present tense of the verb *ado*, which means "to sing" but in the NT it is used of praise to God. "Song" is *o*, *de*, and in the NT it is only used of a sacred song or a song of praise.⁸ The use of the present tense is interesting. When John wrote Revelation, he was recording what he had seen through the visions revealed to him. It is sometimes difficult to determine the reason for the use of a particular tense or the aspect (the portrayal of a tense as to progress, simple occurrence, completed action, etc.) of a tense in a given context, but this may be what is called an historic present, though this use is less pre-

⁸ Baur, Arndt, Gingrich, electronic Media.

valent in apocalyptic writing than in narrative literature. Most translations translate this as “they sang.” So why the present? John may have used the present simply because he wanted to show the scene as in progress, but more than likely, this is what grammarians call an historical present. Historical presents are often used to introduce, highlight, and bring to prominence the scene that follows, specifically, the song of praise extolling the worthiness of the Lamb to take and open the book.

Their Instruments of Worship (5:8b)

(1) Harps and golden bowls full of incense are instruments to aid in praise and worship of the Lamb. The indication is that they each not only had a harp, but played it as an expression of their adoration of the Lord.

(2) Since this scene is prophetic of the future, the “golden bowls full of incense which are the prayers of the saints” would certainly include the prayers of church age saints who will be in heaven with the elders who are seen around the throne.

But what does this teach us concerning prayer? (a) That the bowls are golden stresses the value of prayer to us and especially to God. (b) That the bowls are full would stress the extent and abundance of their prayer and worship. Our praise and worship will not be halfhearted or part time then, and it should not be now. The saints will be full of the prayer of praise.

(3) Incense was burned in the tabernacle and temple which gave off a pleasing odor and ascended upward to God. The incense portrayed the person and work of Jesus Christ who alone satisfies the character of God and is pleasing to Him. Biblical praying and praise to God through the Lord Jesus Christ fills the area with a sweet atmosphere and aroma which calls attention to God’s glory and to Christ’s person.

(4) But what do the prayers consist of? Lindsey says that the incense “represents the earnest prayers of believers of all past ages begging God to judge Satan and his followers and to liberate mankind and creation from its curse.”⁹ This would be in keeping with the example prayer Christ gave to the disciples, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10).

Another view is that this refers only to the prayers of those then in heaven who are occupied with Jesus Christ and are full of praise only. Barnhouse is probably right when he says,

... today, prayer consists of confession, intercession, and worship. When we confess we are occupied with our sins; when we intercede, we are occupied with human needs, ours and others’ but when we worship we are occupied with Him alone. The day will come when prayer will be emptied of its need of confession. There will be no more laver. Prayer will be emptied of its need for intercession. There will be nothing remaining but that which may be symbolized under the bowls of incense, and all our prayer shall be praise and worship.¹⁰

Their Song of Worship (5:9-10)

Again, we should note that the goal of the song is to acclaim the worthiness of the Lamb to unleash the judgments of the seals. This is a keynote of this chapter. Terrible judgments will follow as an expression of God’s holiness and justice against man’s sin and rebellion. But what about God’s love? This is declared in the accomplishments of the Lamb as the gift of God’s love (John 3:16). Further, the Son gave His life as God’s solution to sin. But a large portion of the world has rejected and turned away from God’s Son. In this section we have what is in part a theodicy, a vindication of God’s goodness and justice in the face of the existence of evil and the judgments that will follow.

There are five reasons given in this new song that declare the Lamb as worthy. They fall into three time slots, all being based on the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

(1) He “was slain” is an obvious reference to the cross and the substitutionary death of Christ for the sin of the world. This looks at the *past* historic event, the demonstration of God’s love for the world.

⁹ Hal Lindsey, *There’s a New World Coming*, Harvest House Publishers, p. 96

¹⁰ Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Revelation, An Expository Commentary*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1971, p. 109.

(2) The words, “and with your blood you purchased men for God,” point us to the efficacy of Christ’s death and describes both its *past* and *present*. Note that it is viewed as an accomplished fact. “Purchased” is the Greek, *agorazo*, and means “to purchase in the market place.” It is used of the redemptive work of Christ which sets us free from sin and death. But the tense, a consummative or effective aorist, points to our redemption as an accomplished fact. There is a present effect in that every time a person believes in Christ, His redemptive death becomes the means of the believer’s salvation.

(3) “You have made them to be a kingdom” points to a further *present* effect of the cross, the establishment of a kingdom. Whenever a person trusts in Christ, they are rescued from the kingdom of darkness and made a part of a whole new kingdom, a kingdom of light in accord with God’s will for man (Col. 1:13).

(4) “And priests to God” This stresses our *present* representative character. By Christ’s work we have access to God and can serve and represent Him to men here on earth during the church age.

(5) “And they will reign...” The Greek employs a *future* indicative of a promised future fact. Though God is always on throne, sitting in the heavens and in charge of all that goes on, the church is not ruling today. Though the church will rule with Christ in the future, it was never meant to rule in this present age (1 Cor. 6:2). Rather, the Lord’s promise was, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33, NIV).

The Sayings of Adoration and Exaltation

The seven-fold saying of the angels (5:12)

Here we are told that a host of innumerable angels surround the throne with the four living beings and the 24 elders, and that their voice is heard. Please note—as one voice. Voice is singular which emphasizes they are speaking in perfect unity, as one. An innumerable company of mighty beings speak in complete appreciation for the Lamb, for what He has done, and is now about to do. They speak in a loud (Greek *meegas*) i.e., a great voice. *Megas* speaks of both the intensity and degree.

The angels who were present at Satan’s revolt and again at the fall of man are overjoyed and excited at the prospects of these judgments, now that one with whom they have done battle over the centuries is about to be removed. Thus a seven-fold exaltation is said of Christ.

(1) He is “worthy to receive power.” Power (*dunamis*) is mentioned first perhaps because the immediate situation calls for the need of great power to accomplish His purposes in the earth. He alone, as the perfect God-man Savior is worthy of such power for He alone will and can use it with perfect justice and equity (Isa. 11).

(2) “And wealth” refers to the wealth of the universe. All this is His by creation and now by redemption and reclamation.

(3) “And wisdom” refers to the Lord’s omniscience and its wise use in carrying out the purposes of God in the world.

(4) “And strength” (*ischus*) refers to working might or power in action and stresses His omnipotence to carry out God’s will.

(5) “And honor” (time,,) refers to the esteem, the value and respect which is due to Christ because of Who He is and what He has and will accomplish to the glory of God and the benefit of the world.

(6) “And glory” (*doxa*) refers to the tribute and public display of adoration that should accrue to Christ and again, this stems from His person and work, both past, present, and future.

(7) “And praise.” Praise (“blessing” in the NASB) is the Greek word (*eulogia*) which means “fair or good speech.” It refers to the praise that should be given to the Lord because of His wonderful acts of redemption and reclamation.

The four-fold saying of all created beings (5:13)

The emphasis of verse 13 is that all creation will finally praise Jesus Christ and recognize His sovereign authority and right to rule as the God-man. In chapter four the praise was to the Father. Here it is to the Son and the Father, both are praised.

This is the prophesy and fulfillment of Philippians 2:10-11. This means, that even the devil and his demon hosts are brought to this place, in spite of themselves and their defiance of God and Christ's authority, and their unwillingness to praise Him. Here the angelic conflict will be resolved. Satan will be forced, after all these centuries of blasphemy, slander and accusations against God, to praise God and to admit God and His Son are worthy to be praised.

The four-fold blessing consists of "praise and honor and glory and power (the NASB has "dominion") for ever and ever." Praise and honor and glory are the same as above, only now a new note of praise is added—that of everlasting dominion. The Greek word here, *kratos*, is translated as "power" by the NIV, but that translation does not distinguish it enough from the other two words for power used in this chapter, *dunamis* and *ischus*. *Kratos* does mean "power, might, strength," but it is particularly used of ruling power or sovereignty or dominion. The verb form, *krateo*, means (a) "to be strong, mighty," hence "to rule, be master, prevail," and then (b) "to get possession of, obtain, take hold of."¹¹ The emphasis here is clearly that of the Lion-Lamb prevailing against the rebellion of man and Satan and visibly taking control of the reigns of government over the earth through the events that will follow in chapters 6-19.

The response by the living beings and 24 elders (5:14)

Here we have the proper response from the four living beings and the worship of the 24 elders, the effects of the above praise. The *amen* signifies "truly, truly." This is heaven's response—the response of the angelic hosts asserting the validity of the praise. The falling down of the elders in worship shows the church's response (through the representation of the twenty-four elders) to the sovereignty of God and the worthiness of the Lamb to now extend that sovereignty to earth and recover it for God and redeemed mankind.

Walvoord writes:

The scene of chapter 5 can be considered as prophetic of future events in which the church of Jesus Christ bearing witness in the world today will be in the presence of the Lord in heaven. Those who have received Jesus Christ as Saviour and who have entered into the blessings of His redemptive work will be numbered among the tens of thousands pictured in chapter 5 as giving their worship and praise to the Saviour. That which John contemplated in prophetic vision will be an actual part of the future experience of the saints of God as they wait with Christ for the consummating events of the age and the establishment of His kingdom.¹²

All is now ready for the events of chapters 6-19—the outpouring of God's divine wrath upon the earth and rebellious man.

The emphasis of these verses is clearly worship, recognizing the worthiness of the Lamb to take the book, open its seals, and pour out its judgments. But a further emphasis is the unified expression of worship. No one is preoccupied with themselves or with people. All attention is on the Lamb. No one is occupied with protecting their frail egos or vying for attention or worried about his position or praise, as we see in Luke 22 with the disciples. No one is seeking to promote their hidden agendas, for none now exist.

Obviously, God wants our worship just like this today. This passages serves as a beautiful example of what our worship and service for the Lord should always be like.

Romans 15:5-6 Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus; 6 that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Barnhouse wrote:

¹¹ G. Abbott-Smith, p. 256.

¹² Walvoord, p. 120.

Never will such music have been heard in the universe. Never will so many voices have intoned such mighty praise. The armies of armies come to the last note. The mightiest of God's creatures sound the amen. We gaze upon the scene with no voice for utterance and, prostrate, we worship the Lord Jesus Christ who now proceeds to the most awful scenes of judgment with actions that rooted in His cross.¹³

Application

As we so clearly see from this chapter, in heaven, all believers in their glorified state, without a sinful nature, will be occupied with giving praise and glory to God. But that's not something we should put off until heaven. May we now be living to the glory of God as those who love Him and are living in the moment-by-moment expectation of the Savior's coming.

Three men worked on a large building project. One was asked, "What are you doing?" "I'm mixing mortar," he said. The second man said, "I'm helping put up this great stone wall." When the third man was asked, he replied, "I'm building a cathedral to the glory of God."

Those three men could just as well have been working on a car, a truck, a house, a road, or any legitimate product or service a man or woman might provide. Most people work to earn a living, attain success, or amass wealth. Such reasons, however, must not be the Christian's primary motive for working. Like the third man in our story, we need to see that what gives work eternal value is not the product or service of our labor but the process of laboring itself—doing the job faithfully to the glory of the Lord.¹⁴

¹³ Barnhouse, p. 113.

¹⁴ *The Bible Illustrator*, Parson's Technology, electronic media.

Lesson 14: The Six Seals (6:1-17)

The Beginning of the Great Day of God's Wrath

Introduction

As discussed previously, the outline for this study of Revelation is based on Revelation 1:19, **the things past** (the salutation and the vision of Christ, chapter one), **the things present** (the letters to the churches, chapters 2-3), and **the things future** (chapters 4-22). The last and major portion of Revelation, begins with chapter 4:1, but as mentioned, chapters 4 and 5 provide us with a prologue to the events and pictures of chapters 6-19. They give us heaven's perspective of the judgments that will now be revealed. This is not without significance. Wilbur Smith writes:

A fundamental factor in this book, too often passed over by commentators, is of great help in understanding these chapters when it is recognized. That is, many scenes of this book are located in heaven, while the judgments themselves take place on this earth; and the scenes in heaven always precede the earthly events to which they are attached. Thus, the messages to the seven churches are preceded by a vision of the ascended Lord. The opening of the six seals in chapter 6 is preceded by a vision of the Lamb in heaven, worthy to open the book (chs. 4; 5). The judgments accompanying the blowing of the seven trumpets are preceded by a heavenly scene extending from 7:1 to 8:5. The dreadful events of chapters 11; 12; 13 are again preceded by a heavenly scene of instructions to John. The devastations accompanying the seven plagues (chs. 15; 16) are preceded by the announcements of the angels and the showing of "the temple...in heaven." And, after the final judgment of chapter 20, the book concludes with a picture of the heavenly home of the redeemed.

I have always felt that there are two great truths to be drawn from this phenomenon. First, what is about to take place on earth, though unknown to man and unexpected by him, is fully known to those in heaven—the ascended Lord, the angels, the twenty-four elders, the living creatures, and the others. Secondly, what is to take place on earth is under the complete control and direction of heaven, so that we may safely say, judging from this book, as well as from other prophetic books in the Scripture, that everything that takes place on this earth only fulfills the Word of God. This principle is remarkably set forth in the preliminary announcements concerning the kings of the earth going forth to make war with the Lamb. Though we read of the ten kings satanically inspired, having one mind and giving their power and authority unto the beast (17:12, 13), nevertheless, it is God who "did put in their hearts to do his mind, and to come to one mind, and to give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God should be accomplished" (17:17).¹

Chapters 6-19 concern the judgments and players of the events often referred to as the Tribulation, a period of time covering seven years. But as Ryrie points out:

There is no problem in outlining the events of these chapters; the difficulty comes in determining the sequential order of those events, particularly the relation of the three series of judgments to each other. Do the judgments of the seals (chap. 6), and of the trumpets (chaps. 8-9) and of the bowls (chap. 16) follow each other in succession, or do the trumpets and /or the bowls recapitulate the judgments of the seals with greater intensity? In other words, do the trumpet and bowl judgments follow the seals as different and distinct judgments or do they picture the same judgments? To this writer's understanding they all follow in chronological sequence and there is no recapitulation.²

¹ Everett F. Harrison, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, New Testament*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1962, Electronic Media.

² Charles Ryrie, *Revelation*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1968, p. 43.

I would agree and this study will be based on the view that the judgments follow in chronological sequence with the trumpets immediately proceeding after the seventh seal is broken (cf. 8:1-2). With the breaking of each of the first six seals some form of judgment follows, but not with the seventh. Instead, only silence, but the trumpets are immediately announced as though they constituted the content of the seventh seal.

A similar situation exists in connection with the seven trumpets. Following each of the first six trumpets, specific judgments follow, but not after the seventh angel sounds his trumpet. Instead, we are again given a glimpse of heaven’s response just as before (cf. 8:1 with 11:15-19). Chapters 12-14 form another interlude describing key players and making important announcements, but with chapter 15 the bowl judgments are anticipated and then described in chapter 16. The implication is that somehow the seventh trumpet prepares the way for the bowls that follow. In essence, then, the seven seals include the entire Tribulation period from its beginning to its conclusion since the trumpets and bowls ultimately come out of the seventh seal. See again the charts used in connection with the introduction to this study on Revelation. Walvoord states the same position. He writes:

The six seals seem to unfold successively in a chronological pattern. Out of the seventh seal will come another series of seven trumpets and out of the seventh trumpet will come another series of seven vials or bowls of the wrath of God. Different actors are prominent, namely, the Lamb opening the seal, the angels sounding the trumpets, and God Himself pouring out the vials. Actually, however, the seven seals comprehend the whole, as all the trumpets and all the vials are comprehended in the seventh seal. The seven-sealed book therefore is the comprehensive program of God culminating in the second coming of Christ.³

Note the following chart from the Expanded Edition of the <i>Ryrie Study Bible</i>:⁴ Judgments	
Judgment Series Identified	Judgment Series Interrelated
The Seven Seals (6:1-8:6)	1. Antichrist 2. War 3. Famine 4. Death 5. Martyrs’ prayers 6. Great earthquake
	7. Announcement of Trumpets
The Seven Trumpets (8:7-9:21)	1. A third of vegetation burned 2. A third of the sea judged 3. A third of fresh water judged 4. A third of the luminaries darkened 5. Increased demonic activity 6. A third of mankind killed
	7. Announcement of Bowls
The Seven Bowls (15:1-16:21)	1. Malignant sores 2. Sea turned to blood 3. Fresh waters to blood 4. Men scorched with fire 5. Darkness over the kingdom of the beast 6. Invasion from the east. 7. Greatest earthquake and widespread destruction

Discussing this same issue, Everett Harrison writes:

It has been claimed by some commentators that these three successive septenary series of three judgments are a recapitulation of the same events. That is, the trumpets review what the seals previously set forth, but with greater intensity; and the vials review the same events, characterizing them with even more severity. I have not been able to accept this view. For one reason, the sequence in each series is altogether different, and this alone, it seems, makes the concept of recapitulation impossible.⁵

Though this was discussed in the introduction to this study, let me summarize the make up of chapters 6-19. Chapters 6-19 cover the Tribulation events with chapters 6 (the seals), 8-9 (the trumpets), and 16 (the bowls) forming the chronological backbone and following one another sequentially. The others chapters give us important infor-

³ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1966, p. 124.

⁴ Charles C. Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible, Expanded Edition*, NASB, Moody Press: Chicago, 1995, p. 2024.

⁵ Harrison, Electronic Media.

mation about the key players in the drama of these end time events from the standpoint of heaven and earth. Ryrie has an excellent explanation of this.

The other chapters reveal vital information about the period but are not arranged in chronological order. They either cover the entire period, or spotlight an event within the period, or survey the first or last half of the period. The chapters in this section are arranged like a conversation on the telephone between two persons. They start telling the story in order (chap. 6) but soon there is an interruption to fill in some information (chap. 7). Then the order of events is resumed (chaps. 8-9), then some more fill-in (chaps. 10-15). There is a return to the progressive order of events (chap. 16) and finally more detail (chaps. 17-19). Sometimes the fill-in runs ahead of the story and at other times it backs up to add or emphasize pertinent information.⁶

(As a preparation for chapters 6-19, and for an overview of this future time often referred to as “the Tribulation,” see Appendix 5.)

The First Seal: The White Horse Rider, False Peace (6:1-2)

1 And I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, “Come.” 2 And I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him; and he went out conquering, and to conquer.

When the first seal is broken by the Lamb, one of the four living creatures in a voice of thunder tells John to “come” so that he might behold the vision of the breaking of the first seal

The “voice of thunder” is naturally symbolic of judgment as a coming storm. I was born and raised in Texas and spent many of my years of ministry there. It was not uncommon for us to have some pretty awesome thunder and lighting storms with heavy down pours of an inch or more within just a short period of time, but most of the time, we could hear the thunder long before the storm ever hit.

After the command to “come” John says, “I looked and behold.” This stresses the effect on John, He was startled and he exhorts us “to behold” what he saw so that we too may grasp its significance. What John saw was a white horse rider with a bow. A crown was given to the rider and he went forth conquering and to conquer. Each aspect of this is significant.

“White” is a symbol of peace and righteousness. For this reason some have tried to identify this rider as Christ, but “white” is the only similarity between this rider and the white horse rider of Chapter 19:11 which is clearly Christ.

Reasons this cannot be Christ

(1) This occurs too early in the Tribulation. At this time Christ is in heaven rewarding His bride while at the same time pouring out wrath from the throne mentioned in chapter 4:2. Christ’s coming on a white horse is at the end and is the culmination of the Tribulation. Also, note that Revelation 6:16 views the Lamb as still in heaven.

(2) Further support that the white horse rider is not Christ is the parallelism with the other three horses which are instruments of judgment. Each rider is an instrument of evil and judgment on the world. The Lamb is viewed as the One who opens the seals allowing the riders to go forth and would not be one of the riders.

(3) In Revelation 19 no more judgments follow. Christ’s own coming puts an end to the Tribulation judgments. Here, however, the judgments of the entire Tribulation have yet to unfold.

(4) The crown which this rider wears is the stephanos crown, a single crown and a victor’s crown, not the diadem crown of a sovereign. In chapter 19 the white horse rider wears many crowns, and they are the diadem crowns—the crowns of sovereignty.

⁶ Ryrie, *Revelation*, p. 44.

The Identity of the Rider

This rider is the Antichrist, the false Christ who comes as a peacemaker. Later he will show his true colors and will then be called the beast. This is undoubtedly the prince who is to come and who will make a peace treaty with Israel according to Daniel 9:26-27. This fits with the picture Paul gives us in 1 Thessalonians 5:3. The world will be trusting in the peace and safety brought about by the tactics of the white horse rider, but it will be oblivious this very peace has inaugurated the Day of the Lord which will quickly usher in destruction.

1 Thessalonians 5:2-3. for you know very well that the Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape (NIV).

(1) White is a symbol of peace and he comes as a peacemaker. According to Daniel 9:26-27, one of his first feats will be to find a solution to the Arab-Israeli dispute by a peace treaty with Israel. This evidently begins Daniel's 70th week, the unprecedented time of Jacob's distress (Jer. 30:7).

(2) His weapon is a bow, yet no arrows are mentioned. The bow is a symbol of distant victory and since no arrows are mentioned it seems to indicate that he gains his victory by bloodless tactics.

(3) That all this is true is indicated further by the fact that peace isn't taken from the earth until the second seal.

(4) He has a hidden agenda. His purpose is not world peace, but rather world domination. He goes out conquering and to conquer. He is the false Christ.

So, Revelation 6:2 says "he went out conquering and to conquer," but the picture given here of a bow (perhaps a symbol of distant victory), but with no arrows mentioned, suggests that he conquers by cold war tactics through a one world order mentality that has been growing for years and continues to do so. Today the world is ripe for the rise of such a man with his world government as an answer to international problems. Prominent world leaders and movements have posed the idea that what we need is a world order with a charismatic leader who can mold the world into harmony and peace. In his book, written in 1973, *The Day the Dollar Dies*, Willard Cantelon quotes a number of world leaders to this effect. He writes:

Harold Urey said, "The only escape from total destruction of civilization will be a world government." Robert J. Oppenheimer stated, "In the field of atomic energy, there must be set up a world power." Arthur Compton added his word, "World government has become inevitable." Dr. Ralph Barton Perry of Harvard said, "One world government is in the making. Whether we like it or not, we are moving toward a one-world government." Professor Hocking wrote, "Therefore the alternative is that we vest all political power in one agency and resign that power ourselves."⁷

James Warburg says, "We are living in a perilous period of transition from the era of the fully sovereign nation-state to the era of world government."⁸ In *Between Two Ages*, Zbigniew Brezinski, former assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, openly advocates a one world government as a necessity. And this is not even the tip of the iceberg. Such thinking is all part of a deluding influence that will continue to grow as a product of the blindness and rebellion of man against God, being blinded by his own natural blindness and by the deceptions of Satan, and even by God's own sovereign judgment (cf. Eph. 2:1-3; 4:16-17; 2 Cor. 4:4; 2 Tim. 2:26). Undoubtedly, this kind of thinking among world leaders will pave the way for the white horse rider who comes proclaiming peace, but it is really the system of the beast in disguise and a precursor to the horrible world conditions that will follow. In 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12, the apostle Paul warns:

8 And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; 9 that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, 10 and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. 11 And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, 12 in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.

⁷ Willard Cantelon, *The Day the Dollar Dies*, 1973.

⁸ James P. Warburg, *The West In Crisis*, Doubleday, 1959, p. 30.

This passage pertains to the end times, but the same thing is happening today, though in a lesser degree. Concerning this, Ryrie writes:

The deluding influence comes from God; it is both a punishment and a moral result of their rejection of the truth (vv. 10, 12). These verses reflect the OT concept that God is sovereign even in the activities of the powers of evil (cf. Ex. 4:21; Josh. 11:20; 1 Kings 22:19-23; 1 Chron. 21:1; cf. 2 Sam. 24:1). The result will be that men will believe what is false, as Satan works through Anti-christ.⁹

Ironically, a large part of the world has greater access to the Bible and its revelation of the good news of the Lord Jesus than at any other time in history through the many translations of Scripture, through books, tapes, videos, radio, the internet, etc. In its moment of greatest need, however, the world will turn to a man who goes forth with a plan for peace just as our Lord Himself stated in John 5 when He was on earth.

43 I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another shall come in his own name, you will receive him. 44 How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another, and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God? 45 Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. 46 For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me. 47 But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?

The Second Seal: The Red Horse Rider, War (6:3-4)

3 And when He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come." 4 And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that *men* should slay one another; and a great sword was given to him.

The various colors of the horsemen surely represent in symbolical language the nature of the human agencies employed in the execution of these judgments (cf. "the red dragon," 12:3; and the "scarlet beast," 17:3). It is important to keep in mind, however, that the hand moving these instruments is the Lamb who, as sovereign Lord, opens the seven seals. Each seal is begun by the words "and He (the Lamb) broke..." Note also the words, "and to him was granted..."

Some commentators see the word "come" (Greek *erchou*) in each of the seals as referring to John, while others think the verb is addressed to the four horsemen. If it refers to the horsemen, the heavenly agents of God's throne are successively calling these human instruments to move in their divinely appointed role. It emphasizes that they cannot move until God allows, even though they operate by their own volition and evil purposes (cf. Isa. 10:5-11). As such, the command "come" could be translated "go forth" (a present imperative of *erchomai*).

Others take this to be an admonition to Christ in the sense of Revelation 22:17 and 20 where the same word *erchou* is used. Interpreters of Revelation seem widely split between these views, but the most probable view is the first or second view. If the preponderance of manuscript evidence had the addition "see" as "come and see" then there would be no question, it would refer to John.

It seems best, however, to take this as a command to the four horsemen to go forth to accomplish their purpose. Reasons: (1) With the fifth and sixth seal, when human agencies astride the horses are no longer used, there is no command to come or go, yet John is still seeing the vision of the six seals. (2) In Revelation 4:1, when John is called up, the aorist tense is used, but here the instantaneous present "come" or "go forth" is used which would be more in line with a command to the four horsemen. This strongly stresses God's sovereignty and is comforting to the human heart.

While the white horse was symbolic of a victorious conqueror and one who primarily gained his supremacy by cold war and bloodless peace maneuvers, red is a clear symbol of bloodshed or warfare and the rest of the verse clearly shows this to be the case (Rev. 12:3; Isa. 63:2f).

⁹ *Ryrie Study Bible, Expanded Edition*, p. 1913.

As with the white horse rider, so this rider is unnamed. Some see this as Russia because Russia is known as the Red menace and their army as the Red army. Certainly Russia, if she is the king of the North as depicted in Ezekiel 38 and 39, could fit strongly in the promotion of war and the removal of peace in the Tribulation period. Russia and her allies could easily help to promote the escalation of cold war to actual warfare, but the primary emphasis is on the fact that prior to and during the Tribulation, there will be constant tension among nations and the ambitions of men who will be clamoring for power and control. This will come to its climax just prior to the return of Christ. Walvoord understands Matthew 24:4-8 to apply to conditions characteristic of this age rather than the Tribulation.¹⁰ Walvoord writes:

Though “wars and rumours of wars” (Matt. 24:6) are characteristic of the age, it is evident that warfare occupies a large place in the consummation of the age with a resultant great loss of life. There apparently is a series of wars, the greatest of which is under way at the time of the second coming. The hope of permanent peace by means of the United Nations and other human efforts is doomed to failure.¹¹

However, concerning the fact the seals closely parallel the events or signs of the end times spoken of by the Lord in His Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:1-15), Barnhouse writes:

The order of events follows closely that which was announced by our Lord in answer to the disciples’ questions on the Mount of Olives, “For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many” (Matt. 24:5). This is the white horse. “And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars...for nation shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom...” (24:6,7). This is the red horse of war. There are some who apply this passage to our day, thinking that the wars which trouble this age are those spoken of in prophecy. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The wars of our day are but rehearsals, but the wars which Christ prophesied take place after the believers are removed from the earth, after the man of sin has been revealed (II Thess. 2:3). These campaigns are described in the book of Daniel.¹²

The short-lived peace which the world will have known in those early days of the Tribulation (during part of the first half) will be broken by the red horse rider. International conflicts will begin to erupt all over the earth. We are not told here in Revelation 6 just what exactly causes this, i.e., the kind of political or military move, but men everywhere begin to slay one another. Until this point there would undoubtedly be “rumors of wars” (Matt. 24:6), but then nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom (Matt. 24:7). These parallels between the seals and Matthew 24 are too striking to be ignored.

The Parallels Between Matthew 24:1-14 and Revelation 6		
Conditions	Matthew	Revelation 6
False Christs	24:4-5	6:1-2
Warfare	24:6-8	6:3-4
Famine	24:7	6:5-6
Death	24:7-10	6:7-8
Witnessing	24:14	6:9-11
Cosmic changes	24:29	6:12-23

¹⁰ John F. Walvoord, *Matthew, Thy Kingdom Come*, Moody Press: Chicago, p. 183.

¹¹ Walvoord, *The Revelation*, p. 129.

¹² Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Revelation, An Expository Commentary*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1971, p. 124. (Barnhouse had in mind Daniel 11:40-45.)

**Third Seal:
The Black Horse Rider, Famine
(6:5-6)**

5 And when He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, “Come.” And I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. 6 And I heard as it were a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine.”

The third judgment, and an aftermath of war brings famine to the world. The “black horse” speaks of suffering and death and the “balances” of the careful rationing of food because of its scarcity.

The denarius, as a Roman coin, in ancient times was a normal day’s wage. In New Testament times this coin would purchase eight quarts of wheat, or eight measures (one measure equals about one quart) or 24 quarts of barley. Wheat was the better grain and barley was normally used only for livestock except in times of scarcity. During the Tribulation, however, one denarius (a full day’s wage) will buy only one measure (about one meal) of wheat, or three meals of barley with nothing left. Of course, the larger the family, the worse it will be. But note the words, “do not harm the oil and the wine.” These were luxury items which will apparently be unharmed at this point. There will be plenty of luxury items but only the super rich will have them. The average man will spend all he has on the bare essentials. Barnhouse has an interesting comment from his own experience on this.

Just after World War I, I spent a few days in Vienna at the time when misery was very great... There was a shortage of coal and the police had ordered everyone off the streets by nine o’clock. The city was filled with wealthy refugees from Russia and other countries. Walking along the boulevard one afternoon as the crowds were coming out of the opera which began early to conform with the curfew regulations, I saw men with bare feet in the snow, their skeletons covered with rags, their ribs seen through the holes in the cloths with which they attempted to cover their bodies. From time to time there was blood on the snow from their feet. Out of the opera came men escorting women with fortunes in jewels upon them. Never have I seen more wonderful displays in any of the capitals of the earth. The beggars blocked the way to the fine limousines that came for the rich. I saw the men striking the beggars with their canes to clear the way for the women. Poor girls not clad in the gaudy finery of prostitutes, but with poor clothing and in wooden shoes, clattered about clutching at the passerby and offering to sell themselves for a coin which at that moment could be purchased for one five hundredth part of a dollar. Mark well, there was no famine in Vienna. There was scarcity in the midst of plenty, but there was no hurt to the luxuries.¹³

The picture here is scarcity in the midst of plenty. This will be accentuated in the times of the Antichrist, especially in the last half of the Tribulation via his buying and selling policies.

**The Fourth Seal:
The Pale Horse Rider, Mass Death
(6:7-8)**

7 And when He broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, “Come.” 8 And I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. And authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.

The color of this horse is ashen, a pale or yellowish green. The same Greek word is used in Revelation 9:4 of green vegetation. It is the Greek word *chlo,ros* which denotes a yellowish green, the light green of a plant, or the paleness of a person who is critically ill. Our word chlorophyll or chlorine comes from this word.

We are told the name of this horse is death and that Hades follows. “Death” refers to physical death, not annihilation—only the physical body is claimed. “Hades” refers to the underworld, the prison and temporary quarters of

¹³ Barnhouse, pp. 127-128.

the souls of unbelievers between their death and the time of the Great White Throne Judgment. This is the compartment called torments in Luke 16:23.

“Authority was given him over one fourth...” According to present figures and estimations this is about 800,000,000, a staggering figure. The emphasis of this judgment is death on a massive scale. Four powers of death are mentioned: (a) The sword refers to death by war and perhaps by the cruelty of the beast and his godless system under the domination of the Red Dragon, Satan. (b) Famine, of course, anticipates death on an even greater scale by starvation. (c) Pestilence speaks of death by disease and plagues. (d) Wild beasts, perhaps, as an aftermath of the above, anticipates the fact that people will be weak, unprotected and easy prey for wild animals.

The unprecedented character of the Tribulation is now beginning to show itself, and some believe this is still in just the first half of the Tribulation. However, others see the unprecedented nature of this fourth seal as an indication the second half of the Tribulation has begun.

Having quoted several Old Testament passages that point to the unparalleled nature of this future time of trouble (Dan. 12:1; Joel 2:1-3), Walvoord writes:

Inasmuch as the judgment described in the fourth seal is unparalleled, it seems to correspond with greater accuracy to the latter half of Daniel’s seventieth week than to the earlier half and for that reason must be the time of great Tribulation which Christ declared would exceed by far anything the world had previously known.

So great will be the trial of that period that Christ exhorted those living in Palestine at that time to flee to the mountains to escape their persecutors:

“21 For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. 22 And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened” (Matthew 24:21-22).

If the supreme mark of this great tribulation is unprecedented trouble, the fourth seal certainly qualifies as describing this period. Though some expositors believe the great tribulation does not begin until chapter 11, on the basis of this evidence, some have come to the conclusion that the great tribulation must begin much earlier, possibly as early as the first seal of Revelation 6. Though the book of Revelation itself does not state specifically what event begins the great tribulation, the characteristics unfolded in the fourth seal would indicate the great tribulation is underway at the time.

... The fifth and sixth seals advance the narrative and describe the period specifically as “the great day of his wrath” (6:17), which almost certainly is a reference to the great tribulation.¹⁴

Obviously, regardless of when the last half of the Tribulation begins in the design of Revelation, the dreams of the world for a great society where the world will get better and better in all spheres of life, scientifically, intellectually, morally, socially, and spiritually, are very contrary to the picture we see in the Word of God. “Suddenly all of man’s programs for bringing in peace, plenty and longevity through medicine will be overturned in the short time that it will take to accomplish this judgment (Matt. 24:4-7).¹⁵ This should certainly warn all believers to never fall for any world leader or any form of world government program, for, as with the tower of Babel, they stand condemned by God’s Word as an attempt at world peace apart from God. They cannot accomplish what they promise and will be the product of a demonic system. Not until the return of Christ will we have a one world government characterized by righteousness and justice for only then will we have a ruler capable of establishing and maintaining such a rule, the Lord Jesus Christ.

¹⁴ Walvoord, p. 129.

¹⁵ Ryrie, *Revelation*, p. 46.

The Fifth Seal: Martyrdom of Believers (6:9-11)

9 And when He broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; 10 and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” 11 And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until *the number of* their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, should be completed also.

That these martyrs are introduced at this point strongly suggests that they come out the Tribulation. They are Tribulation martyrs. The fifth seal, then, parallels Matthew 24:9-14 and undoubtedly occurs during the last half of the Tribulation. My understanding of the chronology of Matthew 24 is that verses 4-8 refer to the first half of the Tribulation, the beginning of birth pangs, and verses 9-28 refer to the last half. Some see the last half beginning with verse 15 and the mention of the Abomination of Desolation, but the “therefore” that introduces verse 15 links this event very closely to the preceding events marked especially by the persecution mentioned in verse 9. It is this blasphemous event in the temple that shows the persecution will begin and that signals the need to flee.

The persecution of Matthew 24:9 is not just of the Jews, but is a persecution against any believer in Jesus Christ, Jew or Gentle. Note “you will be hated...on account of my Name.” These will accept Christ because of the preaching mentioned in Matthew 24:14, and this is undoubtedly carried out in part by the 144,000 mentioned in Revelation 7. The period called, “the beginning of sorrows,” the first half of the Tribulation, is now over. The Prince of Daniel 9:26-27 breaks his covenant with Israel, manifests his true beastly character, and begins to persecute Israel along with all believers in Christ. This will coincide with the events of Revelation 12:7-17.

Verse 9b, They are martyred “because of the Word of God.” This will be a day of absolute, unleashed, autonomous and idolatrous humanism with man worshipping his own reason and rejecting any idea of revelation from God. So anyone who believes the Bible and proclaims its message will be persecuted. But God has always preserved His Word and there has always been a remnant—those within mankind who have turned to God’s revelation for light and direction. This immediately and always creates opposition. The Word exposes and judges man’s deeds, and so, in haughty independence and defiance, the world persecutes those who stand for the Bible. This has always been true as history shows, but in the Tribulation it will become unprecedented.

“And because of the testimony which they maintained...” or we could translate, “on account of the witness which they continually had.” The Greek text uses the imperfect tense of the repeated and continuous witness these saints maintained under the various persecutions that eventually led to their death. Of course, this is all future since this is a prophetic scene of the persecutions of believers in the time of the Tribulation that John is privileged to see.

“Testimony” is the Greek word *marturia* from *martureo*, which means “to bear witness, be a witness, give testimony.” *Martureo*, comes from *martus* meaning “a witness.” But *martus* is also translated “*martyr*” because it is used of those who have witnessed for Christ by their death. These believers will witness for Christ by their life as they hold fast to the Word of God in the midst of a degenerate world, but they will also witness for Christ by their death. Matthew 24:14 refers in part to their labors in addition to the labors of the 144,000 of chapter 7.

Verse 9a, “Underneath the altar the souls...slain.” “Souls” is the plural of the Greek *psuche*, which may mean “the souls,” referring to the immaterial part of man. But *psuche*, is often used in the sense of “the lives” or “persons.” John sees these martyrs very much alive. Men may destroy our bodies, but they cannot kill the soul or the person who indwells the body, the house for the person. At death, the soul or the person goes to be with the Lord (Phil. 1:21-22; 2 Cor. 5:6-8). The body “sleeps” but the soul or the person is conscious, awake.

“Slain” is the Greek *sphrazo*,. This was a sacrificial term used for the slaughtering of the animals for sacrifice. The emphasis seems to be on the fact they were not just killed, but slaughtered.

“The altar” maybe the altar of incense or the altar of sacrifice. The use of the verb *sphrazo*, suggest the altar of sacrifice which stood in the court of the tabernacle just inside the entrance. It was the means of access into the taber-

naacle complex. It stood for Christ, our Sacrifice and Access into God's presence. But remember, the earthly tabernacle and its ritual was all patterned after the heavenly sanctuary (Isa. 6:1f; Heb. 8:1, 2, 5; 9:1, 11-12).

Some think that because these martyrs are seen "under the altar" the altar must be the altar of incense, otherwise they would have been seen on the altar. But there could be a good reason for this portrait. If this is the altar of sacrifice, it is significant that they are seen under it, not on it. The sacrificial animals were placed on the altar, killed there, their blood spilled and the animal burned to consume the sacrifice. But these sacrificial animals anticipated God's Lamb, the Lord Jesus. Only Christ, the true Lamb of God, our Passover, is qualified to be placed on the altar to die for our sins and give access into God's presence. These, however, are under it, under the blood or under the substitutionary death of Christ, and thereby saved and in heaven by the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The point is, as believers in Christ, they too share in the world's hatred of Christ, and as living sacrifices for Christ they are slain, as martyrs and witnesses for the Lord (Rom. 12:1). Undoubtedly, by their death and the way they die others will come to know Christ.

For another perspective on this scene, Alan Johnson writes:

Depending on which altar is meant, one of two different ideas is connoted. In 8:3, 5 and 9:13 the altar is the golden altar of incense that stood in the tabernacle either in or before the Most Holy Place (Exod. 30:1ff.; Heb 9:4). Likewise, the other references in Revelation to "altar" also can be understood as referring to this altar of incense (11:1; 14:18; 16:7). In accord with this sense, the prayers of the saints would be for God's vindication of the martyrs of Christ (cf. Luke 18:7-8).¹⁶

Verse 10. "Cried out" is the Greek *krazo*, and means "to shriek, scream." This word and the words "with a loud voice" lay stress on the earnestness of their cry and concern. These saints are in heaven, with no sinful natures and in God's blessed presence. But they are seen crying out for justice. This is not a cry for revenge, but for God's justice and righteousness to prevail on earth against the sin and the atrocities of man in rebellion to God. As in the disciples' prayer, "Your kingdom come," they are praying for the second advent which ushers in God's righteous and just reign on earth.

"How long" asks the question, "When, Sovereign Lord, are you going to act in history?" They expect this because of their knowledge of God evidenced by the way they address the Lord. "O Lord" is the Greek *ho despotes*, or "the Despot." They clearly recognized the Lord as the Sovereign One in control of all the affairs of the earth and the universe. "Holy" is *hagios* which means, "set apart." It is used of God's perfect holiness or His absolute just and righteous character, as one totally set apart from sin. It is the expectation, much as with the prophet in Habakkuk 1:13, anticipating God's holy justice to be poured out against an evil and rebellious world. "True" is *alēthinos*. It means "true in the sense of the ideal, genuine, real." It stresses God's veracity but also the fact He is the true and genuine Ruler of the world as opposed to the usurper, Satan.

"Will you refrain from judging." "Judging" is *krino*, and means "to pronounce judgment" or "to act in judgment, carry out a sentence." "Avenging" is *ekdikoo*, and means "to avenge, exact a penalty from, carry out justice against wrong doing." These saints are acting on the truth of Romans 12:19, "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord."

Note that the justice of God is directed toward "those who dwell on the earth." The Greek uses a present adjectival participle which characterizes these as *the earth-dwellers*, those who have no interest in God, or in spiritual or heavenly things. As mentioned in connection with 3:10, in Revelation it is practically a technical term for unbelievers who live in rebellion against God.

Verse 11. The martyrs are each given a "white robe" to symbolize their fully redeemed state and the gift of righteousness by Jesus Christ. Since Tribulation saints along with all OT saints are not resurrected until after the Tribulation described by Daniel as "a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time" (cf. Dan. 12:1-2 with Rev. 20:4), some have suggested that these martyrs are given temporary heavenly bodies. The robes spoken of here and portrayed to John in this vision, however, may simply be the symbol of the fact they are clothed in the righteousness of God as believers in Christ.

¹⁶ Alan Johnson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12, Frank E. Gaebelein, General Editor, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1981, p. 475.

Further, they are told they “should rest for a little while longer.” “Rest” is *anapauo*,, “to give intermission from labor, give rest, refresh,” and in the middle voice as here, “to take one’s rest, enjoy rest.”¹⁷ This is a compound verb and is somewhat stronger than simply *pauo*,,. In the middle voice it means “to take rest, enjoy a rest.”¹⁸ Based on the facts their labors and trials are over, that God is all wise and on the throne, and they are now in the presence and protection of the Lord, they are told, “you yourself, enjoy your rest, leave it in God’s hands, for soon justice will be done.”

“A little while longer” refers to the short remaining time of the Tribulation, less than three and a half years, if these events occur in the last half of the Tribulation.

“Until the number of their fellow servants...were to be killed...should be completed.” Until the end of the Tribulation believers will suffer persecution and death on behalf of Christ as a proof of their love of Christ, the reality of God, and as a testimony to the world that God is worthy of the creature’s worship and obedience.

“Completed” is the verb *pleroo*,, which means “to fill, or fulfill, or complete, bring to fruition.” This stresses the divine providence and purpose of God in the deaths of the martyrs. They are not without God’s knowledge or without God’s control or concern. The exact numbers are known to God and allowed by Him according to His own eternal purpose. For “precious” in the sight of the Lord is the death of His godly ones” (Psalm 116:15).

The Sixth Seal: Physical Disturbances (6:12-17)

12 And I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth *made* of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; 13 and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. 14 And the sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. 15 And the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; 16 and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; 17 for the great day of their wrath has come; and who is able to stand?”

The nature of this scene which John beholds is awesome. It is awesome in its effects upon the universe as judgment, and in its effects upon mankind. Here is a turning point in history, a momentous event unlike any man has ever seen. It disturbs the normal order of the universe which man has taken for granted almost from the beginning of time. As we shall see, John calls this “a great shaking.”

The previous five seal judgments were largely brought about by the activities of man. But such is not the case here. Because of this, some have taken the position that it is only with the sixth seal that we have the wrath of God. Until this point it is merely the wrath of man. Because of this, they have also taken the position that the church will go into the Tribulation and will not be raptured until about midway through the last half of the Tribulation, just before this time of God’s wrath. They believe the church has been promised deliverance from God’s wrath, but since the first three quarters of the Tribulation is not God’s wrath, but man’s, the church will not be raptured until just prior to the sixth seal which alone constitutes the wrath of God (1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9).

But this is untenable for we have seen from chapters 4-5 that all the seals constitute an outpouring of God’s wrath and are unleashed by the Lord Himself. Further, they are all seen as the means or instruments by which He establishes His rule on earth. Finally, just because the first five seals employ human agents, that does not mean this is not part of the outpouring of God’s wrath. The other seals are intermediate instruments of God to execute His judgments of wrath. The only difference in the sixth seal and the first five is the degree and magnitude of His wrath. A

¹⁷ G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, T. & T. Clark: Edinburgh, 1937, p. 32.

¹⁸ Some believe NT Greek has pretty much abandoned the rules of classical Greek, and, therefore, the middle voice has very little significance, if any, in the NT. For arguments against this see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1996, pp. 420f.

good passage to illustrate this fact is Isaiah 10:5-12. Note that in this passage, Assyria is called “the rod of My anger and the staff in whose hands is My indignation” (vs. 5). Assyria was a human agent commissioned by God (vs. 6) to execute His wrath or judgment against Israel for her rebellion. The fact God used a human agency does not remove the fact this was God’s wrath in action.

So the sixth seal is the direct intervention of the Creator upsetting the normal order of His creation. The nature and effect of this judgment is such that it causes all of mankind from kings to slaves to recognize that God the Creator is acting in human history in divine wrath. If the six things that occur here were set off or caused by something which man does, like an atomic explosion, then it could be attributed to man’s foolishness causing universal ecological destruction. It should further be noticed that the magnitude of this is far above what even atomic fission could accomplish. This is an act, a direct intervention of God in history. The passage stresses that men see it as the direct hand and action of God.

When the sixth seal occurs God shakes the universe like a rag doll and all the world will know without a doubt not only that there is a God, but that He is acting catastrophically in divine wrath against man’s rebellion. It is interesting to note that this judgment affects the creation, that which from the beginning of time has spoken of God, an evidence of His being and of His nature, an evidence of His divine essence, but also an evidence that modern man has rejected and attributed to evolution (Rom. 1:19-22).

“And there was a great earthquake” (vs. 12a). Literally the Greek says “and a shaking, a great one came to be.” The Greek word here is *seismos* from *seio*, which means “to shake, agitate, cause to quake.” Our word seismology comes from this Greek word. “Great” is *meegas* and means “large, great.” It is used of (a) an extension in space in all directions, as to length, numbers, or size, and (b) figuratively of measure, intensity, quantity, of natural phenomenon (strong, severe, intense), and of rank or importance. This will be the most severe, intense, shaking which the world or universe has ever known—one reaching out in all directions so that the whole universe is shaken like a rag doll. This is not just a great earthquake, but a shaking of the universe, in which even the powers (stars) of the heavens will be shaken (Luke 21:26; Matt. 24:29). This shaking affects sun, moon, stars, atmosphere, and earth, bringing about a tremendous quake all over the earth. The devastation of this is beyond our imagination, though many scientists today are actually trying to evaluate by scientific data how much devastation would occur if a meteor of various sizes were to hit the earth. Some actually think such is inevitable and that if large enough, it will destroy the earth.

“And the sun became black as sackcloth” (vs. 12b). The sun is the most conspicuous of the heavenly bodies and the most important to earth because of its warmth and light. Note its use in Scripture:

- (1) To mark the time of day (Mark 1:32; Luke 4:40).
- (2) Ecclesiastes speaks of “things under the sun” or life in the real world.
- (3) It shows God’s order, permanence, consistency, grace, and faithfulness (Matt. 5:45; Ps. 19:1, 4-6); righteousness, beauty and light (Mal. 4:2; Matt. 13:43).
- (4) It shows direction, i.e., east and west (Rev. 7:2; 16:12).
- (5) Primarily, it rules the day and separates the light from darkness or night (Gen. 1:14, 16).
- (6) In addition, it is for signs and for seasons; an indicator of seasons, and days, and years (Gen. 1:14).

Very important to the sun’s function is the sign aspect. The word sign brings to mind some spectacular display in the sun or moon, something foreign to normal experience. As God designed the sun and moon to be sources of light in the sky to give light and direction to men on earth, so God’s special acts with the sun and moon are designed to illuminate God to man and His actions in history (Joel 2: 10, 31; Matt. 25:24; Acts 2:19-20; Isa. 13:9-10; Ezek. 32:7; and our passage Rev. 6:12).

All of these passages relate to the Lord’s return. These signs herald the return of Christ and His judgment—the direct intervention of God’s wrath in human history.

“Became black as sackcloth” is literally “as sackcloth of hair.” This was a very rough cloth made of the hair of a black goat and worn in times of mourning and despair. The blackening or darkening of the sun as a sign, speaks of God’s judgment and the withdrawal of His longsuffering. It shows this will truly be a time of great despair for man.

What causes this darkening? We are not told; we can only speculate. Perhaps it is caused by the ash, dust and debris which will fill the sky when the earth begins to quake (vs. 14). This will undoubtedly cause volcanic eruptions which will make Mount St. Helens look like a hiccup by comparison. When there is a large volcanic eruption, the sun becomes darkened by the substances in the air.

“And the whole moon became like blood (vs. 12c). Note the uses for the moon in Scripture: (a) a light for the night (Gen. 1:16); (b) it shows a fixed and consistent order to God’s creation (Jer. 31:35); (c) beauty (Ps. 8:3); (d) permanence and opportunity to know God (Ps. 72:5, 7); and (e) for signs, and for seasons (Gen. 1:14-16). What was true above with the sun in its function as a sign is also true of the moon.

“Became like blood” means the moon will take on a blood red color. As a sign, this speaks of the loss of life and death. How eerie this all will be to look up at night and see a blood red moon. Evidently through the atmospheric changes brought about by the shaking of the earth and the heavens, particles or substances will be in the air which will cause the moon to take on a red cast.

“And the stars of the sky fell to earth vs. 13a.” The word “star” (aste,r) is used of any heavenly body seen at night, i.e., stars, planets, asteroids, meteors, etc. These are not stars as we often use the word which are huge and often dwarf the earth in size. These are meteorites or asteroids which are small by comparison to the earth. John compares them to unripe figs falling to earth from a fig tree when shaken by a great wind. However, what John sees is classed in the category of stars, which in Scripture have much the same meaning and significance, though to a much lesser degree, as do the sun and moon. They indicate time by their appearance, direction (used for navigation), order and precision, beauty and grace. Here, because of their size, likened to unripe figs, these are apparently meteorites or perhaps asteroids which are larger. Revelation 8:8 most likely refers to an asteroid and this to meteorites.

In his book, *The Earth, The Stars, and The Bible*, Paul Steidl says:

In the past the earth has been struck by a number of objects smaller than the Apollo asteroids. The famous Arizona meteorite crater is 4,200 feet across and 600 feet deep, but is estimated to have been caused by a meteorite of only two million tons, or about 300 feet across. The meteorite (or comet) which fell in Siberia in 1908 devastated over 1,000 square miles. The shock was felt as far away as Europe, while trees up to twenty miles from the site were blown over. Yet this body was estimated to be only 200 feet across.¹⁹

With such objects whether meteorites or asteroids, falling like unripe figs on earth, the damage and effects on the minds and hearts of men and on the topography and structure of this planet are astronomical. Thank God the body of Christ will not be here!

“And the sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up” (vs. 14a).

“The sky” is ho ouranos, “the heaven” or “the vault or firmament of heaven,” i.e., the sky and the aerial regions above the earth. Most likely this includes only our atmosphere. Scripture speaks of three heavens (2 Cor. 12:2; Deut. 10:14; Neh. 9:6; Ps. 68:33). There is (a) the first heaven, our atmosphere (Rev 6:14), (b) the second heaven, outer space (Rev. 12:7 perhaps), and (c) the third heaven, the eternal abode of God, the highest heaven (Ps. 68:33; 1 Kings 8:27; 2 Cor. 12:2).

“Was split apart” is the Greek word apocho,,rizo,, from apo which means “from,” showing source, separation, departure,” plus cho,,rizo,, which means “to separate, divide.” This compound verb means to tear apart, split or separate as when a huge curtain is separated or pulled back to reveal what lies behind it as in a theater. The illustration used in Revelation to express the idea is that of a scroll.

“Like a scroll when it is rolled up.” “Scroll” is the Greek word biblion and means a scroll, book, or roll. The figure is that of a papyrus roll which, when it is first unrolled for reading, splits apart or separates the two roles to reveal the contents on the inside.

Now remember that the great shaking mentioned in verse 12 affects the entire universe at once, The effects mentioned here upon the sun, the moon, the stars, the sky and the earth (the islands and mountains), are apparently not successive occurrences, but occur simultaneously as a part of the great shaking. Zephaniah and Joel both picture the Tribulation as a day of darkness and gloom, of clouds and thick darkness (Zeph. 1:15; Joel 2:2). Revelation 6:14b

¹⁹ Paul Steidl, *The Earth, The Stars, and The Bible*.

describes one of the effects of this great agitation of the universe, a tremendous earthquake. This causes volcanic eruptions that will fill the sky with smoke, volcanic ash, dust and rocks which, as mentioned previously, will darken the sun and make the moon blood red. The meteorite showers will also surely add to all of this. Then with the sky black with these particles and clouds and filled with darkness, God will cause the sky to separate and roll back separating the darkness, opening up a window-like effect into heaven.

Apparently this lasts for at least one full revolution of the earth so all the world sees this (vs. 15). But not only this, it appears from verse 16 they are given, through this window, a glimpse of God and the Lamb on the throne.

“And every mountain and island were moved out of their places” (vs. 14b). “Were moved” is the Greek word *kineo*, which means “to move, set in motion.” The whole earth is set in motion. The earth today has many geological faults, cracks below and in the crust of the earth. Through this worldwide earthquake, these faults will be undoubtedly set in motion causing the mountains and islands to be moved out of their present places.

With verses 15-17 we see who will be affected and their response.

(1) Those affected: Every class of society. No one is exempt. Money or status cannot protect one from these judgments (vs. 15a).

(2) Their actions: Now men not only know that the end is near, but they act like it. There is no buying, selling, or planning for the future while this seal is being poured out. Instead, people hide themselves among the caves and rocks of the earth (vs. 15b).

(3) Their attitude (vs. 16): In every age there have been those who have predicted the end of the world. There have been the dooms dayers (as they are sometimes called) but previously even those who believed it have by-in-large lived as though they didn't believe it. But not now. Three things characterize their attitude: (a) They want to die. Speaking to the mountains and rocks they cry, “fall on us.” (b) They are struck with terror, perhaps not so much from the physical phenomenon as from the sight of God on the throne. They cry “Hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne...” (c) They are, in spite of this, unrepentant even though they know they are facing the day of God's wrath poured out against sin. Note their words, “who is able to stand?” The idea here is not who can make it through alive, because they want to die. They sense God's perfect righteousness and know they cannot stand before Him. They must be judged, yet no note of repentance is heard. This shows just how hard the soul of man can become!

The sixth seal is now over on earth and silence in heaven follows for about a half an hour, like the quiet in the eye of a hurricane. But then suddenly a new wave of judgments will begin to be poured out on the earth, the seven trumpet judgments (8:1f). Chapter 7 is parenthetical, it does not carry the chronological sequence forward, but adds some important details regarding the saved of the Tribulation, many of whom are martyred.

The remarkable wonder is that anyone is left alive. But millions survive. After this, it appears from other chapters in Scripture as Revelation 13, 17, 18, and Matthew 24:37f, that man on the whole goes on in pursuit of his rebel like ways, indifferent to God, buying and selling, giving in marriage and worshipping the beast. How soon man forgets! What a telling story this is about man's condition in sin. I am reminded of Pharaoh in Exodus who continued to harden his heart in spite of the miracles he saw with his own eyes.

Lesson 15:

The Redeemed of the Tribulation

(7:1-17)

With chapter 7 the narrative sequence or chronological order is interrupted and we are taken into an interlude. That this is an interlude is obvious from the change in tone seen in a change of the subject matter and in the suspension of judgment. Chapter 6 closes with the sixth seal and the seventh is not opened until chapter 8. This chapter, then, is a parenthesis, but it is one which answers some very important questions. From the very nature of the judgments of the preceding section it would appear no one could possibly be delivered physically, much less saved spiritually. In fact these judgments give rise to the desperate question at the end of chapter 6, “for the great day of their wrath has come, who is able to stand?” Chapter 7 answers this question, and demonstrates that even in the midst of this awesome display of God’s wrath, the mercy of God is still present and seeking to bring men to Himself. Even in the midst of this wrath, God is providing an opportunity for men to be saved (Matt. 24:14).

So, before the seventh seal and the intensified trumpet judgments of chapter 8, God gives us a panorama of salvation and the evangelistic activity of this period known as Tribulation or Daniel’s Seventieth Week. The fifth seal was a revelation concerning the martyrs who had been killed for their faith in Christ. Since the church has been raptured and the Tribulation begins with only unbelievers, how do people come to faith in Christ? We find the answer to this in the sealing of the 144,000 who are sealed at the beginning of the Tribulation. These are the first converts (Rev. 14:4), and it would appear from the juxtaposition of the sealing of the 144,000 in 7:1-8, followed by the great multitude saved in 7:9-17, the 144,000 become the great evangelists of the Tribulation period. They are supernaturally protected by God in their witness.

The Sealing of the 144,000 Jews

(7:1-8)

1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind should blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. 2 And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, 3 saying, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.”

4 And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: 5 from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, 6 from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, 7 from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, 8 from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand were sealed.

The Withholding of Judgment (7:1-3)

Immediately after the cry, “who is able to stand,” John sees four angels standing at the four corners of the earth. Angels, who are so prominent in Revelation, are the instruments that God uses to temporarily suspend judgment on the earth. They are used both to withhold judgment (7:1-3) and to execute it (8:2). The indication is that judgment is impending, it is about to be poured out. But prior to this, before any of the judgments of the Tribulation ever get under way, God will save, set apart, and protect 144,000 servants. Remember, this chapter is not chronological from the standpoint of the sequence of events, but deals with the issue of salvation during the entire Tribulation. The suspension here is not a suspension between the seals and the trumpets, but looks at what will occur just before the judgments begin.

The “four corners of the earth” speak of global authority and activity under God’s sovereignty. “Holding back” is the Greek word *krateo*,. It is a strong word meaning, “to grasp, seize, restrain.” It comes from *kratos* which stresses power or ability in relation to a job to be done.

“The four winds” relate the restraint and the judgments that follow to the entire globe, the whole earth is affected. In several places in scripture “wind” is used as a symbol of divine judgment (Jer. 49:36; Jer. 51:1; 2 Sam. 22:11).

“So that no wind should blow on the earth” points to the purpose of the restraint: to keep these four angels from executing judgment upon the earth. But what about “the earth...the sea...and the trees”? Because of the mention of these three things, some have identified the judgments of these four angels with the trumpet judgments to follow (Rev. 8:7), i.e., the earth and trees smitten, and the sea harmed. But this is unlikely for the following reasons:

(1) The first trumpet judgment affects the earth, trees, and grass and is accomplished by the first angel alone. The second angel judges the sea (the bodies of salt water). The third angel brings judgment upon the fresh water, and the fourth brings judgment on the heavenly bodies. The point is there is no real parallel here to the four wind angels who are told not to smite the earth, trees and sea only.

(2) Revelation 14:4 teaches us that the 144,000 are those “who are purchased from among men (redeemed) as first fruits to God and to the Lamb.” This means they are the first converts after the Tribulation begins. They are saved at the beginning of the Tribulation. But the four trumpet judgments occur much later, at least in the first part of the second half of the Tribulation. So again, the four winds refer to the impending judgments of the Tribulation in general, pictured here as temporarily restrained.

Next, John sees “another angel” who is superior with authority over the other four angels (compare Ephesians 3:10 for the concepts of rank and authority among the angels of God).

“Having the seal of the living God.” For this concept and meaning of the seal see below.

“And he cried out with a loud voice” stresses the urgency of what must first take place. With the rapture of the church, there is no voice among men for God. Throughout history there has always been a voice from God among men, a remnant of believers. The Tribulation cannot go on without the raising up of a new remnant. The spiritual vacuum left by the rapture will be quickly filled by this work of God to bring 144,000 Jews to Christ.

“Do not harm...until” shows that the suspension of judgment is only temporary, until the sealing of these new bondservants of God.

“Sealed...on their forehead” The servants are sealed on their foreheads. But what exactly is the meaning and significance of this seal?

The verb “to seal” is *sphragizo*,. It means “to make an imprint in wax” and it was often done with a signet ring. This was done in ancient times in various kinds of business transactions. It could signify a number of ideas: (a) It often showed a completed transaction had occurred. For the 144,000 it was their personal redemption. (b) It was often a mark of identification and ownership. These became the servants of God and God’s people. (c) Finally, it was often a mark of protection or security. This is clearly the emphasis here.

The sealing guaranteed their physical and spiritual protection. This is suggested by two things. First, by the fact judgment is suspended until the sealing occurs which indicates the sealing was done as a means of protection. Second, as survivors of the Tribulation, the 144,000 are seen standing on Mount Zion with the Lamb in 14:1, evidently a reference to the earthly Jerusalem. Some, however, take Zion here as a reference to heaven.

The seal is stated to be on their foreheads and in 14:1 this is described as “His (the Lamb’s) name and the name of His Father.” They will become quickly identified as the servants of God, i.e., His agents and evangelists versus the servants of the beast. They will not be ‘secret service’ believers! This undoubtedly also includes the gift of the Holy Spirit, the inward seal and capacity for service (Eph. 1:13-14).

In addition to the physical protection from death, the seal may also point to their protection from the apostasy and deceptions of the beast. It stresses their invulnerability to the beast and the false prophet both physically and spiritually. As the followers of the beast have his mark, so these have the mark of God. Today we are susceptible to certain things, though God may sovereignly protect us, and does, but evidently they will not at all be vulnerable. Further evidence of this is given in 14:1f where these are seen unharmed, standing with the Lamb on Mt. Zion, Jerusa-

lem, and undefiled by the evil of the system of the beast (14:4-5). This passage is a prophetic portrait of the ultimate victory of Christ at the beginning of the Millennium. Ezekiel 9:4-7 undoubtedly provides the OT background for this passage. Referring to the Ezekiel passage, Alan Johnson writes:

In this passage a divine messenger with stylus in hand was to go through apostate Jerusalem of Ezekiel's day and put a mark upon the foreheads of those who deplored the faithless idolatry of the Israelites. Those so marked were the faithful and true servants of God in contrast to the professed but false servants who had abandoned him. The sealed would be spared the divine slaughtering of the rebellious inhabitants of the city. Interestingly, the "mark" (*taw*) in the Phoenician script looked like a cross...and was later adopted by early Jewish Christians as a symbol of their faith in Jesus...¹

They are called "bond servants" because throughout the Tribulation they will be serving the Lord as the great evangelists. The juxtaposition of the 144,000 mentioned here in the first half of this chapter followed by the description of the multitudes saved in the second half of this chapter would indicate a causal relationship. Note verse 9 and the statement, "After these things..."

The Identity of Those Sealed (7:5-8)

Who are the 144,000? When interpreters come to this passage, it is amazing to see just how wild their imaginations can get. Some argue that these could not be literal Jews, others would say that the numbers are not literal, but are merely symbolical of God's preservation of His people. But the language, if language means anything, must be understood in its normal usage. If we do not take it in its literal sense then there is no check on one's imagination nor guide for the real meaning of the passage. As an illustration, some say these are the 144,000 Jehovah's Witnesses, or they are Mormon elders, or they are symbolical for the church.

The 144,000 are Jews. The passage says they are from the 12 tribes of Israel, repeating the fact that 12,000 come from each of the 12 tribes making a total of 144,000. That these are Jews further fits with the entire scheme of Bible prophecy, with the fact this is the 70th week of Daniel, and with the nature of the Tribulation as the time of Jacob's distress (Dan. 9:27; Jer. 30:7). The Tribulation is a time when God is concluding His dealings with Israel to establish and fulfill His promises to the nation (Dan. 9: 24f).

J. A. Seiss wrote:

Nor is there a vice or device of sacred hermeneutics, which so beclouds the Scriptures, and so unsettles the faith of men, as this constant attempt to read *Church* for *Israel*, and Christian people for Jewish tribes. As I read the Bible, when God says "*children of Israel*," I do not understand Him to mean any but people of Jewish blood, be they Christians or not; and when He speaks of the twelve tribes of the sons of Jacob, and gives the names of the tribes, it is impossible for me to believe that He means the Gentiles, in any sense or degree, whether they be believers or not.²

How will they be saved? Since all believers are gone when the Tribulation begins, including the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit or the Restrainer from the New Testament standpoint, just how will these be saved?

(1) The work of the Holy Spirit will be more in accord with that of Old Testament times. But being omnipresent, the Holy Spirit will still be in the world working to convict and draw them to Jesus Christ (John 16:8-11; Gen. 6:3), to regenerate the human heart (John 3:3-4), and to select individuals for special service.

(2) There will still be copies of the Scriptures, books, tracts, and material on the internet containing the gospel message. Undoubtedly, this will be found and used by the Holy Spirit. Some are even hiding copies of the Bible in caves.

(3) Some Jews will have heard the gospel from friends or on the radio or TV before the rapture. Then when the church suddenly disappears, the Holy Spirit will convince these select 144,000 that the gospel message is indeed true.

¹ Alan Johnson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12, Frank E. Gaebelein, General Editor, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1981, pp. 478-479.

² J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids 1865, I, pp. 405-6.

(4) Perhaps others will simply be perplexed over the disappearance of thousands of people through the rapture of the church. Some will seek answers and the Holy Spirit will lead them to Christ. Regardless of the methods God will use, these will come to trust in Jesus Christ as their Messiah-Savior.

So there is really no problem with the identification of the 144,000 if we take the language used here in the normal, plain meaning of the text. But as Ryrie points out, there are three problems in the list as it is found in this text. He writes:

The first is the inclusion of Levi among the twelve tribes. Normally Levi, being the priestly tribe, was considered to have no inheritance among the twelve tribes. Perhaps he is included here because the priestly functions ceased with the coming of Christ. The second is the mention of Joseph instead of Ephraim. Normally Manasseh and Ephraim are both mentioned since they both received an equal portion of territory along with the rest of the tribes. Of course, a double number is counted in this list, but under the names of Joseph and Manasseh rather than Ephraim and Manasseh.

The third problem concerns the omission of Dan from this list, something that was necessary if Levi were to be included. The usual reason given for this omission is that Dan was guilty of idolatry on many occasions (Lev. 24:11; Judges 18:1-2, 30-31; 1 Kings 12:28). The same reason is often given for the omission of Ephraim. It has been suggested further that the antichrist may come from this tribe and that this accounts for its omission from this list (cf. Gen. 49:17; Jer. 8:16). Whatever the reason for Dan's omission from the tribes from which 144,000 elect will come, this is not the end of God's dealings with that tribe. The Danites will receive a portion of the land during the millennial kingdom. Indeed, in Ezekiel 48:1 Dan heads the list of the tribes as the inheritance is divided to them (cf. also v. 32). So the exclusion of Revelation is not permanent, for the gifts and calling of God with regard to his people, including Dan are without repentance.³

The Salvation of a Great Multitude (7:9-17)

9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and *all* tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches *were* in their hands; 10 and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

11 And all the angels were standing around the throne and *around* the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, *be* to our God forever and ever. Amen."

13 And one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and from where have they come?" 14 And I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 "For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them. 16 "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; 17 for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them to springs of the water of life; and God shall wipe every tear from their eyes."

The Persons Saved (7:9)

(1) The Connection: "And after these-things" i.e., after the above vision concerning the sealing and salvation of the 144,000 Jews, John looked and saw another awesome sight—an innumerable multitude. As mentioned previously, by the juxtaposition of this passage (vss. 9-17) with the previous (vss. 1-8), this seem to point to a cause/effect

³ Charles Ryrie, *Revelation*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1968, pp. 51-52.

relationship. In the fulfillment of God's purposes for Israel, these 144,000 become the instruments God uses to lead multitudes to a saving knowledge of Christ as declared in these verses.

“And behold” is the Greek, *idou*, an aorist middle imperative of a verb “to see,” but it is used as a demonstrative particle to arrest the attention and/or to express amazement. The marvel is that in such a time as this, a time of God's wrath, God's mercy is equally manifest and He will save many people.

(2) The Innumerable Number: “A great multitude...” Not only will men be saved, but their number will be beyond human computation. Of course God numbers them and knows everyone that is His (2 Tim. 2:19), but unlike the 144,000, there is no definite number here.

(3) Their Nationalities: “From every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues...” The 144,000 were all Israelites, but this group is composed of all nationalities and groups. Undoubtedly this will include redeemed Jews beyond the 144,000 for this is the period of Jacob's trouble when all Israel will be saved (cf. Rom. 11:26). In addition, these are from every nation which must include Israel and from all tribes which would include the 12 tribes of Israel.

(4) Their Position: The multitude is seen “standing before the throne and before the Lamb” (see also 7:15). This is the same throne mentioned earlier (Rev. 4-5) and shows they are in heaven in the presence of the Lamb of God as saved people. This is a place of privilege and honor. These are martyred Tribulation saints who are now in the presence of God and the Lamb. They are here in their intermediate state without their resurrection bodies since the resurrection of Tribulation believers does not occur until after the Tribulation (Rev. 20:4; Dan. 12:1-2). Death for the Tribulation saints, as with the New Testament saints, means being in the presence of the Lord in heavenly bliss and away from the trials of this life (7:15-17), but also in a conscious state (no soul sleep) where believers are still concerned about the glory of God (cf. 6:10).

(5) Their Spiritual Condition: “Clothed in white robes” again speaks symbolically of the imputed righteousness of Christ given to them at the point of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. This means they are in Him and share in His righteousness as justified saints. As verses 14 and 15 will show, this is the reason they have immediate access into God's presence.

“And palm branches in their hands” suggests the element of joy and worship. The use of palm branches according to ancient traditions symbolized festive joy and worship as well as victory or triumph. “And this is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith, and who is he that overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God” (1 John 5:4-5). “Thanks be to God who always leads us in His triumph in Christ” (2 Cor. 2:14).

Comparisons Between to the Two Groups Described in Revelation 7

144,000 of 7:1-8	The Multitude of 7:9-17
Are Israelites only, 12,000 from the 12 tribes of Israel.	Come out of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues.
Consist of a specific number.	A great multitude which no one can number.
Still upon the earth in mortal bodies that need the protection of God.	In a state of glory before the very throne of God.

The Praise for Salvation (7:10-11)

The Praise of these Saints (vs. 10): Both “cry out” and “saying” are in the present tense. This is either what may be called the progressive present tense, looking at the scene in progress, or the customary present, that which will (since this is prophecy) characterize their lives.

“Cry out” is the Greek word *krazo*, which means “to cry aloud,” but here it is a cry of joy and loud jubilation over their salvation. In John's gospel the word is used of proclaiming the person of Christ.

“Salvation to our God” undoubtedly means salvation belongs to God. He alone is the source and means of salvation. Only God, the one sitting on the throne, and the Lamb can give salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

The Praise of the Angels (vs. 11): Angels are always seen in attendance to God, obeying His will, or in the worship of God’s person and work as in creation (Job 38:1-7), or as in man’s salvation (Luke 2:13-14). More particularly, the angels rejoice over the salvation of sinners (Luke 15:8-10).

More Particulars About the Multitude (7:13-17)

The Questions, “Who” and “Where” (7:13)

The words, “and one of the elders answered,” indicates John had been puzzled over the identity of this group and God, who knows our thoughts, answers John’s question. The answer comes first through a question followed by more particulars about the multitude.

The Answers (7:14-17)

(1) Their origin: They are identified as those who come out of the Tribulation, literally, ‘The Tribulation,’ the great one. These are martyrs killed in the last half of the Tribulation during the reign of the beast as depicted in Revelation 13.

Note the contrasts and comparisons between these and believers of the church age. This shows that these Tribulation saints are distinct and different from the church age saints.

Church Age Saints	Tribulation Saints
Kept out of the Tribulation by the rapture (3:10)	Come out of the Great Tribulation through Martyrdom (7:14)
Clothed in white raiment or garments (himation, mantle, cloak (3:5; 4:4)	Clothed in white robes (stole,, a festal robe) (7:9)
Sit on thrones about the throne (4:4)	Stand before the throne (7:10)
Wear crowns (stephanos, the victor’s crown as promised to the church) (4:4)	No crowns mentioned
Have harps and golden bowls full of incense (5:8)	Palm branches in their hands (7:9)
Sing a new song (5:9)	Cry out with a loud voice (7:10)
Declared to be a kingdom of priests who will reign with Christ (5:10)	Serve Him day and night (7:15, cf. 20:4)

(2) Their actions: “Have washed their robes and made them white” (7:14b). What a paradox: white robes made white by blood. Of course, this is obviously a reference to the imputation of Christ’s righteousness. The point is they acted in faith, trusting in the person and work of Christ and God then justified them, imputing or crediting the righteousness of Christ to their account (Rom. 4-5).

(3) Their position: Their position before the throne is mentioned twice in these verses (vss. 9, 15) perhaps to stress the awesomeness of having access to the very throne of God through faith in Christ in contrast to the awful conditions on the earth. The focus here is on the reason. Such access is the result of having the white robes, the righteousness of Christ. Note especially the words, “for this reason” that introduces the statement about being before the throne.

Three things are prominent in verses 15-17 that we need to note about these saints in heaven: Their service, their satisfaction, and their sufficiency.

(1) Their service (vs. 15b): John is told that these “serve Him day and night in the His temple” (7:15b). We must remember that this whole scene is prophetic of the future time of the Tribulation. The question is, does the scene describe the service of the multitude going on during their time before the throne, or does this looks forward in anticipation of the millennium and their service of God in the millennial temple. The tense of the verb, “serve,” is present. This could be the futuristic present describing what will certainly take place in the future, i.e., these will be

busy in the service of the King. But more than likely, it is a descriptive present and describes the scene in progress as they wait on the Lord in service before the throne. Undoubtedly, it refers to heaven and stresses that heaven is not only a rest from life's pressures and toil, but it is especially a place of worship and privileged service even before the kingdom on earth ever begins.

"Night and day" reinforces the concept of constant service. They have no need for rest or sleep or restoration from fatigue. The temple probably speaks of God's presence, being in the place where God dwells. Concerning this statement, Walvoord writes:

The fact that they are declared to serve "day and night" has been taken by some as an indication that this is a millennial scene rather than heaven since there is never any night in the temple of God in heaven. The expression, however, can be understood as meaning simply that they will continually serve the Lord, that is, they will not need sleep or restoration as is necessary in earthly toil. They are delivered from the limitations of this life.⁴

(2) Their satisfaction (vss. 15c-16): "And He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle..." (7:15c-17). The verb is *ske, noo, ,* "to live, dwell, have one's tent, encamp." It was used of setting up or spreading a tent over something. It comes from *ske, ne, ,* (a tent, booth, tabernacle) and was used of the Mosaic tabernacle (Heb. 8:5; 9:2, 3, 6, 8, 21), of its heavenly prototype (Heb. 8:2; 9:11; Rev. 13:6; 15:5), and of the dwelling of God in the New Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven (Rev. 21:3). In John's writing, the only place where *ske, noo, ,* is used, this verb refers to God's presence among men. M. J. Harris writes:

Whereas in the body of the Fourth Gospel Jesus is pictured as the new temple (Jn. 2:19-22), in the Prologue he is the tabernacle (*eske, no, , sen*, Jn. 1:14), the focus of God's presence among men on earth (cf. Exod. 25:8-9). Where Christ is, there is God's dwelling. Rev. 7:15 pictures one of the elders before God's throne informing John that God would "encamp" (*ske, no, , sei*) over those who had come out of the great tribulation; he would "shelter them with his presence" (RSV), dwell with them continuously within his temple.⁵

The preposition, "over" (Greek, *epi*) answers the question of where, but also, with the meaning of the verb and the context (vs. 16), suggests the picture of spreading God's presence like a tent over the innumerable host for their protections, blessing, and fellowship with God. These tents were places of rest and protection from adverse elements, and in the Old Testament the Tabernacle was a place of worship. These saints will have access to God's perfect provision, protection, and fellowship in an unlimited way.

But when does this occur? Does this begin when the great multitude is in heaven or is this looking forward to the millennial reign of Christ and beyond? All the verbs are in the future tense except one, but even it has a future connotation. In view of the fact they are first seen before the throne in the process of serving the One on the throne, the statements refer to what will happen once they are before the throne and in the presence of God.

So, once they are before the throne, they will be under God's tabernacle and in His presence, and so also delivered from everything evil or harmful that men are subjected to on earth, such as hunger, thirst, heat and even sorrow. These believers will know God's personal and direct comfort, indeed, the personal comfort of the Great Shepherd Himself.

Here there is perfect sufficiency and perfect satisfaction. All the elements which can bring pain, suffering and sadness are absent like the sinful nature, the hostile world system, and the attacks of Satan. In addition, they will experience all that is needed for relief, joy and satisfaction. Namely, the Lamb Himself who will shepherd, guide and wipe away the tears, every single one with the understanding and comfort which He alone can give.

Some have argued that this passage suggests that there will be tears in heaven because of failure and wasted opportunities. But the emphasis of this verse is that the tears of the past, because of the trials of life as in the Great Tri-

⁴ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1966, p. 148.

⁵ M. J. Harris, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Colin Brown, General Editor, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, p. 813.

bulation, are removed when men arrive in heaven in the presence of the Lamb, for there they “will be occupied with the beauty and wonder of heaven and the worship of the Savior.”⁶

(3) Their sufficiency (vs. 17): It is important to note that their sufficiency stems from the shepherding ministry and the presence of the Lamb who is seen in the center of the throne. This stresses the importance and centrality of the person and work of Christ to the Godhead and the preeminence He should always have to us. How often in this life we experience insufficiency, but only because, like sheep who tend to wander, we fail to walk under the shepherding care of the Great Shepherd.

“Springs of the water of life” is literally “life’s water springs.” The emphasis is strongly on the word “life” which serves to stress that from death onward, with our arrival into the presence of our Great Shepherd, we will drink of life on the highest level, both life eternal and life abundantly.

⁶ Walvoord, p. 14.

Lesson 16: The First Four Trumpet Judgments (8:1-13)

The Seventh Seal and the Silence in Heaven (8:1)

1 And when He broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

The first parenthesis or interlude dealing with salvation in the Tribulation is now over and the narrative sequence begins again with chapter 8. Remember that the seven seals ultimately contain all the judgments needed to usher in the rule of the Lamb and the kingdom of God. This includes both the trumpet and bowl judgments. With the opening of the seventh seal, the seven-sealed scroll is completely opened and immediately there is silence in heaven. Everything becomes deathly still in heaven. In place of the choruses of the elders, the cries of the angels and the multitudes, all is quiet.

The stillness is so intense that it can be felt. This is a silence of expectancy, for this is the last seal. It is also a silence of foreboding that precedes the onslaught of judgments. It last for half an hour (which may be understood just as literally as the other time designations in the book). Silence at this point, after all the vocal expressions of worship previously noted, would be an awesome thing.¹

Here, then, is a dramatic pause caused by the significance of this final seal, by the intensity of its judgments to follow, and by their final result. The seventh seal contains within its scope all the rest of the judgments of the Tribulation (the trumpets and the bowls) which will restore the kingdom of God to earth.

As mentioned previously, some have said that the seals, trumpets and bowls all describe the same period, or that the trumpets and bowls simply double back over all or portions of the seals. But very poor or no arguments are given for such a position. Especially significant is the fact that those who hold this position never explain the content of the seventh seal, nor do they give an adequate explanation for the content of the seventh trumpet. Certainly Revelation 11:15b-19 does not describe the seventh trumpet, but rather heaven's response to the sounding of the trumpet because of its significance, i.e., the outpouring of the seven bowls followed by the return of Jesus Christ.

Further, chapters 12 through 14 do not set forth its content for they introduce key personages and events in another parenthetical section. These chapters again interrupt the chronological movement which is then resumed in chapters 15 and 16 with the announcement of the bowl judgments. Perhaps, it would be good to review the argument for this view, that the seventh seal contains the seven trumpets and the seventh trumpet contains the seven bowls is simply this:

(1) There is no precise explanation of the content of the seventh seal as with the preceding six, instead, the seven trumpet angels are immediately introduced following the announcement of the seventh seal (cf. 8:1 with 8:2f).

(2) When we come to the seventh trumpet we again find no precise definition as with the preceding six. Instead, heaven's response is seen and heard in anticipation of what the seventh trumpet and its judgments will bring, specifically "... the kingdom of the world becoming the kingdom of our Lord..." Revelation 11:18 summarizes the activities and results, though the details of this are given in Revelation 15 and 16 in the bowl judgments.

(3) Chapter 5 gives the story of the seven-sealed book which contains all that is needed to restore God's kingdom to earth. Here there is no mention of the trumpets or bowls. Why? Because each is ultimately contained in the seventh seal.

Thus we can see why there is silence when the seventh seal is opened: it is a display of awesome reverence for what God is doing.

¹ Charles Ryrie, *Revelation*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1968, p. 55.

The Seven Angels (8:2)

2 And I saw the seven angels who stand before God; and seven trumpets were given to them.

Here the seven angels, who stand in the presence of God as attendants to His service ever ready to carry out His orders, are equipped to carry out the trumpet judgments. They are given seven trumpets which stand symbolically for God's provision and authority for these seven angels to pour out these judgments.

Trumpets were used by Israel on all their national occasions: for assembly to battle, public assembly, to signal important events of the calendar year and almost any important occasion. In this context, they symbolize the announcement of judgment and the number seven signifies the completeness or perfect accomplishment of these judgments.

Joel 2:1 Blow a trumpet in Zion, And sound an alarm on My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, For the Day of the Lord is coming; Surely it is near.

The Single Angel with the Golden Sensor (8:3-6)

3 And another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand. 5 And the angel took the censer; and he filled it with the fire of the altar and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake. 6 And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them.

The Identity of the Angel (8:3a)

"Another angel came and stood at the altar..." There is no way to determine with finality who this angel is. Some believe it is an angel of high rank, carrying out a representative work which illustrates the priestly work of Christ whose life and presence in heaven gives efficacy to our prayers. Others believe that it is Jesus Christ, because He is seen often in the Old Testament as the Angel of the Lord (Gen. 16:7; Ex. 3:2; Numb. 22:22), and because here this angel is ministering in a priestly function which is not the normal role of angels in Scripture.

But an angel could perform such a function as this in Christ's behalf, symbolically, just as the Old Testament priests did. The Greek word for "another" is *allos*, "another of the same kind," and not *heteros*, "another of a different kind." This indicates this single angel is another angelic being of the same order as the seven.

What can we learn from the imagery of this angel with the sensor and his function?

(1) The imagery is that of the Old Testament tabernacle which was itself made to serve as a copy of the heavenly (cf. Heb. 8:5; 9:1-5; Isa. 6:1-7).

(2) The altar is the golden alter of incense, which was before God (or placed before the Holy of Holies just outside the veil), but it belonged on the inside in the Presence of God (Heb. 9:3-4). It was kept outside of the veil because it had to be serviced and the high priest could only go within the veil once a year (Heb. 9:7).

(3) In the Old Testament the priest would burn incense on the altar of incense. The smoke would fill the temple or tabernacle and then ascend upward to heaven.

(4) The live coals on this altar originally came from the altar of brass, the altar of sacrifice or of judgment with the brass symbolizing judgment. This spoke of Christ our sacrifice who was judged for us. Anyone who rejects Christ's sacrifice must face God's judgment (John 3:16-19). Note that when this angel filled the sensor with fire from the altar and through the fire to earth, immediately, there were peals of thunder, flashes of lightning and an earthquake, all portents of divine wrath (Rev. 8:5).

(5) The sweet incense ascending heavenward was symbolic of worship and prayer and was a reminder that our prayers must have the character of sweet incense or the mediatorial presence of Christ to be accepted and heard by

God. (a) The sweet incense speaks of the sweet savor of Christ's person who satisfies the Father's holy character and represents us before God, providing boldness and access to God (cf. Eph. 3:12; Heb. 4:16; 10:19-22). (b) The incense poured on the coals from the altar of sacrifice producing the smoke and sweet odor pictures both Christ's person and work together. It is this (both His person and work) which makes our worship and prayer acceptable to God. The coals spoke of Christ's death, the incense of Christ's person.

(6) In Revelation 8:3-4 much incense is given to the angel which is added to the prayers of all the saints upon the altar of incense. The point is that the incense gives efficacy, meaning, and acceptance to the prayers of the saints because it represents the sweet savor of Christ's person and work. Thus their prayers ascend upward into God's presence, gaining His ear and answer.

The Identity of The Saints and Their Intercession (8:3-4)

We are not specifically told who these saints are, but the implication of the passage is that the saints here are Tribulation saints, both Jew and Gentile believers who are living on earth during the Tribulation. Their prayer is that God would pour out His wrath on a rebellious world, but their desire is to establish His kingdom and will on earth. However, "they may include the saints of all time whose longing petitions for the coming of the kingdom of the Lord are now about to be answered."²

The Implications of this Scene (8:5-6)

There is a clear juxtaposition of ideas here. First, the prayers of the saints are made effective before God by the symbolic ministry of the priestly angel (8:3-4). The next scene is the angel acting in judgment, or in a symbolic way which speaks of judgment. This action is followed by a token judgment in physical phenomenon on earth, "peals of thunder, flashes of lightening and an earthquake." Then we are told the seven angels prepared themselves to sound their trumpets. The point is that after the prayer ascends with the incense then the judgment descends with the coals of fire from the altar.

As the incense gives efficacy to the prayers of the saints, so the coals from the altar of sacrifice, Christ's sacrifice for us, gives efficacy or the right to judge the earth and the earthdweller, the rejecters of Christ. Here is retribution for rebellion and rejection of Christ.

John 3:16-19. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him. 18 He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 19 And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.

John 3:36. He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

The First Four Trumpets (8:7-12)

7 And the first sounded, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.

8 And the second angel sounded, and *something* like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea; and a third of the sea became blood; 9 and a third of the creatures, which were in the sea and had life, died; and a third of the ships were destroyed.

² Ryrie, *Revelation*, p. 57.

10 And the third angel sounded, and a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of waters; 11 and the name of the star is called Wormwood; and a third of the waters became wormwood; and many men died from the waters, because they were made bitter.

12 And the fourth angel sounded, and a third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were smitten, so that a third of them might be darkened and the day might not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way.

In chapter eight there is nothing to indicate we should take verses 7-13 in any way other than in their literal sense. If the literal sense makes good sense, and if there is no indication in the passage itself which suggests a symbolic interpretation, then these verses should be taken literally. This is mentioned for some, like Walter Scott, understand the third part of the earth to mean the devastation of the Western confederation of nations, etc. But there is nothing here to suggest this. These are literal judgments. Ryrie makes a good point:

As has often been pointed out, it would be very inconsistent to understand these judgments symbolically and interpret the plagues in Egypt plainly and actually. The judgment of the first trumpet presents a grim picture of devastation on the vegetation of the world.³

The Significance of the Number Four

Many Bible students believe that four is the number of the world. It marks God's creative works. We might say that it is the signature of the world, or the universal aspect.

- (1) On the fourth day God finished the material creation, i.e., the heavens and earth (Gen. 1:14-19).
- (2) Revelation 7:9 gives us four divisions of mankind: nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues.
- (3) There are four directions or regions: north, south, east, and west.
- (4) There are four seasons: spring, summer, fall, and winter.
- (5) In presenting the Lord Jesus to men, there are four gospels.
- (6) There are four kingdoms: animal, mineral, vegetable, and spiritual;
- (7) Finally, in Daniel's portrayal of the times of the Gentiles, we are given only four great world powers or kingdoms of prophecy, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome.

In this regard, the seven trumpets are divided into four and three. The first four bring devastation to the world, God's creation. The last three are aimed more directly at man though mankind is affected and hurt by all the trumpets. This is significant since these first four are areas of God's common grace intended for man's blessing. Yet man, on the whole today, attributes this world to evolution rather than to a personal God. The evolutionists often say, "God did not create the universe. Man simply created God in his imagination out of his fears and weaknesses." But at this point in the Tribulation, remember that there will then be no atheists, only rebellious and hardened people.

The First Trumpet (8:7)

With the sounding of the first trumpet hail and fire are cast to earth mingled with blood. This results in the burning of one-third of the earth—specifically burned are the trees and the green grass. This would also refer to the various crops of the earth like wheat, barley, rice, corn, etc. Imagine the famine as a result of this.

Each aspect of this judgment, though undoubtedly literal, represents certain spiritual concepts in the wrath of God.

- (1) "Hail" comes from above and naturally speaks of the source as well as the suddenness (cf. Isa. 28:2).
- (2) "Fire" speaks of the consuming character of God's wrath. These judgments consume and destroy the meaning and purpose of life on earth.

³ Ryrie, *Revelation*, p. 58.

(3) “Blood” is naturally descriptive of death. It not only reminds us men will be killed by these judgments, but that the wages of sin is death. God is judging moral and spiritual death on the earth by the physical death caused by the hail and fire.

(4) One third of the earth is destroyed by fire. Why not one fourth, or one fifth? Perhaps, because three is one of the numbers of perfection as with the number seven. Three is the number of God or the trinity. God is referred to by the formula, “Who was, Who is, and Who is to come.” During the last half of the Tribulation, the world will be ruled by the trinity from hell—Satan, the beast, and the False Prophet. In other words, the world has sought a solution to its problems not in God (the Trinity) but in the Satanic trinity. So it appears that by the number one-third, God is stressing the impotence of Satan’s trio and the perfection of God’s wrath to establish His eternal purposes.

These are literal judgments, but they also seem to represent some very basic spiritual truth.

The Second Trumpet (8:8-9)

Let’s be careful to note exactly what this says and what it does not say. It does not say that a great mountain, burning with fire was cast into the sea. Rather, it says “Something like a great mountain...” The object which is cast into the sea is compared to a great burning mountain. It was a huge mountain-like ball of fire which was cast into the sea. It is the perfect picture of what we know today about asteroids. Asteroids are literally mountains hurling through space. There is one family of asteroids called the Apollo group with an orbit that crosses directly across the Earth. These asteroids are masses of rock which vary in size from just a few miles to several hundred.

About 3,500 asteroids have been cataloged, and more are discovered each year. Their orbits are generally very elliptical, with one end closer to the sun than the other. The largest asteroid, Ceres, is about 620 miles (1,000 kilometers) in diameter. Next in size are Pallas, about 332 miles (534 kilometers); and Vesta, about 240 miles (386 kilometers).⁴

What would happen if even a small asteroid struck the earth? First, as it entered our atmosphere, as with shooting stars, it would begin to heat up and glow white with fire by friction. It would actually begin to burn. Then, when it hit the sea (as this object will if this is something like an asteroid) it would cause tidal waves and devastation for hundreds of miles. The meteorite which fell in Siberia in 1908 devastated over 1,000 square miles. The shock was felt as far away as Europe while trees up to 20 miles away were blown down. Yet the 1908 meteorite was only about 200 feet across—a far cry from one mile across!

One of the most powerful and devastating volcanic eruptions was that of Krakatoa. Its eruption in 1883 was one of the most catastrophic ever witnessed in recorded history and provides us with just an inkling of what the future holds in the time of the Tribulation.

On the afternoon of Aug. 26, 1883, the first of a series of increasingly violent explosions occurred. A black cloud of ash rose 17 miles (27 kilometers) above Krakatoa. On the morning of the next day, tremendous explosions were heard 2,200 miles (3,540 kilometers) away in Australia. Ash was propelled to a height of 50 miles (80 kilometers), blocking the sun and plunging the surrounding region into darkness for two and a half days. The drifting dust caused spectacular red sunsets throughout the following year. Pressure waves in the atmosphere were recorded around the Earth, and tsunamis, or tidal waves, reached as far away as Hawaii and South America. The greatest wave reached a height of 120 feet (36 meters) and took 36,000 lives in the coastal towns of nearby Java and Sumatra. Near the volcano masses of floating pumice produced from lava cooled in the sea were thick enough to halt traveling ships.

Everything on the nearby islands was buried under a thick layer of sterile ash. Plant and animal life did not begin to reestablish itself to any degree for five years. The volcano was quiet until 1927, when sporadic weaker eruptions began. These tremors have continued into the 1990s.⁵

Other reports have mentioned that it killed 38,000 due mostly from the huge tidal waves.

⁴ Excerpted from *Compton’s Interactive Encyclopedia*. ©1994, 1995 Compton’s NewMedia, Inc. All rights reserved.

⁵ *Compton’s Interactive Encyclopedia*.

Let's look at the devastation described in verses 8 and 9.

“A third of the sea became blood” refers to the open sea or ocean. What sea we are not told, though it could very well be the Mediterranean Sea.

“Became blood.” This could be caused supernaturally as with the Nile River in Exodus 7:20, or perhaps it could be caused by the tremendous amount of death resulting in blood poured into the Sea. The Sea becoming blood would simply mean or refer to a tremendous loss of life. When the second bowl of Revelation 16:3 is poured out into the sea, in that part of the world, either the sea is turned to blood, or it is chemically changed so as to have the appearance of blood. Here there is a change in the color of one-third of the sea. In the next trumpet there is an effect on the taste of one-third of the fresh water supply.

“A third of the sea” means that one-third of the sea is affected, whereas in the second bowl (16:3) all the sea, or open water is affected with all its sea life. The third appears to be in one portion of the earth, the portion near the impact of the burning object.

Verse 9 tells us one-third of all sea life dies and one-third of the ships are destroyed. This again means one-third of all in the oceans, but all in that specific area. Evidently sea life is killed by the change in the water and the ships are destroyed by the impact of the burning object, probably by both the shock waves and tidal waves, whatever the cause.

The Third Trumpet (8:10-11)

Quite clearly this is a heavenly body burning with fire as it comes into the Earth's atmosphere and hits the Earth. Evidently as the star enters our atmosphere it begins to burn and to break up affecting a very large area of land and especially the lakes, rivers and streams. This will cause a chemical change making the waters bitter.

The star is called “wormwood.” This was a type of wood growing in Palestine that had a very strong and bitter taste. The star is called wormwood because of the affect the star has on the water. It makes the water like wormwood, i.e., bitter, but it appears that while the wormwood in Palestine is not poisonous, this star will poison the water because those who drink this water die. Thus one-third of the fresh water supply of the Earth is made unfit for human consumption.

The reference to wormwood seems to draw the parallel of the experience of the children of Israel at the waters of Marah (Exodus 15:23-25). There the tree cast into the bitter waters made them sweet. Here the wormwood cast into the sweet water made it bitter. Such also is the contrast between Christ on the cross atoning for sin and making that which is bitter sweet and Christ coming in judgment which turns the vain hopes and ambitions of men into bitterness and despair. The result of this trumpet is to inflict a divine judgment from God upon men themselves.⁶

The Fourth Trumpet (8:12)

In contrast to the first three trumpet judgments against the land, sea, rivers, and fountains of water, the fourth trumpet is aimed against the heavens. It is interesting that it was on the fourth day that God created and made visible to the Earth the sun, the moon and the stars. So now the fourth trumpet judgment is aimed at these heavenly bodies—the gracious provisions of God's common grace (Cf. Matt. 24:29; Luke 21:25).

The Luke passage teaches us that these very literal occurrences are signs. The Greek word here is *semeion*, “a sign, mark, token.” But this word looks at what is supernatural, a supernatural act of God, but one with a message or a moral or spiritual purpose. It is designed to teach and communicate a point and to cause people to take note of something. In the last days, man, in his humanism and the deification of himself, will have rejected the truth of creation and the authority of God. So now God acts supernaturally in that part of His creation which so clearly declares His glory—the sun, the moon, and the stars. Why? To demonstrate the truth of God as the Creator and Sovereign of the universe. However, surely it is also a warning and an appeal. It warns of final judgment, the return of Christ, and appeals to man to repent.

⁶ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1966, p. 155.

“Smitten” is the Greek word *pleusso*, which means “to strike or smite.” The word *plege*, “a blow, stripe, wound, or calamity, plague,” comes from this word. The point is that God strikes one-third of the light-bearing bodies of the universe which hinders their light-giving capacity in some way. Note the emphatic thrust of the word order of the Greek sentence, “and was smitten, the third of the sun.”

The statement, “so that one-third of them might be darkened,” focuses our attention on both God’s purpose or design and the result. “So that” is *hina*, a conjunction which normally shows purpose (“in order that”), but the distinction between purpose and result are often very delicate so that a purpose blends into the result (“so that”). “Darkened” is *skotizo*, and means “to blacken, darken.” From this meaning and what follows, this could refer to an eclipse that will begin and occur daily from this point on in the Tribulation. The rest of the verse gives us the result.

“And the day might not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way.” The daylight hours are reduced by one-third and even the light of the night from the moon and stars will likewise be eclipsed for one-third of the night. Ryrie believes this means the day-night cycle is changed from a 24-hour day to a 16-hour day.⁷

Whatever, these things seem to defy what science knows about the laws of our universe. They are unexplainable apart from the omnipotence of God and this is the point. Matthew 24:29 tells us that “powers of the heavens will be shaken.” “Powers” refers to the stars, or the heavenly bodies perhaps so-called because of their light-giving capacity. “Shaken” is the Greek word *saleuo*, and means “to agitate, to shake, cause to move to and fro.” The stars now so obedient and consistent in their orbit will then be moving out of their orbit. This is all tremendously frightening, and to live in these days will be beyond description.

The Eagle Flying in Mid-heaven (8:13)

13 And I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in midheaven, saying with a loud voice, “Woe, woe, woe, to those who dwell on the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!”

As the ass spoke to Balaam, so this eagle, by the power of God, will speak from heaven as it flies about the earth like a flying sound-truck giving warning of the coming last three trumpets. The first four trumpets seem to serve not only as judgments, but as warnings of the last three trumpets since they are far worse. This is supported by the effects of the fourth on the heavens which the Lord referred to as “great signs in the heavens” (Luke 21:11), and by the warning of the eagle flying in heaven. Then, by the cry of the eagle, “Woe, woe, woe,” these last three trumpets are designated as woes because of their severity. As bad as the first four will be, these last three will be even worse. “Woe” is the Greek *ouai*, an onomatopoeic term and a strong interjection of grief or denunciation. By onomatopoeic is meant the formation or use of words such as *buzz* or *murmur* because the sound of the word imitates the sounds associated with the objects or actions they refer to. So this is a very graphic warning of the nature of what is coming.

⁷ Ryrie, *Revelation*, p. 58-59.

Lesson 17:
The Fifth and Sixth Trumpets,
and First Two Woes
(9:1-20)

The Fifth Trumpet and the First Woe
(9:1-12)

1 And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him. 2 And he opened the bottomless pit; and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit. 3 And out of the smoke came forth locusts upon the earth; and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power. 4 And they were told that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. 5 And they were not permitted to kill anyone, but to torment for five months; and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man. 6 And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; and they will long to die and death flees from them. 7 And the appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle; and on their heads, as it were, crowns like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. 8 And they had hair like the hair of women, and their teeth were like the teeth of lions. 9 And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle. 10 And they have tails like scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men for five months. 11 They have as king over them, the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon. 12 The first woe is past; behold, two woes are still coming after these things.

The Fallen Star and the Opening of the Abyss (9:1-2)

As we begin our study of this judgment it is important to remember that these last three trumpets were called “woes” (8:13) to draw our attention to the increased intensity of these judgments as the Tribulation moves closer and closer to its end. Also, remember that one of the purposes of the Tribulation is to unmask Satan’s true character. The fifth trumpet will begin to do this even more clearly. In the church age, Satan often disguises himself as an angel of light with his servants doing likewise (2 Cor. 11:14-15), but from this point on in the Tribulation, the mask will come off and his true colors will be evident for the whole world to see.

This leads us to consider the “star from (out of) heaven which had fallen to earth.” A careful consideration of the context shows us that this star is not a literal meteor or star, but stands symbolically for a person, an angelic creature—specifically Satan.

In more accurate translations, the star is described as “had fallen” (NASB, NIV), looking at the result of a completed event rather than as “fall,” suggesting that John saw the star falling as in the KJV. “Had fallen” is in the perfect tense and points to a fallen condition or state, to what had already occurred with existing results. The event itself is undoubtedly described in chapter 12. That the star is a personality or another angel is suggested by the following:

(1) To this star is given the key to the bottomless pit and the star is called a “him.” Note also the translation “he” in verse 2. In the Greek text, “him” is an intensive, personal pronoun (autos). It is in the dative case and can be masculine (to him) or neuter (to it), but is properly translated “him” because the context is describing a person. Some take the pronouns here to refer to the fifth angel, but the nearest subject to the pronoun and the verb is the star.

(2) The star is seen performing the actions of personality. He opens the abyss (verse 2) which would indicate that the star is in charge of these creatures of the abyss and somehow related to them.

(3) The star is given the ascriptions and appellatives of a person. This is seen in verse 11 which describes the star’s specific relationship to the demonic creatures of the abyss. There he is spoken of as a king, specifically called

the Angel of the Abyss, and given names, “Abaddon” and “Apollyon.” That the star of verse 1 is the king and angel of verse 11 seems clearly evident for two reasons: First, the mention of the fallen star in verse one would be meaningless unless he is the actor who opens the pit. Unless this is the case, why call attention to a fallen star. Second, the fact the star was given the key and authority to open the pit in order to bring destruction on the world also fits with the names given to this angel of the abyss. Both names, Abaddon and Apollyon, mean “destruction.”

(4) There is further support for this view in the fact that, in Scripture, angels are called “stars” (Job 38:7) and Satan is specifically referred to as a star (cf. Isa. 14:12 with Luke 10:18). Regarding Isaiah 14:12 as a reference to Satan, Ryrie writes: “*star of the morning*. Lit., the bright one. Evidently a reference to Satan embodied in the king of Babylon because of Christ’s similar description (Luke 10:18) and because of the inappropriateness of the expressions of verses 13-14 on the lips of any but Satan (cf. 1 Tim. 3:6).”¹ While the description in Luke 10:18 does not use the term “star,” the description of seeing Satan “falling from heaven like lightning” can certainly fit the picture of a falling star streaking across the sky like lightning or a beam of light. “Lightning” is astrape,, “lightening, brightness, a beam of light.”²

(5) Finally, Luke 8:31, 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 show us that the abyss, here called “the pit of the abyss,” in 2 Peter 2:4, “the pits of darkness,” and in Jude 6, “eternal bonds under darkness” is the abode of a portion of demons or fallen angels. Other Scriptures teach us that Satan is the ruler or king of the fallen angels; they are viewed as his angels (Matt. 12:24, 26; Eph. 2:2; Rev. 12:4, 7). See also John 12:31 and Ephesians 6:12. What we see in these verses fits very well with the facts of Revelation 9.

The opening of the abyss results in a literal darkness, but it is also symbolical of the spiritual darkness that is about to fill the earth and portrays the system and activities of Satan.

Regarding Satan’s fall, consider the following three points:

(1) Satan’s fall is both historic and prophetic. *Historically*, he lost his position as the anointed cherub when he sinned and rebelled against God. This fall and the reasons for it are recorded in Ezekiel 28:11f and Isaiah 14:12f. Revelation is another reference to this fall. *Prophetically*, he will be permanently cast out of heaven and restricted to earth in the middle of the Tribulation. Revelation 12:7-17 describes this event that will occur dead center in the Tribulation. It starts the Great Tribulation. While Luke 10:18 shows us the power of Satan has been broken, with the success of the seventy disciples over demons proving that (vs. 17), it may also be prophetic of Satan’s final defeat.

(2) During this interim, Satan evidently has access into God’s presence to accuse believers night and day. One of Satan’s chief purposes in this is to malign the character of God who sentenced him to the lake of fire (cf. Job 1:6-11; Rev. 12:10; Matt. 12:41). Satan is not called “the adversary,” *antidikos*, “an opponent in a lawsuit,” and “the devil,” *diabolos*, “the slanderer,” for no reason.

(3) Revelation 9:1-11 does not record the fall itself, but the aftermath of Satan’s fall to earth occurring in the middle of the Tribulation. Knowing that his time is short, he will do all he can to bring about pain and suffering on the earth including the greatest time of anti-Semitism the world has ever known (see Rev. 12:13-17).

Giving the fallen star “the key” obviously stands for authority and power to open the bottomless pit.

“Of the bottomless pit” is literally, “the pit of the abyss.” “Bottomless” is the *abussos*, “abyss, unfathomable depths.” This word is used Luke 8:31, Rom. 10:7 and in Revelation 9:1, 2, 11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3. “Pit” is the Greek *phrear*, “pit, well, shaft.” But what is this abyss?

(1) The abyss is the temporary abode and prison of a portion of the demon hosts where they wait their eternal and final judgment to the lake of fire.

(2) Various descriptions of this place: (a) In 2 Peter 2:4 it is described as “the abode of the judged,” literally, “having cast them into tartarus” (*tartaroo*,,, “to hold captive in tartarus”). Tartarus means “the abode of the judged,” and as “pits of darkness.” “Pits” is *seiros*, “a deep pit as used in storing grain,” and “darkness” is *zophos*, “blackness.” (b) In Jude 6 it is described as “eternal bonds under darkness.” (c) In Luke 8:31 and Romans 10:7, it is de-

¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible, Expanded Edition*, NASB, Moody Press: Chicago, 1995, p. 1069.

² *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 3, Colin Brown, general editor, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, p. 1001.

scribed simply as “the abyss,” abussos, “the place of unfathomable depth.” (d) In Revelation 9:1-2, it is described as “the pit or shaft of the abyss, and (e) as “the spirits now in prison” in 1 Peter 3:19-20.

(3) A study of the above passages show us that the abyss is a place of judgment for demons for specific sin. It is utterly black and the demons there are in total oblivion to the rest of the universe. It is also a place of bondage, a prison from which not even Satan can release them until he is give the key and authority to do so in keeping with God’s sovereign purpose for the Tribulation.

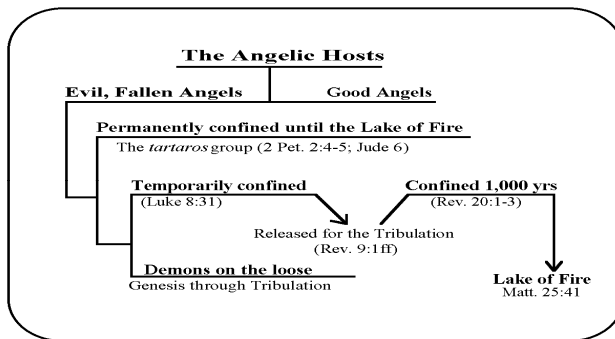
(4) The majority of these bound demons are there because they left their normal habitation and abode. This refers to leaving their heavenly sphere and purpose as designed by God. Some believe this includes whatever is involved in the events of Genesis 6.

(5) It appears that others were cast there by Christ during His ministry on earth according to Luke 8:31-33. In this regard, just some food for thought: (a) According to Luke 11:24f, demons travel and seek habitats in waterless places. (b) The Greek translation in the LXX for the Hebrew word, *tehom*, “deep, ocean, large body of water,” and for *salah*, “ocean, deep,” is our word *abussos*. (c) Revelation 21:1 and 22:1f describe conditions of the new heavens and earth in which the only water is the river of life. Evidently, there will be no sea or ocean in the new earth. (d) It is interesting that the specific judgment God used on the antediluvian world, the world involved with the fallen angels called, “sons of God,” in Genesis 6, was the flood. The flood was not merely caused by rain, but by the crust of the earth breaking up with water coming from subterranean levels. Is there some kind of relation between water, the oceans, and the subterranean levels and the abyss? Interestingly, the swine running into the water was certainly a judgment and was perhaps symbolical of the fact that Christ was sending them into the abyss.

In Revelation 9, Satan, the king of the fallen angels or demons, is given the power and authority by God to open the abyss and release these demons on earth as part and instruments of God’s divine wrath.

All the demons including Satan will be bound and thrown into the abyss again at the end of the Tribulation for 1,000 years (Rev. 20:1-3). Satan will be released from his prison at the end of the 1,000 years, and he will come out to deceive the nations. Some will follow him but the King of kings will quickly defeat him and cast him with his demon hosts into the lake of fire forever (Rev. 20:7-10).

The following chart illustrates the history of the imprisonment of demons:



Verse 2. “And he opened...” draws our attention to Satan’s character—cruel, vicious, and hurtful to the core. As soon as the opportunity is presented, he takes advantage of it. He does not need to be coaxed. He simply needs the opportunity—the removal of the restraining hand of God. Remember, as “the adversary,” he is the one who walks about like a roaring lion always in search of someone to devour (1 Pet. 5:8).

“And smoke went up out of the pit;... and the sun and the air were darkened.” “Air” is the Greek, *ae,r* and refers to the atmosphere about the earth. Earth’s atmosphere will become polluted with the smoke pouring out of the abyss. This will block out the sun and suddenly all will be dark. This is a literal darkness, but is also symbolical of the spiritual darkness that will fall on the earth in the system and activities of Satan and his end time system of the beast.

This demonic activity that will literally fill the atmosphere will be clearly evident to the eyes of men, even the demon creatures themselves. Ironically, according to Ephesians 2:2 and other passages, our atmosphere and the

world we live in even now are full of demonic forces and activity, but on the whole, they are hidden to the world. Many do not really believe in a real devil or in demons. Many may be blind to their existence now, but not so in the future.

Demonic Torment Loosed Upon Man (9:3-5)

Verse 3: The appearance of these demonic creatures of the abyss is given in verses seven and following. Here they are simply called locusts with the stinging power of scorpions. Descending out of the abyss, these are demons but they will take on the form described in verses seven and following. This is a literal phenomenon that will occur and it has spiritual significance. In Scripture locusts are associated with divine wrath (Ex. 10:12-20). This is why they are called locusts. But unlike the locusts of history who attack vegetation, these are commanded not to hurt the grass, etc.; their purpose will be to hurt men.

Verse 4: In this verse these demon creatures are told not to do what locusts normally do—attack vegetation. In Old Testament times and throughout history the locust is a symbol of destruction and terror. I have read that they may travel in a column 100 feet deep and up to four miles in length leaving the land stripped bare of all vegetation.³

Who gives this command to hurt only man but not the vegetation? In the light of God's dealings with Satan in the Book of Job, this is probably God. The only one excluded from this torment of locust are the 144,000 who have the seal of God in their foreheads. We might assume, however, that as far as this plague is concerned, they stand representatively for all believers and that any believer would be spared this torment. Why? This is a judgment upon men who have rejected Christ, not for believers in Jesus Christ, those who had believed the message of the 144,000.

Verse 5: It is interesting to note that again specific limitations are placed on these demonic creatures by God. They are limited as to what and who they may strike (vs. 4), as to how far they may go in the torment (not unto death), and as to how long (five months) (vs. 5).

“Scorpion” is the Greek word *skorpios*. This was a lobster like vermin some four or five inches long. It had a claw on the end of the tail that secreted a poison when it struck.⁴ Please notice that these demons are not called scorpions, nor are we told that they look like scorpions, just that they have the power (vs. 3), and torment (vs. 5) of a scorpion. This means they have the power to cause tremendous pain, short of death, but extending for five months.

Verse 6: In this verse we see the effect which will drive men to seek suicide, but they will be unable to accomplish it. Death will elude them. This is astounding and clearly a supernatural restraint of God that stresses and demonstrates His absolute authority or sovereignty. As Ryrie puts it, “Bodies will not sink and drown; poisons and pills will have no effect; and somehow even bullets and knives will not do their intended job.”⁵

So in addition to the natural plagues that have afflicted the earth, now men are directly attacked and tormented by these demonic creatures.

The Demonic Locust Creatures Described (9:9-10)

These verses make it clear that these creatures are not ordinary locusts, and are only called such because of their function in judgment. The same applies, as mentioned above, to their likeness to scorpions. The emphasis is on the capacity to torment and to cause pain.

In their description John lists eight things about their appearance. He begins with the head and moves backward to their tails, the source of their power to inflict torment for the five months. Torment is their sole purpose. The description here defies imagination, but remember, these are demonic creatures that have come from the abyss. They are the worst of the demons of Satan. Whether they take on this form as a demonic-like apparition, or just what happens here we are not told. But they will be real and will inflict terrible torment upon mankind. It will be a literal hell on earth.

³ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1977.

⁴ Mounce.

⁵ Charles C. Ryrie, *Revelation*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1968, p. 62.

The Leader of the Demons (9:11)

This king over the demons is of course Satan. He is called the Angel of the Abyss because he is a fallen angel and because of his own relation to the abyss and to those within it. They are there because they followed his rebellion, he is given the key to release them and he will be bound there himself.

His name given in both Hebrew and Greek means *destroyer*. This is just another of the many names of Satan given in Scripture that portray his character and activities (cf. 12:9). As the destroyer he is the one chiefly responsible for all the forms of destruction in this life, from the Garden of Eden to the last battle at the end of the Millennium (Gen. 3 to Rev. 20). In many ways, the Scripture is in essence a portrait of two, of Satan and his destruction, and the Savior and His deliverance.

The Announcement of Two More Woes (9:12)

With the first woe now past we are informed that the next two woes are still to come. As serious and fearful as the first woe is in its torment, it is only the first. The worst is yet to come. As we shall see in the second woe and have seen in the first, the Tribulation unmasks the true character of Satan in all his evil and cruelty, but it also demonstrates the depravity and rebellion of the human heart. This will especially be seen in this second woe.

Concerning this woe Walvoord says,

For the first time in history all those who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior will come under demonic possession and affliction. What is true in that hour is also true in some measure today, for there is no deliverance from the power of Satan nor from his affliction apart from salvation in Christ and the delivering power of God.⁶

Today we are seeing the stages set for this very black and degenerate hour that is portrayed in this sixth trumpet or second woe.

The Sixth Trumpet and Second Woe (9:13-21)

13 And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, 14 one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." 15 And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they might kill a third of mankind. 16 And the number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them. 17 And this is how I saw in the vision the horses and those who sat on them: *the riders* had breastplates *the color* of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone. 18 A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone, which proceeded out of their mouths. 19 For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents and have heads; and with them they do harm. 20 And the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; 21 and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts.

The Voice From the Four Horns of the Golden Altar (9:13)

This is the same altar mentioned in 8:3 in the scene of the offering of incense with the prayers of the saints. The voice is probably that of the priestly angel and the implication is that this judgment like the preceding is in answer to the prayers of the saints so persecuted by the beast in the Tribulation.

⁶ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1966, p. 164.

The Release of the Four Angels (9:14-15)

The sixth angel is instructed to release four angels bound at the River Euphrates. The Euphrates is called great, perhaps not just for its size, but because of its prominence and importance in Scripture.

Verses 14-15 speak of four angels that are bound at the Euphrates River and then released to kill one-third of mankind. The Euphrates is mentioned twice in Revelation, here and in 16:12.

The epithet “great” is used in both occurrences. The entire length is 1780 miles, and it is by far the longest and most important river of western Asia. The Euphrates was the natural boundary separating the nations of the east from Palestine. Its broad stream flowed between Israel and her powerful enemy Assyria. The Euphrates was also the limit of the Roman conquests in that part of the world. We understand, therefore, that the *literal* Euphrates is here signified, and not the Turkish power.⁷

Who are these angels? They are fallen angels, demonic spirits similar to those in 16:13-14. The four angels of Revelation 7:1 are good angels who carry out the judgment of God. These, however, appear to be fallen angels because they have been bound. Good angels are never spoken of as bound, unless this is the exception. On the other hand, demonic spirits or fallen angels are bound or will be (cf. Jude 6; 2 Pet. 2:4; Rev. 20:2 with 9:1ff). These, then, are *wicked* angels prepared by God to be released as a further judgment against a godless, Christ rejecting world.

The expression “For the hour and day and month and year” refers not to the duration of their activity, but to the fact this occurs exactly on the hour of God’s appointment, i.e., the exact hour of the day, month, and year that God ordained it. God raises up both men and demons as His instruments to accomplish His purposes in history. Each acts out of their own volition, according to their schemes and nature, but God, knowing them from eternity past, raises them up in history to carry out His purpose even at the exact hour (cf. Isa. 10:5f; Rom. 9:11-18).

“So that they might kill a third of mankind.” This states their purpose in the plan of God. But just how do they do this? The following verses tell us. They do it through an army of 200,000,000. Earlier one-fourth of the earth’s population is killed in the fourth seal. Now one-third of the remaining population of mankind is wiped out. This means the earth’s total population is reduced by one-half by these two judgments alone and these judgments do not account for all the deaths that will occur. The other judgments also will result in widespread destruction of human life. As Walvoord says, “Never since Noah has such a substantial proportion of the earth’s population come under God’s righteous judgment.”⁸

The Army of Two-Hundred Million (9:16-19)

Is this a literal two-hundred million man army or a description of an innumerable host? Walter Scott thinks that it should not be taken literally.

We have had the number of the invisible leaders, *four*; now both the reader and the Seer are informed as to the number of the invading hosts, stated to be “**twice ten thousand times ten thousand**,” or two hundred millions. This immense host is a number too vast for human conception. The mind gets bewildered in the effort to comprehend such an army which for number surpasses anything ever seen on earth. The unseen chariots of God are similarly numbered (Psa. 68:17)...A literal army consisting of two hundred millions of cavalry need not be thought of. The main idea in the passage is a vast and overwhelming army, one beyond human computation, and exceeding by far any before witnessed.⁹

Ryrie is of the opinion that this army is made up of demons. He says, “The weapons of this army are fire, smoke, and brimstone (vs. 17) which are weapons of hell and may further indicate that the army is made up of the inhabitants of hell—demons.”¹⁰ It is clear that the four angels are the demons, however, it is more likely that this army, like one gathered in 16:14, is a human army already in existence which these demons now cause to move against man-

⁷ Walter Scott, *Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Fleming H. Revell: Westwood, NJ, p. 210.

⁸ Walvoord, p. 165.

⁹ Scott, p. 211.

¹⁰ Ryrie, *Revelation*, p. 64.

kind similar to the work of the three unclean spirits who cause the kings of the earth to gather together for the battle of Armageddon (16:13ff). Walvoord writes:

There is no direct statement as to the origin of this army, but the implication is, from the fact that the angels of verse 14 were bound “in” or at Euphrates, that the army may come from the East. A similar and later development mentioned in Revelation 16:12 following the outpouring of the sixth vial also depicts an invasion from the East. Unless the vials and the trumpets coincide as some believe, these are two different events, possibly two different phases of the same operation. Chronologically the trumpets involved closely succeed one another and their judgments seem to fall like trip-hammer blows as the great Tribulation comes to its close. Whether the army is held to be the literal number mentioned or not, it is clear that this is a massive force of tremendous military power as evidenced in its capacity to slay a third part of the human race. It may be that the army here described continues to fight until the time of the second coming of Christ, and the number slain is the total number involved in the conflict.¹¹

Verses 17-19 describe the army and its tactics or method of warfare. Quite clearly these are not ordinary horsemen or horses. Since this refers to a human army, it is probably best taken as symbolical of modern mechanical warfare. John has never seen tanks or armored vehicles, so he was given a vision of horsemen, as in his day—yet the vision went beyond his day and portrayed modern warfare. The fire, smoke, and brimstone could refer to any number of devices of modern warfare. Again in verse 18 it is mentioned that one-third of mankind will be killed.

The Great Society of the Future (9:20-21)

Through humanism and a Christ-rejecting society, man has little to look forward to, specifically, the horrible conditions of these two verses. Here we see the harvest, the true results of humanism and the great society the world is seeking to develop—but apart from God and the Lord Jesus Christ. The following three points describe the character of this society and its people.

Rebelliously Unrepentant (9:20a)

“And the rest...who were not killed...did not repent.” One would think by this time men would be crying out for mercy from God in deep repentance, especially since the world will know these all things that are happening are judgments from God (cf. 6:14-17). But no, by now the rest of mankind has become confirmed in their rebellion and depraved ways through the hardening effect of continued negative volition to God.

Significantly, the things they will refuse to repent of are “the works of their own hands.” This demonstrates the extreme humanistic nature of man that has always been evident, but especially in these last days. Men, as we see today, reject the works of God both in creation and in salvation. Man seeks to handle life by what he can do apart from God. But wasn’t this precisely the heart and nature of Satan’s temptation to Eve in Genesis 3?

Religious, Demonic and Idolatrous (9:20b)

We should notice that this is a consequence of the refusal to repent. The translation of the NASV “So as not to” represents the conjunction hina, “in order that” and the negative particle me,, “not.” This may look at a negative purpose or intent, or a negative result or consequence. Theologically, however, both concepts, as mentioned previously, are often involved together. Men often refuse to come to Christ, even though salvation is by grace, because they want to continue to pursue their present lifestyle of sin. As our Lord teaches us in the Gospel of John:

John 3:19-21 And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.

Men ultimately reject Christ in order to pursue their own course. Ironically, such a purpose is not without its consequences—the consequences of greater and greater degeneration as Paul makes clear in Romans 1:18ff. The

¹¹ Walvoord, pp. 166-167.

consequences here in Revelation 9 are two-fold, though tied together: (a) rampant demonism and (b) gross idolatry. Paul teaches us in 1 Corinthians 10:20 that behind all idolatry is demonism or the worship of demons.

There are basically four levels of demonic activity in the world today:

(1) **Demon influence and temptation:** In view of Satan's constant activity through his demonic forces, all people face this to some degree (1 Pet. 5:8; Eph. 2:2; 6:12-13; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 2:26).

(2) **Demon Subjection or Control:** This occurs through the lust patterns of the flesh and the many temptations found in the world which, of course, operates to a large degree under Satan's control and influence. It is for this reason that he is called "the god of this world" (age) (2 Cor. 4:4) and "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31; 16:11). See also Ephesians 2:2 and 1 John 2:15-17; Mark 4:14-19.

(3) **Demon Harassment or Oppression:** This involves direct demonic attack that often leads to severe harm mentally, emotionally, and physically. This is possibly the cause of Paul's thorn in the flesh that he describes as "a messenger of Satan" mentioned in 2 Corinthians 12:7.

(4) **Demon Possession:** Demon possession is the condition where a demon (or demons) actually take up residence within the body of a person and not only controls the person, but uses their central nervous system and vocal cords. The gospels are filled with illustrations of this.

For more detailed information on this issue, see the bibliography at the end of this lesson.

The idols of gold and silver will probably include the whole gamut of materialism (cf. Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5), but by this time it will be far beyond this into rank idol worship in the form of worship of the beast (cf. Rev. 13).

The last phrase of verse 21, "which can neither see nor hear nor talk," is stark irony to bring out the supreme foolishness of all forms of idolatry (see Ps. 115:3-8; Isa. 44:9f). Man's idols, materialism included, are empty of capacity to meet his needs. Man's idols are helpless nothings.

Morally Decadent (9:21)

Here we have the natural outcome of the preceding two characteristics of man at this time. God is holy, just, love, goodness, mercy and grace, etc. Demons are unholy, unjust, hateful, cruel, murderous, destructive, immoral, etc. When men reject God, the only thing left is the world of Satan. Today Satan's ministers (servants) often take on the form of goodness, the form of light. But of course, this is only a smoke screen. In the Tribulation, however, the true nature of Satan's kingdom will surface. In verse 21 John gives us four results that characterize men of Satan's kingdom and of all men of the Tribulation.

The first sin mentioned is *murder*. Note that the passage says "murders" (plural). Murder will be rampant. No one will think anything of killing another human being. The 'law of the jungle' will prevail. Unfortunately, we can see the nature of this in our own country today since we have left the absolutes of the Word of God. Currently, one of our judges is having to battle to keep a copy of the Ten Commandments on the wall of his court room.

The second sin mentioned is *sorcery*. This is again plural. The Greek word is pharmakon, "a drug, incantation, enchantment."¹² Our word pharmacy comes from this word group. The verb pharmakeuo,, means "to administer drugs." The word referred to magical arts, but the use of drugs is often a part of witchcraft or demonism. This suggests that drugs will be a big part of the Tribulation. In the Tribulation practically everyone will be on drugs and men will kill and steal to get them.

The third sin mentioned is *immorality*. This is the Greek word porneia from which we get our word pornography. Porneia looks at sexual sins and perversions of every type.

The fourth sin mentioned is *thefts*. This is the Greek word klemma, "a thing stolen," or "theft, stealing." This too is plural and draws our attention to the complete moral breakdown where men will lie, steal, cheat, and defraud at every turn.

¹² G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, T. & T. Clark: Edinburgh, 1937, p. 466.

The bonds of society loosened, all mutual respect for each other's rights, even in the most sacred relationship, completely gone, what follows? Greed will lure on the mass of men "not killed" to enrich themselves at the expense of society. "Each one for himself" is the order and motto of these coming days.¹³

What a horrible and grim picture the Spirit of God has painted for us of these final days!!! Men will hold nothing sacred anymore. Not life, not marriage or the family or sex, not one's health, nor the property and rights of others. Man will be given over completely to sensual indulgence and he will do anything to satisfy his cravings. Is not this in itself the greatest judgment he will face? It demonstrates the total ruin of all meaning to life. I used to think this condition in society and the misery of man's soul at this point would be great beyond imagination. But now in the nineties we see (in our country as well as others) the same signs of moral degeneration—a hardened and unrepentant spirit and moral decadence of the worst kind—murder and violence, stealing in every conceivable form (from petty theft to political and corporate fraud), and gross immorality. It's a frightening picture.

I am convinced from Scripture that the church will not go into the Tribulation. I believe the Lord's return for us is imminent and that we do not look for signs of His coming for the church. He could have come in John's or Paul's lifetime, and He could come for His bride today.

It would appear, however, that there are certain signs of the approach of the Tribulation in preparation for setting the stage for the events described in Revelation 6-19 and other prophetic passages. Surely we are seeing something of this today and the church could go through a great deal of persecution as the world grows worse and worse. Actually, many believers are undergoing tremendous suffering in various parts of the world already. May we continue to look up and pray, come quickly Lord Jesus.

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¹³ Scott, p. 216.

Lesson 18: The Angel and the Little Book (10:1-11)

The Appearance of the Angel (10:1-3a)

1 And I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, clothed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire; 2 and he had in his hand a little book which was open. And he placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land; 3 and he cried out with a loud voice, as when a lion roars;...

Beginning with chapter 10 and extending through 11:14 there is another parenthetical section or interlude between judgments. Again, this does not chronologically advance the narrative of Tribulation events, but is descriptive, introductory and explanatory. It presents other facts and explanations that contribute to the total prophetic scene of the Tribulation period.

“And I saw another strong angel...” (vs. 1). While the key note of the chapter is “the little book,” the first thing John sees is the appearance of another strong angel. This is important because the appearance and character of the angel gives validity and significance to the little book and its message. Some see this angel as the Lord Himself because of the description given of the angel. He descends with a cloud (cf. Ps. 104:3; Rev. 1:7), his face is like the sun (cf. 1:16), and his feet are as pillars of fire (cf. 1:15). Others try to connect him with the sixth angel, but it seems apparent that he is neither. “Another” is the Greek word *allos* and means “another of the same kind.” He is an angelic being of the same kind, but different (another) from the sixth angel. He is very likely the same angel as in 5:2 and this angel is clearly not the Lord. Furthermore, as Ryrie points out:

Others, however, point out that an angel might have these characteristics as well. He is called a “mighty” angel (the same word as in 5:2). Similar characteristics are ascribed to a man (clearly an angelic being) in Daniel 10:5ff. Furthermore, the archangel Michael’s name means “who is like God,” which would make these characteristics not unexpected. Also, there might be some problem in a descent of Christ at this point in the book (v. 1). There would be no problem if this were an angel. If this is an angel it is quite possible that he is the same one that appeared in 8:3, the “another” in 10:1 merely distinguishing him from the seven trumpet angels as it does in 8:3.¹

“Coming down from heaven” simply emphasizes his source and his authority. In no other Scripture is Christ viewed as coming down to earth before the end of the Tribulation. This again suggests this is not Christ, but a mighty angel from God’s presence.

“Clothed with a cloud.” The angels are ministering spirits sent out to minister or carry out God’s purposes as with these judgments. In this, He makes or clothes them as He desires for the task at hand (cf. Heb. 1:7, 14). Those who see this angel as the Lord, see the cloud as a symbol of the Lord’s presence,² but for reasons mentioned above, this is unlikely. Rather, “clothed with a cloud” is a symbol of divine intervention and judgment (cf. Dan. 7:13; 1 Thess. 4:17; Rev. 1:7; Exodus 24:15-18).

“And the rainbow was upon his head.” The rainbow appears as a crown or perhaps a kind of halo. This is the Greek, *iris*, “a rainbow, (colored) halo or radiance.”³ Since a rainbow is a sign of God’s faithfulness to His word in Scripture, the colored radiance or rainbow teaches that his appearance and the messages of this chapter are a result of God’s faithfulness to His covenants and mercy. God was here in the process of fulfilling Old and New Testament promises.

¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Revelation*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1968, p. 67.

² William Kelly, *Lectures on the Book of Revelation*, W. H. Broom, 1874, p. 200.

³ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, translated by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, University of Chicago Press, electronic version.

“And his face was like the sun” stresses this glorious angel was invested with divine glory and holiness to show us he was acting in response to God’s holiness (cf. Exodus 34:29).

“And his feet like pillars of fire” emphasizes his stance as firm, stable, immovable. “Fire” points to judgment and shows that God is immovable in the outpouring of these judgments.

“And he had in his hand a little book which was open.” In contrast to the seven-sealed book in Christ’s hand (Rev. 5), this is a little book and it is open. “Open” is in the perfect passive to show the book had already been opened. It was an open book which may indicate that it contained Old and New Testament prophecies of the coming events, though the exact contents of this little book are not revealed in this chapter. The point is this book had been opened prior to this chapter, unlike the seven-sealed book that had its contents revealed gradually, seal by seal in the progression of the book of Revelation.

“And he placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land. Evidently for emphasis, this is mentioned three times in this chapter (10:2, 5, 8) and presents a picture of total conquest of land and sea. It relates this angel and the message of the little book to God’s purpose and promise to take possession of the entire world as it will be carried out in the final events of this momentous period of world events.

“And he cried out with a loud voice as when a lion roars” (vs. 3a). The lion, known as the king of the beasts, often roars when he has made a kill and takes possession of his prey. This stresses strength, kingship, possession, and victory on behalf of the Lord Jesus, the King of kings.

The Answer of the Seven Peals of Thunder (10:3b-4)

3b “...and when he had cried out, the seven peals of thunder uttered their voices. 4 And when the seven peals of thunder had spoken, I was about to write; and I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Seal up the things which the seven peals of thunder have spoken, and do not write them.”

“And when he had cried out, the seven peals of thunder uttered their voices.” This occurs in answer to the appearance and cry of the angel. As lightening appears and flashes across the sky, and thunder follows, so now the seven peals of thunder are heard following the appearance of the mighty angel. The thunder answers the lion-like voice of the angel. Note that the thunder and the voice of the angel are not the same.

Thunder is a symbol of judgment but also of revelation. It reminds us God has revealed Himself in history to man, first in creation and then in various ways through special revelation, i.e., through the holy Scriptures and through the Son. Thunder is portrayed as the voice of the Lord seven times in Psalm 29:3-9. The idea is that thunderstorms are a reminder to man that he should ascribe glory and strength to God and worship God as the Creator King of this world. In Revelation 10, the thunder is heard in a most electrifying message that John was both able to hear and understand.

“Seal up...and do not write them” (vs. 4). The message was so electrifying and astounding that John, as was his custom with these visions, was about to write down what he heard, but a voice out of heaven, perhaps the Lord Himself, forbids this action. Evidently the message was so awesome that man could not handle it. It is sealed and is never revealed in this book. The Lord will evidently explain and reveal this Himself when we are with Him. From the nature of the passage, or context, this apparently deals with God’s judgments and purposes for these things, but the details are sealed.

The Affirmation of the Angel (10:5-7)

5 And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his right hand to heaven, 6 and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, WHO CREATED HEAVEN AND THE THINGS IN IT, AND THE EARTH AND THE THINGS IN IT, AND THE SEA AND THE THINGS IN IT, that there shall be delay no longer, 7 but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets.

“And the angel...lifted up his right hand to heaven and swore by Him...” (vs. 5-6). With his feet firmly planted on the sea and the land, the mighty angel takes the position of oath taking—the raised right hand—in order to affirm the

plan and purposes of God to take possession of the earth without further delay. The feet firmly planted adds a determined and emphatic note to this affirmation of what God is going to do.

The basis of the oath is the person and work of God as the eternal, self-existent God who created all things, i.e., “by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven...” It is significant for us who are living in these last days before the Tribulation that the key philosophical issue of our time revolves around these two issues—the existence of God and creation versus secularism and evolution. Modern man derides both. Instead of being the creation of a personal God who created mankind for His own glory and purposes, man is the impersonal result of time and chance.

“That there shall be delay no longer” is literally, “that time no longer shall be.” “Time” is *chronos* which refers to a duration of time, time as a period of time. Some see this as a declaration that time will be no more. As “there will be no more sea” (21:1), “no more death” (21:4), and “no more night” (22:5), so there will be “no more time” (10:6). But with all of these except 10:6 we have the negative “no,” the verb “to be,” and the word *eti* meaning “more.” In 10:6 “more” is missing. This is not saying that “time will be no more,” but that “time has run out,” that “there will be no more time before God completes His purposes on earth as the earth or world exists today.”

Verse 7 explains this and makes the concept clear. When the seventh angel sounds, then the mystery of God will be finished, there will be no more delay, time will have run out. But what is meant by the words, “the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His prophets”? Surely, the mystery of God is the answer to the age-old question, why has God allowed Satan and evil to continue to exist? The answer to this is found in Scripture. It was preached by God to His prophets, they proclaimed it, and it is now found in the Bible.

Kelly identifies “the mystery of God” as: “... the secret of allowing Satan to have his own way, and man too (this is to say, the wonder of evil prospering and of good being trodden underfoot). God checks, no doubt, the evil in a measure, partly through human government and partly through His own providential dealings.”⁴

Certainly also, God restrains this evil through the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit in the church (2 Thess. 2:5-9). But when the Tribulation begins, this check will have been removed. This mystery, which the Tribulation will help to remove through its judgments, is a truth about God proclaimed by the prophets. It is a truth that involves two key features—truth concerning the conflict with Satan and evil, and truth about the establishment of God’s kingdom that will put an end to Satan and his activity.

Concerning the establishment of God’s kingdom, Newell writes:

This expression, “the *mystery* of God,” in this connection seems to indicate all those counsels and dealings of God made known by Him to and through the Old Testament prophets, concerning His governmental proceedings with men on earth looking always toward the establishment of the kingdom in the hands of Christ. When Christ comes to take the kingdom, there will be no mystery, but, on the contrary, manifestation.⁵

Concerning the problem of the age old conflict with Satan and evil, Scott has written:

Does it not seem strange that Satan has been allowed for 6000 years to wrap and twist his coils around the world, to work evil and spoil and mar the work of God? What havoc he has wrought! He is the god of this world and the prince of the power of the air. God’s saints have ever been the objects of his fiercest malignity. Is it not a mystery why God, the God of righteousness and holiness, allows evil to go unpunished and His own people to be crushed and broken on every hand? Truly this *is* the mystery of God. Is it that He is indifferent to the wrong, indifferent to the sorrows of His people? Nay, that were impossible. God bears with evil till the hour of judgment arrives, when He will avenge the cry of His elect, and come out of His place to punish the wicked. The checks and restraints upon evil now are unseen as to their source, and are only of partial application. Everything in the world and in the Church is out of order save what God by His Spirit produces.

Now, however, this mystery of God is about to be finished, and God by His Son, the Heir of all things, will wrest the government of the world from the iron grasp of Satan, confine him as a prisoner in the

⁴ Kelly, p. 206.

⁵ William R. Newell, *The Book of Revelation*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1935, p. 143.

abyss for 1,000 years, finally casting him into the lake of fire for eternity, and then rule and reign in manifested power and glory...

This is indeed glad tidings proclaimed to His prophets of old, not declared by them (although they did that as their books testify), but *to* them,..."⁶

When the angel of Revelation 10:7 says "time shall be no more" he means that once the seventh trumpet is sounded, this time of allowing Satan and rebellion to continue, will be over; God will act swiftly now to establish His rule of righteousness on earth. This period of the patience of God is over.

The Assignment Concerning the Little Book (10:8-11)

8 And the voice which I heard from heaven, I heard again speaking with me, and saying, "Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land." 9 And I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. And he said to me, "Take it, and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey." 10 And I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and it was in my mouth sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter. 11 And they said to me, "You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings."

The first assignment (vs. 8). The same voice that forbade John to write what the seven peals of thunder spoke (vs. 4), now commands him to take the open book or scroll from the hand of the angel.

The second assignment (vss. 9-10). John, in obedience to the voice, takes the book, but then the angel gives him another assignment. John is commanded to eat the book which will be bitter to his stomach, but sweet in his mouth. It will give him heartburn, but it will be sweet to the taste. What is the point of this? Eating is often a picture of learning and assimilating the word of God (cf. Ezek. 2:9-10; 3:1-4, 14; Jer. 15:15-18). The opened book undoubtedly contained prophetic truth and revelations from God. As a book already opened it could have contained Old Testament truth, but it also could well have contained new revelation that John was about to write as contained in the rest of Revelation regarding the subjects mentioned in verse 11. As Ryrie says, "the point of this interlude during which John was commanded to assimilate these prophecies before he wrote them is simply that it is necessary for the prophet of God to let the word of God affect him first before he ministers it to others."⁷

In verse 10 John obeys the angel, and as the angel said, it was sweet in his mouth, but bitter in his stomach. Doubtless he was delighted with the fact of this revelation from God which revealed that God was taking over His kingdom and would defeat His enemies. But as he pondered and reflected on the nature of this revelation (God's wrath, the revelation of the man of sin, Satan's kingdom, the worship of the beast, the persecution of Israel, the manifestation of man's heart and rebellion, etc.), the message of the book became bitter in his stomach—it gave him spiritual heartburn.

Likewise today we are invited to come to the Word of God and feed on its truth. As we study prophecy and contemplate the nature of our times we become more confident that the return of the Lord draws ever nearer and in this we rejoice, but these are days of ever increasing spiritual darkness, rebellion and apostasy. This saddens the heart and greatly increases the burdens and pressures of life. It causes bitterness of soul.

The third assignment (vs. 11). In verses 4 and 8 a voice from heaven speaks to John, then the mighty angel in verse 9. But now we read "and they (plural) said to me." The verb is a third person plural, "they said." This is what is known as an indefinite or a literary plural sometimes used to hide the precise subject. Whether this came from the voice from heaven, or from the angel, or from some other source is not important. It is left indefinite. What is important is the commission or the assignment. "You must (Greek *dei*, pointing to a moral necessity) prophesy again (following this interlude, he must once more pick up his prophetic pen) concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings."

"Many," the Greek *pollois*, a plural dative from *polus*, is emphatic and strongly stresses the vastness of that which he must prophesy. The prophecies of the last days of the Tribulation encompass not just one people, or king, or domain,

⁶ Walter Scott, *Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Fleming H. Revell: Westwood, NJ, pp. 223-224.

⁷ Ryrie, *Revelation*, p. 69.

but the entire earth that belongs to God—that He is about to reclaim. The whole world will lie in rebellion and apostasy. All the races, peoples and kingdoms will come under the power of the beast and his satanic system.

The word “concerning” is the preposition *epi* used with the dative case. Contextually, this means, not to them, nor in their midst or presence, nor against them, but concerning their individual cases as it will exist in these final days of the Tribulation. This is undoubtedly the content of the little book, much of which we have in the final portion of Revelation and perhaps also in Old Testament prophecies such as Daniel.

Lesson 19: The Temple, the Two Witnesses, and the Seventh Trumpet (11:1-19)

Perhaps no passage in Revelation is more controversial than chapter 11. There is a wide diversity of viewpoints regarding the interpretation of this chapter, but most of this occurs because men try to symbolize or spiritualize the city, the temple, and the events that are portrayed here. Once again when the passage is taken in its normal or literal meaning much of the diversity immediately vanishes because the literal method provides a check on the imaginations of men and gives an intelligent understanding of the passage. Unless, of course, one is biased against the supernatural elements of these verses. As John Walvoord writes:

The guiding lines which govern the exposition to follow regard this chapter as a legitimate prophetic utterance in which the terms are taken normally. Hence, the great city of 11:8 is identified as the literal city of Jerusalem. The time periods are taken as literal time periods. The two witnesses are interpreted as two individuals. The three and half days are taken literally. The earthquake is a literal earthquake. The seven thousand men who are slain by the earthquake are seven thousand individuals who die in the catastrophe. The death of the witnesses is literal as are their resurrection and ascension.¹

Again it is important to keep in mind that chapter 11:1-13 does not advance the chronological sequence of the prophetic events, but parenthetically describes: (a) the ministries of the two witnesses, which occur over a three-and-a-half-year period, and (b) the spiritual condition of the temple and Jerusalem as it will exist in the Tribulation. With 11:14 and following the last woe and the seventh trumpet are introduced along with heaven's response because of what this means to the kingdom of God. Not until chapter 15 will the chronological developments continue again, namely the pouring out of the seven vials which constitutes the seventh trumpet and the last woe.

The Measuring Rod and the Temple of God (11:1-2)

1 And there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, "Rise and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and those who worship in it. 2 "And leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months.

Verse 1. "And there was given me a measuring rod like a staff." "Measuring rod" is kalamos, "a measuring reed or rod." This came from a species of cane that grew in the Jordan Valley to a height of 12-20 feet. It was very straight, light, and was cut and used for measuring rods, usually 10 feet long. It was known as the "giant reed."

"Like a staff." Staff is rhabdos, a long rod or staff. It was used on a journey, or was carried by a ruler, or by a judge or umpire. In fact, a rhabdouchos was one who carried a rod or staff as an umpire or judge. Here John is no longer merely a witness, he is now to become actively involved, a kind of rhabdouchos to measure or judge the temple for God.

"Arise and measure." "Measure" is the Greek word metreo,, and means "to measure either a space, number, or value." Here it signifies that (a) this all belongs to God, the temple, the altar, and the worship involved, and (b) that he was to measure or judge the value, worth, and character of the standards of the temple and its worship and the people therein.

"Temple" here is naos and refers only to the Holy of Holies, and the Holy Place, part of the whole temple complex, the hieron, the name used of the entire temple at Jerusalem. It presupposes the rest of the temple areas. But only the priests could serve in the naos.

"Altar" here refers to the brazen altar in the court where others could come to make their sacrifices.

¹ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1966, p. 175.

Why is John sent to measure the temple? This is saying in effect that man and his worship are always judged by the standards of God. Further, believers, like John who have that standard, are responsible to judge by that standard in order to avoid apostasy and are to be instruments to turn men to Christ and true worship. Regardless of what man thinks, the only thing that counts is God's judgment and standard of both our lives and our worship. As mentioned above, note that this measuring reed, the kalamos, was usually 10 feet long—far taller than any man. This suggest to us that our worship and character must come up to God's standards, or man faces rejection and loss as it occurs here (1 Cor. 3:11-15; 11:17f; Heb. 10:23-39).

Therefore, no matter how beautiful the temple or church building, or the ritual and the priestly garb, or the prayers, or no matter how sincere the worshipper, it must all pass the test of the reed, the kalamas, or the kano,n, the Word of God. Necessary to passing the test is our worship which must be done in faith, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and the Scriptures, and in the Spirit (John 4:22-24). Verse 8 will give us God's evaluation and judgment of the Tribulation system. Ryrie says: "The measuring itself seems to be an act of knowing, claiming or staking out. In this act of John, God is giving assurance that He will take note of those who faithfully worship Him in the Tribulation days."²

Verse 2. "And leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it is given..."

The outer court refers to the court of the Gentiles. Literally the Greek text says "the court, the outer one of the temple, cast without and do not measure." We are told three things regarding the temple in verse 2: (a) John is told not to measure this court. (b) It is be left out because it is cast out, totally rejected by God. (c) It has been given to the nations who, in their rebellion to God, will tread under foot the holy city (Jerusalem) for 42 months.

Here we have a contrast. One part of the temple is measured, another part (the court of the Gentiles) is not. It is totally rejected, but why? Both parts are rejected and one part will be reclaimed for God, but not the other. Why? Because it represents the Gentile nations who will invade the holy city during the last half of the Tribulation beginning with the blasphemous actions of the beast (Dan. 9:27; Rev. 13).

One of the problems many have with taking this passage literally is the presence of the temple in Jerusalem. Many scholars believe John's gospel was written between A.D. 85-90 though some argue for a date before A.D. 70, but this is far from conclusive. If the later date is correct, there has been no Jewish temple in Jerusalem since A.D. 70. To make matters more difficult, the Dome of the Rock presently sits on the temple site, or at least a portion of it. This is a very important place of worship in the Arab world. To tear it down would cause tremendous international complications, and we see evidence of this on a daily basis in the news. But for the temple to be measured in the Tribulation, the temple would have to be rebuilt and the Jews would never build their temple on any other site.

This passage shows us that the Jews will again have a temple in Jerusalem during the Tribulation. The temple will be rebuilt very early in the first half of the Tribulation and the Jews will offer sacrifices there as they did in the time of Christ. So the temple worship of verses 1-2a will occur during the first half of the Tribulation, during the time of the treaty between Israel and the Roman prince, the beast of revived Rome (Dan. 9:27). This is the same temple in which the man of lawlessness, "who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God" (2 Thess. 2:4). The treading under foot the holy city (Jerusalem) for forty-two months occurs in the last half of the Tribulation—the last 42 months (three and a half years). This will begin when the beast breaks his treaty with Israel and desecrates the temple. This is the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet (Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24:15-21; cf. with Rev. 12:13-14 and 13:1). From this point on Jerusalem will come under siege by the Gentile powers (Zech. 12:2-4; 14:2, 12).

Thus, the strong wording of Revelation 11:2 and the contrast with verse 1 stresses that God rejects this whole religious system because it will be a product of the times of the Gentiles and a false Messiah. It will, however, have another 42 months to operate and then God will establish the true temple.

² Charles C. Ryrie, *Revelation*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1968, p. 71.

The Two Witnesses (11:3-13)

3 “And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.” 4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. 5 And if anyone desires to harm them, fire proceeds out of their mouth and devours their enemies; and if anyone would desire to harm them, in this manner he must be killed. 6 These have the power to shut up the sky, in order that rain may not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they desire. 7 And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them. 8 And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. 9 And those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations will look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. 10 And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry; and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. 11 And after the three and a half days the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were beholding them. 12 And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here.” And they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies beheld them. 13 And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; and seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

The Ministry of the Two Witnesses (11:3-5)

God’s Provision for the Two Witnesses

“And I will grant authority to my two witnesses” (vs. 3a). Literally the Greek simply says “And I shall give to my two witnesses.” What is given is not stated. The idea however, is that whatever is needed to fulfill their task, God will give it, i.e., protection (vs. 5), miraculous power (vs. 5), authoritative and effective testimony (vs. 4), and ultimate deliverance (vss. 11-12).

This reminds us that the Lord always provides the resources necessary to accomplish whatever He sends us to do. Our job is to stay occupied with the Lord and to obey Him. Because of His faithfulness and divine essence, He will supply according to His purposes until our job and His purpose and design for our lives is over (vs. 7). So never worry (Phil. 4:6-7), the LORD will always provide no matter how dark or ugly or how large or small; He supplies against the bite of the mosquito or against the charge of the elephant. We need to constantly remember, “the battle is the Lord’s” (1 Sam. 17:47).

“To my two witnesses.” The text does not simply say “to the two witnesses,” but “to my two witnesses.” “My” is a personal pronoun that emphasizes relationship and fellowship (cf. Acts 1:8). This perhaps implies ownership. We belong to Him and are put here on this earth to serve God. But surely this also reminds us that effective representation of Christ only occurs when men walk in close fellowship with the Lord.

The Nature and Character of Their Ministry

“And they shall prophesy...clothed in sackcloth” (vs. 3b). The words “witness, prophesy, and sackcloth” point us to the nature and character of their ministry. “Witness” is the Greek *martus* and refers to the witness or testimony of these men to the divine truth of God. “Prophesy” is *prophe,teuo,* which is related to the verb, *prophe,mi*, “to speak forth.” The primary idea of the word was “to speak forth, to herald a message, preach.” Included in this was the element of foretelling or the speaking forth *of* future events. But the gift of prophecy as found in the early church included with it the direct communication of a divine message from God (1 Cor. 14:29-33). During the Tribulation these undoubtedly will receive direct communication from God as in Old Testament times and with the New Testament apostles and prophets (cf. 2 Pet. 1:20-21; Acts 21:1; Rev. 10:11; 1 Cor. 13:2).

While some disagree with this, many scholars believe this gift is not now active. Men preach and herald the Word, the faith once and for all delivered, and proclaim the prophetic events spoken of in Scripture, but with the completion of the canon of Scripture which was founded on the ministry and prophetic gift of the apostles and prophets of the early church, this gift ceased (cf. Eph. 2:10-22; Jude 3, 20; with 1 Cor. 13:8-13; Heb. 2:3-4).³

“Clothed in sackcloth.” “Clothed” is a perfect passive of *periballo*, meaning “to throw around, about, to clothe.” The passive emphasizes that God caused them to be so dressed because of what it symbolized and the perfect tense (probably an intensive perfect) points to the present state of affairs; this would be their dress throughout their ministry.

“Sackcloth” is *sakkos* referring to a very coarse, dark cloth, often made of hair and worn like a sack. It expressed mourning, repentance and judgment. Their message will essentially be the message of John the Baptist, that of announcing the coming judgments and calling men to repent.

The Time and Length of Their Ministry

“For twelve hundred and sixty days.” In Scripture a prophetic year is 360 days. Thus the 1260 days equals three and a half years—exactly half of the seven-year Tribulation. The big question is in which portion of the Tribulation do they minister, the first half, last half, or in a portion of each? Many try to place their ministry in the first half, but there are a number of reasons that seem to favor the last half instead.

(1) Immediately after this teaching regarding their ministry there is the announcement of the third woe and the seventh trumpet (cf. 11:14-15). This seventh trumpet occurs right at the end of the Tribulation and results in the ushering in of the kingdom of God. Though chapter 11 is an interlude, it could imply a natural sequence or relationship and may indicate they minister in the last half.

(2) The two witnesses pour out judgment on any who would attempt to harm them (vs. 5). It would appear that this condition better fits the last half of the Tribulation after the abomination of desolation when the beast is seeking to be worshipped, when there is great anti-Semitism and persecution against all believers.

(3) The hideous acts of verses 9 and 10 also seem to fit better with the character of the last half of the Tribulation with the lawlessness of the beast and his system and the worship of Satan (13:4).

(4) The reaction of men in verse 13 with mankind terrified and giving glory to God also better fits the very end of the Tribulation than the middle or even somewhat later in the seven-year period. During the last half of the Tribulation men will worship the beast and Satan and exclaim “who is like the beast and who is able to make war with him?” (13:4). This could even be exclaimed after the death of these seemingly invincible prophets who are killed by the beast (11:8). But then, there is their resurrection, the voice from heaven, and the devastating earthquake (11:11-13). After this, those who are left, in terror, give glory to God instead of the beast.

(5) There seems to be a natural sequence and tie between verses 1, 2, and 3. In verses 1 and 2a we see the temple that is to be measured. We know the temple is present in the first half of the Tribulation (Dan. 9:27a). Then in verse 2b we have a reference to the court of the Gentiles and the 42 months (three and one-half years), when the nations will tread under foot the city of Jerusalem. We know this occurs in the last half of the Tribulation, after the beast invades Palestine (Dan. 9:27b). Right after this, we then have the mention of the two witnesses who prophesy for 1260 days (three and one-half years).

Note that days are used in reference to the two prophets or God’s witnesses, but months are used in connection with the unbelieving Gentile nations (cf. 12:6; 13:5). Why? Because God reckons time with believers on a daily basis, showing concern and care for His own. But not so with the unbelieving world.

³ For support of the cessation of the gift of prophecy, see *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 130, #520, Oct 1973, p. 315; *Contemporary Issues in the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit Part IV: Spiritual Gifts Today* by John F. Walvoord; Also *Bibliotheca Sacra*, see Vol 149, #593, Jan 1992 *Prophecy Rediscovered? A Review of The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, by Robert L. Thomas.

The Identity of the Two Witnesses

Because their miracles are similar to those of Elijah and Moses, and because Malachi 4:5 says “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible Day of the Lord” (Mal. 3:1), some believe one of these must be Elijah because Scripture says Elijah will come again. Thus, they insist these must be identified as literal characters out of the Old Testament. Further, Moses and Elijah were seen with the Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration. So many believe and teach the two witness here are Elijah and Moses, who are given bodies and who are brought back to earth. Others see them as Elijah and Enoch who were translated and never saw death.

The big question is are they literally Moses and Elijah (or Elijah and Enoch), or are they two men who will come in the power, spirit, and character of Moses and Elijah, etc., i.e., a virtual Elijah and Moses, but not literally Elijah and Moses?

There are several New Testament passages that bear on this question and shed important light on the problem.⁴

(1) Luke 1:17 clearly states that John the Baptist, as a forerunner of Christ, would go forth in the spirit and power of Elijah (cf. Mark 1:2-3 with Matt. 3:3), i.e., he was a virtual Elijah.

(2) Matthew 17:10-13 teaches us that Elijah had come and that John the Baptist was that Elijah.

(3) John himself said he was not Elijah, only a voice of one crying in the wilderness to prepare men for Messiah (John 1:21-22). John denied that he was a literal Elijah, though he saw his role as a virtual Elijah doing what the Malachi passage said Elijah would do (Mal. 3:1; 4:6).

(4) Matthew 11:7-14 adds some very interesting light on the whole issue. These verses show that John could have and would have fulfilled the Malachi passage if Israel as a nation had believed and accepted his message. But since they rejected both John and Messiah, another would have to come to fulfill the Malachi prophecy and this would need to occur prior to Christ’s second advent.

Since John could have and would have fulfilled the Malachi passage, it seems obvious the one who will come in the future, will be, like John, one who will come in the spirit and power of Elijah, a virtual Elijah, but not literally Elijah himself. He does not have to be a literal Elijah, or John could not have fulfilled the Malachi passage.

Thus, in Revelation 11, the two witnesses are not literally Elijah and Moses (or Elijah and Enoch), but two men whom God will raise up in the spirit and power of their Old Testament counterparts. They are similar from the standpoint of their ministries, but similarity does not mean identity. Their ministries are similar because they are ministering to Israel and such similarity would carry great significance to the Jews.

Some try to symbolize these two witnesses as movements or powers that occur in some religious sense. But clearly, these two witnesses are specific persons and not symbolical of movements or powers. This is proven by the article used with the word “witnesses” and by the fact that the term “witness” in the New Testament is always used of persons. Further, we must remember that they are not named in the text which would indicate that God does not intend for us to identify them. They are simply two exceptional men whom God will raise up in the Tribulation.

The Traits of the Two Witnesses (11:4-6)

Their Character

“These are two olive trees and two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth” (vs. 4). These two figures are taken from Zechariah 4:1-14 in order to emphasize the truth of this Old Testament passage as it will relate to these two witnesses of the Tribulation.

Likewise, in this Old Testament passage there were two witnesses to God’s people: Joshua, the high priest (Zech. 3), and Zerubbabel, the civil leader (Zech. 4). Further, this Old Testament passage occurred in connection with the rebuilding of the temple, which was small by comparison to the temple of Solomon that had been destroyed.

⁴ For an excellent discussion on this whole question see, *Things To Come*, by Dwight Pentecost, Dunham, Findlay, 1958, pp. 306ff.

This smallness had become a matter of reproach to the people who were looking at things as they appeared (according to sight) rather than spiritually (according to faith) (cf. Zech. 4:10). When Zechariah saw the two olive trees and the lampstand he asked, “What are these my Lord?” The answer given was a word of comfort and encouragement, but also a warning. In verse 6 he is told, “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel saying, not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts (armies).”

So in the Tribulation, the temple will be an apostate one, Jerusalem will be like Sodom and Egypt (Rev. 11:8), and the beast will at this time have set up his image in the temple, proclaiming himself as God (cf. 2 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 13:2-8). Regardless, in times of apostasy and “small things” (Zech. 4:10), when things seem bad, God has His witnesses who operate, not by the power and skill of men, but by the power and might of the Lord of Armies.

The olive tree was a source of olive oil used to fuel lamps in ancient times. The oil speaks of the ministry of the Holy Spirit who is God’s anointing bestowed upon men to enable them for service. The olive oil, then, is the fuel used in the two lamps that enabled them to burn brightly, to shed their light (witness) to a lost and needy world. So likewise, the two witnesses of the Tribulation will operate in the power and might of the Holy Spirit. Their power and effectiveness does not lie in human ability or ingenuity, nor can it be hindered or stopped by the nature of the circumstances. The Lord of Hosts (Armies) would be at work within them.

Now remember, the Tribulation will be back under the Old Testament economy and this includes the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit. *Indwelling will again be selective to certain believers, rather than universal to all believers as it is today.* The universal indwelling of all believers will end at the removal of the church at the rapture and won’t happen again until the Millennium. The fulfillment of Joel 2 to Israel is dependent on turning to Christ and faith (cf. John 14:16-17; 2 Thess. 2:6-7; Joel 2:12-18; 2:28, 32). Joel 2 has been partly fulfilled in the church, but can’t be completely fulfilled to Israel until there has been repentance and restoration.

Their Conduct

Their ministry is characterized in conduct by four great miraculous powers: (a) they can kill their enemies with fire; (b) withhold rain for three and one-half years; (c) turn water into blood; and (d) bring plagues upon the earth (2 Kings 1:10-15; 1 Kings 17:1f; and Exodus 7-11).

Why these specific miracles? First, they are a means of defense and protection to the two witnesses until their ministry is over (Rev. 11:5). But second, these specific miracles occur because of their significance to Israel. They will be used to turn the hearts of the Jews to the Lord in preparation for the coming King.

The Martyrdom of the Two Witnesses (11:7-10)

The Time of Their Martyrdom (11:7a)

“And when they have finished their testimony.” The word “finished” is the Greek *teleo*, and means “to finish in the sense of accomplish, complete.” The tense is perfect which looks at their work as accomplished, done, but with continuing results. The results are souls saved and glory to God. They were invincible until their work was done, and then, according to God’s own timing and perfect plan, He allows their termination.

This illustrates the biblical truth, as with Job, Moses, Elijah, Peter, Paul and John, that the believer who is in the will of God need fear no man or system of the world or Satan; no one can shorten our life nor stop our work for the Lord until He Himself is ready. Remember, Revelation 3:7-8, He is the One “who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens.” When He puts before us an open door, no one, not even Satan himself can shut the door! Of course men can terminate their own lives or kill their own ministry by personal rebellion, carnality, and regression from the Lord as was the case with Saul and as did some of the Christians at Corinth. But people bring this on themselves by turning away from God and staying out of His plan and grace (1 Cor. 11:30-32; 1 John 5:16-17).

The Means God Uses (11:7b)

“The beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them.” “The beast” mentioned here is the first of 36 references to one called the beast that will occur from this point on in the

book of Revelation. Since chapter 13 describes and develops the beast and his political-religious system in detail, we will wait until then to discuss the beast. Here we are simply told that he is the one who makes war, overcomes, and kills the two witnesses. Their ministry has been diametrically opposed to his purposes, so the beast goes all out to hush their testimony, which he is unable to do until the end.

“That comes up out of the abyss.” Literally, “the beast, the one ascending up out of the abyss.” Walvoord sees this as a reference to Satan since he comes up out of the abyss (cf. Rev. 9). Thus he writes, “The beast out of the pit is Satan. The beast out of the sea is the world dictator (13:1). The beast out of the land is the false religious leader of that Day (13:11).”⁵ Everywhere else in Revelation, the title, “the beast,” refers either to the world dictator who is the head of the revived Roman empire and the ten nation confederation, or to his system over which he rules. The reference here to the abyss may simply draw attention to the character, nature and source of this ruler’s power and governmental system, i.e., Satan. It does not mean the beast is Satan or a demon, but that he is demon possessed and Satanically inspired. Scott who believes the beast is the revived empire of Rome, writes, “... whilst its *historical* rise is human, its *revival* is satanic.”

“Will make war.” “War” is *polemos* and refers to a military campaign. He will finally make all out warfare against these two witnesses, but he is successful only by divine intervention, and only then at the end of the 1260 days when their work is finished.

“And overcome them.” The verb “overcome” is *nikao*, meaning “to conquer, overcome.” John uses it of believers in 1 John 5:4-5 and in Revelation 2:7, 17; 3:6, 13 of believers who are overcomers by faith. Because the two witnesses are overcomers in Christ, this victory is only temporary by divine design. It is only an apparent victory, not a real one. God uses their death, as He so often does with believers, to His own purposes and glory. Christ, our Victor and Overcomer, has removed the sting of death. Their death is not the end of their testimony.

The Display (11:8-9)

In these verses we see that their bodies will be put on public display as a symbol and proof of the beast’s power who has at last been able to kill these invincible witnesses. You might say it is a satanic object lesson to the world, one designed to say, “evil has conquered, Satan has won; Satan’s man is the true God, worship Him.”

“Their dead bodies” is the Greek *ptoma*, literally, their “fallen corpses.” This implies they are left right where they fall with no burial as the Old Testament Law required or demanded for even the worst of criminals (Deut. 21:22-23). Such an act reflects the total degradation of man under the lawless system of the beast, the man of lawlessness (2 Thess. 2). Their fallen corpses lie in the streets of the great city (Jerusalem) which is mystically called Sodom and Egypt.

“Mystically” is the Greek *pneumatikos* meaning “spiritually, pertaining to the Spirit”, or “caused by the Spirit.” Jerusalem is called such by the Spirit of God. In Scripture, ‘Egypt’ stands for the world, and ‘Sodom’ for the flesh. The point is the great city is dominated by the world system, by the flesh, and by Satan through the beast. The city has spiritually become totally reprobate along with the rest of the world.

According to verse 9 it is apparent that great throngs of people, people from all over the world, come to view the bodies and see the victory of the beast. Again we see the fiendishness and monstrous rebellion of man in the hardness of his heart against God. I am reminded of Psalm 2:1-6.

1 Why are the nations in an uproar, And the peoples devising a vain thing? 2 The kings of the earth take their stand, And the rulers take counsel together Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, 3 “Let us tear their fetters apart, And cast away their cords from us!” 4 He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them. 5 Then He will speak to them in His anger And terrify them in His fury, saying, 6 “But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain.”

⁵ Walvoord, p. 181.

The Effect (11:10)

“And those who dwell on the earth.” Literally, “those dwelling settled down upon the earth, i.e., the earth dweller.” In John this is practically a technical term for unbelievers, for those totally at home on the earth and devoid of any heavenly hope, concerns, or desires (cf. 3:10, 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 14; 17:8).

“Dwell” is *katoikeo*, from *kata* meaning “down” and *oikeo*, “to dwell.” It means “to settle down, be at home, live permanently.” It is used of the Lord living in the believer in Ephesians 3:17 and in some MSS of the Holy Spirit in James 4:5. (Other MSS have *katoikizo*, “to cause to dwell, be at home.”)

“*Will* rejoice over them and make merry; and they will send gifts.” Here is a kind of hellish Christmas, giving gifts not in celebration of the birth of Christ, but over the death of His two witnesses. “Rejoice” is *chairō*, meaning “to be glad, happy.” “Make merry” is *euphrainō*, “to make merry at a feast, have a party.” They will have a party and declare a holiday because of their death. The first two verbs (“rejoice” and “make merry”) are in the present tense with the third (“send gifts”) being in the future. Of course, the context shows this is all future, but John uses the present tense (a future present) to draw our attention to the certainty and the continuous nature of the merry making that will go on during the three and a half days.

Ironically this is the only mention of rejoicing on earth in the Tribulation. But their rejoicing will quickly be turned into sorrow, pain, and fear (11:13). Of course such action show they had rejected the message of the two witnesses. This is also indicated by the fact their message caused them much torment.

“Because these two prophets tormented.” Here we see the reason for the fiendish party. “Tormented” is the Greek *basanizō*, “to torment, torture, to cause severe pain and distress, mentally or physically.” The message of the prophets that could have brought great joy and peace, brought the opposite because they had hardened their hearts against God.

Does this not remind us that if one continues to reject the Word of God (that gives a peace that passes all understanding and a joy the world can’t give), that same Word, through the hardening of the heart, will bring torture to the soul and joy only over the apparent defeat of God and His people (Heb. 3:7f). O how we need to realize that negative volition to God’s Word is dangerous. The consequences are appalling.

The Resurrection of the Two Witnesses (11:11-13)

Their Resurrection (11:11)

“And after three and one-half days.” This is long enough for the bodies to have begun to decay. As the Lord did with Lazarus, God waits until there is no question about their death, then suddenly God intervenes.

“The breath of life from God.” “From” is *ek* meaning “out of.” The very life-giving breath from God Himself is breathed into them (Gen. 2:7) and “they stood on their feet.” “Stood” is an aorist tense and may stress suddenness. They are pictured lying there on the street with the party going on, and then suddenly, they stand up like a man waking up from a nap. What an effect this will have!

“And great fear fell...” “Fell” is also an aorist and stresses the suddenness of the effect. From drunken merry making one moment to soberness and great fear the next. The word “fell” is most graphic, like a wet blanket, they were enveloped in fear. Suddenly now, they begin to realize God was not dead nor defeated; Satan would not be victorious and they were doomed.

Their Translation (11:12)

Not only are they resurrected from death, but now, like icing on a cake, God’s voice from heaven is heard and they are taken up in a cloud, perhaps the Shekinah glory of God. Ryrie says: “A crowd will be standing around or filing past their bodies lying in the street. Undoubtedly there will be television coverage. Suddenly they will stand up, a voice (not the announcer’s!) will be heard from heaven; the two witnesses will disappear out of sight in the cloud of glory.”⁶

⁶ Ryrie, *Revelation*, p. 74.

Walvoord also has an interesting comment here:

Though there are similarities between this event and the rapture of the church, the contrast is also evident. The rapture will take place in a moment, and apparently will not be gradual enough for people to observe. The parallel here is to the ascension of Christ on the Mount of Olives, when the disciples beheld Him ascending into heaven and, like the two witnesses, He was received by a cloud. This is a special act of God addressed to those who reject His grace and designed as a final warning of the supreme power of God over man whether in life or in death. This act of resurrection and catching up into heaven is distinct from any other mentioned in the Bible in that it occurs after the rapture and before the resurrection in chapter 20.⁷

The Great Earthquake (11:13)

Now as a further demonstration of God's power and sovereignty over the beast and his system, and with the effect of the preceding still vivid in their minds, a great earthquake occurs in and around Jerusalem killing 7,000 people. Those who are left become terrified and give glory to God. Perhaps some are saved through this, but the others will simply confess the glory and power of God without repentance, or faith. They are like the fallen angels who believe and know the reality of God, and yet tremble in their confirmed state of rebellion against God. Because of the hardness of their hearts, these will have become confirmed in their unrepentant condition. They have reached the point of no return.

The Seventh Trumpet and Third Woe (11:14-19)

14 The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly. 15 And the seventh angel sounded; and there arose loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever." 16 And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, 17 saying, "We give Thee thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who art and who wast, because Thou hast taken Thy great power and hast begun to reign.

18 "And the nations were enraged, and Thy wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to give their reward to Thy bond-servants the prophets and to the saints and to those who fear Thy name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth." 19 And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm.

The Announcement of the Third Woe (11:14)

The parenthetical section (10:1-11:13), which elucidated some of the details of the Tribulation, is now completed. In 11:14 we have the announcement that "the second woe is past." Literally, "has come" with the idea "has come and gone." Here John again resumes the sequential movement of the book. So the second woe, concluded in chapter 9, is now mentioned as an introduction to the third and final woe. Thus John says, "behold, the third woe is coming quickly." In 8:13 John was informed that the last three trumpet judgments, there called woes, would be more intense upon the earthdwellers. Now with 11:14 we are told the third woe is coming and quickly.

This is the seventh trumpet that will take us up to the return of Christ and the establishment of His kingdom. The picture here (vss. 15-19) is panoramic of the rest of the Tribulation. The stress is on the effects of the seventh trumpet: it ushers in the reign of Christ (cf. vs. 15 with 17). This judgment becomes the greatest woe because it includes the seven bowl judgments though they are not mentioned here. Chapters 12-14 form the third parenthetical section filling in more details of other key events and personages.

⁷ Walvoord, p. 182.

In verse 14 we are told the third woe “is coming quickly.” The word “quickly” is the Greek *tachu* and can mean (a) quickly in the sense of soon, i.e., the end of the age is near, or (b) “quickly” in the sense of “in rapid succession,” i.e., once the seventh trumpet is blown, its judgments will come like trip hammer blows in quick succession, the end will then be near. This last explanation best suits the conditions of the passage.

The Announcement of Christ’s Reign (11:15)

“And the seventh angel sounded.” The seventh and final trumpet is blown and immediately something happens in heaven; there is an immediate heavenly response.

“And there arose loud voices in heaven.” In contrast to 10:8 and 11:1 where a single voice was heard, now a great choir in heaven is heard praising God for what is about to occur. Note that their voices are “loud.” This stresses the joy and extreme exuberance over what God is going to do through the seventh trumpet.

“The kingdom of the world.” Some manuscripts have kingdoms (plural). If it were plural it would refer to all the kingdoms coming under the reign and authority of Christ. But the best manuscript support is for the singular, “kingdom.”

“Kingdom” (singular) refers to the reign and rule of the entire earth that God intended to be under man’s authority and rule, but was wrested from man by Satan (Heb. 2:5-8). Satan became “the god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4) and “the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working [as a ruling king] in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2). There are really only two kingdoms—Satan’s and God’s (cf. Col. 1:13). But through this trumpet and woe, Satan’s kingdom will be totally destroyed and the world will come under the lordship of Christ.

“Has become” is an aorist tense of the verb *ginomai* and means, “to come to be, become.” The aorist is an ingressive aorist and looks forward to the effects of the seventh trumpet, namely, the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth. At this point the seven bowl judgments have yet to be poured out, but they make up the seventh trumpet and will now fall in rapid succession. That they make up the seventh trumpet is clear from the fact that it is the last trumpet that establishes the rule of Christ on earth.

“Of our LORD and of His Christ.” “LORD” is *kurios* and is here used of *Yahweh* of the Old Testament and refers to God the Father. “Of His Christ” refers to the Messiah of Old Testament promise and expectation whom the Father would and has sent.

“And He will reign forever...” The millennial reign of Christ will last for only 1,000 years, but the reign of Christ will continue on throughout all eternity in the new heavens and the new earth. So here we have the fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies that look forward to the eternal rule of God when God’s will will be done on earth as it is in heaven (cf. Psalm 2:2-9; Dan. 2:35, 44; 6:26; 7:14, 26-27; Zech. 14:9; Matt. 6:10).

The Adoration of the LORD God (11:16-18)

The Actions of Adoration (11:16)

True worship results in action befitting the attitudes of the heart. So here, the 24 elders (the representatives of the church age saints who have already received their crowns and cast them before God) now recognize that it is time, or soon will be, for the reward of Old Testament and Tribulation saints. The coming of the kingdom will be connected with the giving of rewards to the faithful servants of God (Matt. 24:42-25:30). In recognition of God’s faithfulness to His people and the sovereign actions of God, they rise from their thrones (wherein they reign with Christ) and fall on their faces in deep respect and adoration of God. While they reign with Him they recognize that this is all because of who and what God is and what He has accomplished through the Lord Jesus.

The Ascriptions and Assignments of Adoration (11:17-18)

In these verses thanksgiving is given for five things. Two are ascriptions of praise to God regarding His person and three are assignments to which God has committed Himself.

(1) Continual thanks (present tense) **for God’s person.** “Almighty” is the Greek *pantokrator*, from *pas* “all” plus *krateo*, “to rule, be master, to be strong, mighty.” It means possessing all power and rule. It speaks of God’s

sovereignty and omnipotence as the supreme ruler of the universe. Next God is praised for His eternity. In the better manuscripts “who is to come” is here left out. Why? Because, as John looks forward to this point in history, God has come.

(2) Thanks is given because at this point in history God will be exercising His complete sovereignty. The elders say “because you have taken your great power.” “Have taken” is the perfect tense of *lambano*, “to take hold of, possess.” In His immutability God has always possessed omnipotence, but He has not always exercised His absolute authority or power over the earth. Here, at this point, He takes hold of it in the sense that He begins to exercise it absolutely. The perfect tense points to action accomplished with continual results. This stresses that once God so acts it will be permanent and the world will begin to experience the results.

(3) Thanks is given because now God truly, through the exercise of His great power, begins to reign. The phrase “and have begun to reign” is an ingressive aorist and denotes the entrance into a state or condition. The Tribulation judgments, as shown previously in chapter 5, represent the first steps of God in beginning to take the reigns of government. This is especially true at this point in the Tribulation because the return of Christ is now so near.

(4) Thanks for the display of God’s wrath (vs. 18). Here we have the fulfillment of Psalm 2. Just before the return of Christ, as part of the sixth bowl, the armies of the world will be gathered together in the Plain of Esdraelon or the Valley of Decision (Rev. 16:16; Joel 3:14). At this point, as never before, the nations are enraged against one another and against God (Rev. 19:19). But their wrath is impotent against the omnipotence and the holy wrath of God. So John adds “and Your wrath came.” In this context especially, this refers to the final phase of the Tribulation, the seventh trumpet and the seven bowl judgments that are concluded by the personal return of the Lord. “Came” is a culminative aorist and stresses an event or action from the viewpoint of its results or effects. God’s wrath when it comes will overcome the rage of man. It will bring doom and judgment and an end to rebellion.

(5) Thanks is given for the judgment and reward of Old Testament saints—including Tribulation saints. “And time came for the dead to be judged...” Literally the Greek has “and the time of the dead to be judged and to give the reward to Your bond servants...” This refers to the resurrection, judgment, and reward of Old Testament saints at the end of the Tribulation, Daniel’s 70th week, just prior to the millennial reign. This includes Tribulation saints as well because they are a part of Daniel’s 70th week, which concludes God’s program for Israel before the Millennium (cf. Dan. 9:24 with 12:1-3 and Rev. 20:4-5).

In looking back over verse 18, note that three things are said: (a) “The nations were enraged.” Here we have the reaction of the world in the Tribulation, especially in the last portion at Armageddon. (b) “And Your wrath came.” In the context this particularly speaks of the final out pouring of divine judgment in the seventh trumpet. (c) Literally “and the time of the dead to be judged.” This speaks of the resurrection of Old Testament saints. Now each of these areas are given further elaboration in the last part of verse 18, but in inverted order.

The dead are not only judged, but they are rewarded. These are only Old Testament and Tribulation saints who are resurrected. The context makes this clear. They are “Your bondservants, the prophets,” “saints,” and “those that fear Your name, small and great.” As mentioned above, this fits precisely with Daniel 12:1-3 and Revelation 20:3-4. Unbelievers await the Great White Throne Judgment and the church is already in heaven.

God’s wrath aimed at the enraged nations is taken up in the last part of the verse in the words, “to destroy those who destroy the earth.” This refers to the final judgments that are aimed at those living on earth. These will be either killed outright or removed by Christ at the judgments of the Jews and Gentiles that will occur at the end of the Tribulation (Matt. 24:25; Rev. 19).

The Ark of the Temple in Heaven (11:19)

We should note that this chapter began with the apostate temple on earth, but closes triumphantly with the heavenly temple in view. Again this stresses, as in Isaiah 6, the awesome holiness of God, the basic cause of God’s wrath (Heb. 1:13). Remember, this earthly, apostate temple is desecrated by the beast, but he cannot touch the heavenly temple which reflects God’s perfect righteousness, perfect justice and majesty.

The things seen in the temple are symbolical of: (a) the presence of God by the Shekinah glory which hovered over the mercy seat; (b) the faithfulness of God as evidenced by the contents of the Ark—the Law which guided God’s people, Aaron’s rod, a picture of resurrection, and the pot of manna, a picture of the person of Christ and daily provision; and (c) God’s divine holiness which could not be approached without blood, and spoke of the sacrifice of

Christ. All this is seen in heaven to remind the Jews that God is going to fulfill His covenant promises. It is to encourage faith in Christ.

Accompanying the sight of the Ark is lightning, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm all of which are signs of doom and judgment. God in His absolute holiness must deal with the sin and rebellion of man. But before this judgment is poured out in the seven bowls of judgments, the chronological sequence is again interrupted to portray other events and situations that will be in existence during the last half of the Tribulation. This will serve to highlight the dramatic return of Christ as he comes back in the midst of such horrendous conditions.

Apart from the outpourings of the vials, which occur in rapid succession, there is little chronological movement from this point until chapter 19 and the second coming of Christ. Events and situations are now introduced which are concurrent with the seals and the trumpets. These serve to emphasize the dramatic climax of this period in the coming of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.⁸

⁸ Walvoord, p. 186.

Lesson 20: The Angelic Conflict (12:1-17)

War on Earth: Phase I (12:1-6)

1 And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; 2 and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth.

3 And another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems. 4 And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven, and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child.

5 And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne. 6 And the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she might be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

With chapter 12 we begin another parenthetical and explanatory portion of Revelation that discusses seven great personages of the Tribulation, particularly of the last half. These seven personages of 12:1-14:20 are: (a) the woman who represents the nation Israel (12:1-27); (b) the great red dragon, a picture of Satan (12:3-4); (c) the male child, the Lord Jesus (12:5); (d) Michael who represents the holy angels (12:7); (e) the remnant of the woman, regenerate Israel (12:17); (f) the beast out of the sea, the world dictator (13:1-10); and (g) the beast out of the earth, the false prophet and religious leader of the world (12:11-17).

Chapter 12 is descriptive of warfare, but it is primarily a conflict involving angelic forces, particularly, the fallen angels or the demonic world under Satan's authority. Of course, Satan often employs human means to accomplish his purposes (as with the persecution of Israel) but what we must always keep in mind, as this chapter reinforces, is that behind the scenes is our nefarious arch enemy, Satan and his demonic forces. The warfare of this chapter occurs first on earth (12:1-6), then in heaven (12:7-12), and finally on earth again (12:13-17). In chapter 12 we have a clear revelation of the ultimate cause and answer to the problem of the anti-Semitism which has been a grim recurrence from the very early beginnings of Israel's history. Part of the reason for the hatred and persecution which the Jews have endured over the centuries is the divine judgment of God for disobedience and rejection of the Word (cf. Deut. 28:15-68 with Lev. 26:14f). But another reason is Satan's long-time hatred of Israel as the source of Christ, the means of Satan's defeat and condemnation. In Genesis 3:15 we have the prophecy of this conflict and God's declaration of Satan's defeat through the seed of the woman. The nation God chose for this, as seen in the covenant that God made with Abraham, was Israel. Thus, Israel has been the perpetual object of Satan's hatred, the ultimate cause behind all anti-Semitism.

The First Sign in Heaven (12:1-2)

This is the first of a number of places where the word *signs* occurs in Revelation. Regarding the signs mentioned in this section of Revelation, 12-14, Alan Johnson writes:

In this section there is what might be called a Book of Signs. While no signs (se,meia;...) appear in chapters 1 to 11, at least seven signs are mentioned in chapters 12 to 19 (cf. the seven signs in John 1-11). Three are in heaven (12:1, 3; 15:1); four on earth (13:13-14; 16:14; 19:20). Only one is a sign of good (12:1); the others are omens of evil or judgment from God. These signs explain and amplify previous material (e.g., the beast in 11:7 is more fully described in ch. 13) and also advance the drama to its final acts.

This intermediary section (chs. 12-13), preceding the final bowl judgments (15:1ff.), picks up and develops the theme of the persecution of God's people, which has already appeared (3:10; 6:9-11; 7:14; 11:7-10). Chapter 12 gives us a glimpse into the dynamics of the persecution of God's people under the symbolism of the dragon who wages war on the woman and her children (v. 17). Chapter 13 continues the same theme by telling of the persecution of the saints by the dragon-energized beasts...¹

“And a great sign appeared in heaven.” “Sign,” as used here and in verse 3, is the Greek *semeion*. It refers to something like a special event, an object, or even a miracle that is seen and that stands as a sign or symbol designed to reveal some special meaning, truth, or idea.

“A woman clothed with the sun...” There are four women mentioned in Revelation. These are (1) Jezebel (2:20), a woman who claimed to be a prophetess in the church of Thyatira, and who stands for false teachers within the church in the church age; (2) The harlot (17:4), the false religious system of the last days, apostate Christendom; (3) the bride (19:7), the true church, glorified and returning with Christ; and (4) the woman (12:1), the nation Israel.

As already indicated, the woman is the nation of Israel. This is evident for the following reasons: (1) Her description is reminiscent of Genesis 37:9-10 where these heavenly bodies, the sun and the moon, represent Jacob and Rachel. This identifies the woman with Israel and the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. (2) The 12 stars in her crown would link her to the 12 tribes of Israel or the 12 sons of Jacob, the patriarchs of Israel. (3) In verse 2 she is seen with child, one who rules with a rod of iron (vs. 5). This can be none other than Christ, who as promised in Scripture, was from the nation of Israel (Matt. 1:1-25; cf. also Psalm 2:8-9; Rev. 2:27; 19:15). (4) That she is Israel, the nation, and not simply Mary, the mother of Jesus, is clear from the fact she will be persecuted in the last half of the Tribulation (vss. 6, 13-17). So the woman is the nation of Israel, the matrix and source of Messiah.

The description given here is not merely to identify her but to describe her in queenly terms because of Israel's prominence in the plan of God and especially in the millennial reign of Christ. This identifies her with the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant (cf. Psalm 89:34-37).

Verse 2 describes the woman in travail, waiting to give birth to the Christ child. This undoubtedly refers to the sufferings of the nation and her troublesome and restless times at the first advent of Christ. She was even then suffering under not only the judgment of the deportations (see Matt. 1:11, 17) but the hatred of Satan. In fact, it was because of the Roman rule that Mary and Joseph had to make the trip to Bethlehem for the census during the winter when Christ was born.

The Second Sign in Heaven (12:3-6)

Immediately following the description of the queenly woman with child in suffering, another sign, a great red dragon, appears in heaven. This is not without special purpose. The secret and cause of all the anti-Semitism in the world is the presence and hatred of Satan. The red dragon is clearly identified in 12:9 and 20:2 as none other than Satan himself.

That the red dragon is called “great” points to the magnitude of Satan's power and activity in the world. “Red” emphasizes his murderous and blood thirsty character and behavior throughout history (cf. John 8:44). “Dragon” pictures his ferocious and intensely cruel nature. “Having seven heads and ten horns” relates him to the ten nation confederation of the revived Roman empire, the system of the beast (13:1). “Seven diadems” speaks of his ruling power, but also usurped power and authority which he has and will have especially in the last days. Satan is really a dragon, a hideous beast. Today he often appears as an angel of light; he masks his true identity, but in the Tribulation he will be seen for what he really is.

In verse 4, we read that his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven. But to what does this refer? There are three possibilities:

¹ Alan Johnson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12, Frank E. Gaebelein, general editor, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1981, p. 510.

(1) The stars are luminous bodies from heaven which are cast to earth as a judgment or as an act of anger by the dragon in the Tribulation. But the fallen stars are linked by implication at least with the rise and actions of the great red dragon.

(2) The stars are used metaphorically for heads of state gathered together under the dragon's power to create his world rule. But the stars are cast to earth, they are not found on earth.

(3) The stars stand for fallen angels who revolted with Satan at his fall which many Bible expositors believe is described for us in Isaiah 14:12-17 and Ezekiel 28:12-14. "Star" is a term used in Scripture of angelic beings and specifically of Satan (cf. Job 38:7a; Isa. 14:12; Luke 10:18; Rev. 9:1). In the light of the context (Rev. 12:7), then, it is not unlikely that the stars represent one-third of the angels who rebelled with Satan and who became his chief emissaries in his fight and hatred against Israel and the purposes of God (cf. Daniel 10 for an illustration of the great conflict of angelic beings in regard to Israel).

"And the dragon stood before the woman (i.e., Israel) who was about to give birth..." Verse 4a takes us back to the beginning, to Satan's original fall; now verse 4b skips hundreds of years and takes us forward to the first advent of Christ and Satan's efforts to destroy the Christ Child. In between were numerous attacks in Satan's attempt to defeat God's purposes through the seed of the woman and especially with the Jews. (a) Many believe that in Genesis 6 Satan tried to infiltrate the human race in order to destroy the promise of Genesis 3:15 by corrupting the true humanity of mankind. (b) In Genesis 10 and 11 Satan instituted the politico-religious system of Babylon with its mother-child cult under Nimrod and his wife, Semiramus.² (c) Then, through the rest of the Old Testament Satan attempted over and over again to defeat God's purposes with Israel through Pharaoh, through Amalek, through Balak and Balaam, etc., but always to no avail. (d) Finally, in Matthew 2:13, after Messiah was born, he tried through Herod to destroy the baby Jesus by putting to death all the boy babies two years and under (Matt. 2:13-18).

"And she gave birth to a son, a male *child*, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne." These words take us from the birth of Christ (verse 5a) to Christ's ascension and session. Though the earthly life and death of Christ are not mentioned, this assumes the historic facts of the cross and the resurrection which were both necessary for Christ to defeat Satan and rule on the earth (cf. Heb. 2:14; Acts 17:30-31; John 16:10-11; 12:31-33). "Caught up to God and His throne," the ascension and session, prove the facts of the cross and resurrection (Heb. 1:13). This is the proof of Satan's failure and of Satan's sure defeat (cf. Rom. 16:20). As Genesis 3:14-15 anticipates, Satan bruised Christ's heel (the cross), but Christ crushed Satan's head by His death and resurrection culminated by His ascension (cf. Col. 2:15). In between verses 5 and 6 intervenes the inter-advent age of the church and the first half of the Tribulation.

Verse 6 and the reference to the woman fleeing into the wilderness takes us to the trials of Israel in the last half of the Tribulation where she will be under great persecution for three and a half years, 1260 days. But we might ask, "What is the point of verse 6 to the whole picture thus far?"

The idea is this: since Satan failed to kill Christ, he will turn in dragon-like fury against the woman, Israel, and pour out his vengeance on her. Verses 13-17 give us the details of this persecution, but verses 7-12 point us to the immediate cause. Between Christ's first and second advents, the church of Jesus Christ is the prominent figure in the plan of God. So much of Satan's time and hatred is aimed at the church though the Jews still get their share as history so dramatically proves. But before the Tribulation begins the church will be raptured and out of the reach of Satan. However, something will occur in the middle of the Tribulation which will create the greatest anti-Semitism or Jewish persecution the world has ever known. This is described for us in the rest of this chapter.

War in Heaven (12:7-12)

7 And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. And the dragon and his angels waged war, 8 and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. 9 And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and

² For historical details regarding the mother-child cult, see *The Two Babylons* by Alexander Hislop, Loizeaux Brothers.

his angels were thrown down with him. 10 And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them before our God day and night. 11 “And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even to death. 12 “For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has *only* a short time.”

The First Opponent (12:7a)

The scene now shifts to heaven where a tremendous conflict occurs (though still future from our standpoint). The first opponent in this conflict is Michael and his angels. These are the holy angels of God led by Michael who is mentioned in Scripture in Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1; Jude 9, and here. There are four things that are significant about Michael we might mention here:

(1) His name is a composition of an interrogative pronoun, *mi*, “who,” and a preposition, *ke*, “as or like,” and the noun *El*, “God.” *Mi-cha-el*, means “who is like God?” It poses a rhetorical and negative question, one demanding a negative answer. Who is like God? No one! This is significant for this angel’s very name and presence stands as a rebuke and refutation to Satan’s boast in Isaiah 14:14b, “I will make myself like the most High,” i.e., “I will be like God.” It is interesting that God sends this angel to defeat Satan.

(2) His position and responsibility: (a) *His General Position*: He is one of the chief princes (plural) (Dan. 10:13), which suggests he has a high position among the angels of God. In Daniel 12:1 he is called the great prince and in Jude 9 he is “the archangel,” i.e., first or chief of the angels. Here, in Revelation, we read of “Michael and his angels,” those under his authority. It appears that Michael became the chief commander and leader of the holy angels after Satan’s fall. He undoubtedly possesses great power and strength. (b) *His special position and responsibility*: In Daniel 12:1 he is called “your prince,” i.e., Daniel’s and Israel’s prince. In Jude 9 we are told of his dispute with Satan over the body of Moses, Israel’s law giver and leader of the people out of the bondage of Egypt. Here, in Revelation 12:1, we see Michael standing up to bring about another phase of Satan’s defeat in this future time that Jeremiah called, “Jacob’s Distress” (Jer. 30:5-7). All of this indicates that as chief prince he has a special responsibility as guardian of Israel, especially during the Tribulation. Without the protection of Michael, the Jews, who have miraculously remained a distinct people throughout all their persecutions, would have ceased to exist. Behind the power and work of Michael, however, is the sovereign authority and might of God, for “who is like God?”

(3) Until this point in the Tribulation, Michael never lays a hand on Satan. In Jude, regarding the dispute over the body of Moses, we are told that Michael said, “the Lord rebuke you.” He respected Satan’s might and dignity as a beautiful creation of God and he was acting in accordance with God’s purposes with Satan.

(4) But at this point in the Tribulation, however, Michael gets to do what he undoubtedly has longed to do for millenniums; he gets to boot Satan out of heaven.

The Second Opponent (12:7b, 9)

The second opponent in the conflict is of course the great dragon and his angels (the fallen angels), the demonic host under his charge. In verses 9 and 10 the dragon is both identified and described. His history and his character stand in striking contrast to Michael. Ironically, his history and his titles show how devoid he is of ever coming close to becoming like God.

Appellatives (Names) that Describe Satan

(1) “The great dragon” stresses Satan’s vicious and cruel character and emphasizes his end time activity and behavior.

(2) “The serpent of old” clearly identifies him as Satan and draws our attention to his crafty character. It reminds us of the garden of Eden, the fall of man, his usurpation of man’s rule on earth, and his constant activity of temptation and deception.

(3) “The devil” is the Greek *diabolos* and means “slanderer, defamer.” It reminds us of Satan’s activity to impugn the character of God (see Job 1) and to accuse believers for whom Christ died (cf. Rev. 12:10 and Rom. 8:34).

(4) “Satan” is the Greek *satanas* and is derived from the Hebrew *satan* which means “adversary.” It points to Satan as the opponent of God, of believers, and of all that is right and good. Satan may appear as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14), but it is only a sham of deception to further aid him in his work as the arch adversary and opponent of God. In 1 Peter 5:8 Satan is called “your adversary, the devil.” Here the word “adversary” is not *satanas*, but *antidikos*, and though similar in meaning, *antidikos* is more explicit. It specifically refers to “an opponent in a lawsuit.” It was used of a court scene where accusations are made. God has indicted Satan for his sin, found him guilty, and sentenced him to the lake of fire (Matt. 12:41). By the implications of Scripture, as in the titles of Satan and in the keen interest of angels in man (cf. Eph. 3:10; 1 Pet. 1:12), it appears that Satan has appealed the sentence and called God unfair, unjust, and unloving. He has impugned the character of the supreme judge. He stands as the defamer of God’s character, the accuser of believers, and our adversary in general.

(5) “Lucifer,” “Star of the Morning,” and “Son of the Dawn” (Isa. 14:12). The term “Lucifer” of the KJV is *Hel-el* which means literally “the shining one.” Ironically, it comes from the Hebrew verb *halal* meaning “to shine, boast, praise.” As the shining one Satan got his eyes off of God, the source and cause of his brilliance, and became proud and boastful instead of being full of praise to God. Whenever we boast, we are occupied with ourselves, but when we are full of praise to God we are occupied with Him. This name stresses Satan’s state before the fall, and the nature and cause of his fall, the sin of arrogance.

(6) “The evil one” (1 John 5:19). Here, the word “evil” is the Greek word *poneros*, an active noun that points to an active and malignant kind of evil. It refers to what is not only ugly and useless, but to that which is injurious and destructive. Satan, as the *poneros* one, is actively engaged in destruction, in causing pain, injury and death. He is like a cancer to the human race and no time in history will reveal this like the Tribulation.

(7) “The ruler of this world” (John 12:31). This description points to Satan as the unseen head and energy behind the arrangement of world affairs as they stand in total opposition to the arrangements and divine viewpoint set forth in the Word of God. This would include such things as internationalism, materialism, humanism, religionism, spiritualism (demonism), hedonism, etc.

(8) “The god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4). This again emphasizes Satan’s rule and increased activity in the dispensation of the church which will be marked by a continual increase of apostasy and deception and by extreme moral degeneration. This title particularly associates him with blinding men to the good news of Jesus Christ.

(9) “The prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2). This title is of particular importance because it points to Satan as the head of the demonic hosts (fallen angels) who operate night and day in our immediate atmosphere to fill it with satanic deception, satanic viewpoint, doubts, and temptations. The word “power” is singular and refers to the demonic forces as a corporate body that operate as one under the authority and power of Satan, their prince (Eph. 6:12). “Air” is the Greek word *aer* and most likely refers to the immediate atmosphere above the earth which evidently forms their base of operations and the domain of the demonic, their sphere of power, authority, activity, and influence. In other words, our atmosphere is the vehicle or medium of their evil operations and influence. This not only looks at the locality of Satan’s operations, but emblematically portrays the prevailing influence or evil atmosphere in which every individual and the world moves—a world atmosphere of demonic influence controlled by Satan.

(10) “Of the spirit that is now working” (Eph. 2:2). This is often taken as another title for Satan. When it is so understood, it is taken as an appositional phrase describing “the prince of the power,” i.e., a further description of the prince. So the prince is also the unholy spirit (1 Cor. 2:12) who apes the operations of his divine counterpart by working in the sons of disobedience in opposition to the Holy Spirit.³

Now it is true that Satan, as a fallen angel, is a spirit being, actually an unclean spirit, who works in the world to promote disobedience and unbelief in mankind, but because of the rules of Greek syntax, others believe that this is not a reference to Satan, but to an impersonal force or atmosphere Satan controls. The reason is simply this. For the phrase, “of the spirit,” to be appositional, one would expect this phrase to be in the accusative case, but it is in the

³ See Rienecker/Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, Regency, p. 534; Frank E. Gaebelein, General Editor, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, p. 34; Everett F. Harrison, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, New Testament*, Moody Press: Chicago, Electronic Media.

genitive case. According to the principles of Greek syntax an appositional word or phrase would normally be in the same case as the noun or noun phrase it modifies, though there is the possibility for a different case by attraction to the word that precedes it. The word “prince,” *archonta*, is in the accusative case, but “of the spirit” is in the genitive case. So, as a genitive it describes another aspect of the prince’s (Satan’s) rule. The idea is that Satan controls unbelievers through an evil principle at work in the world. The result is a spirit of disobedience.

The last clause of verse 2, in this view, refers to the disposition, the outlook, the way of thinking and acting which one finds in the world of today. It is much like our phrase “the spirit of the age.” It is an outlook, a viewpoint, a disposition that Satan is constantly promoting. Note it is “in the sons of disobedience.” “Disobedience” is the Greek *apeitheia* which means “disbelief, obstinate,” and so “disobedient.” Men are disobedient to Scripture because of a spirit of disbelief and stubbornness—they will not be persuaded by the admonitions, appeals and instructions of Scripture.

“Working” is the Greek *energeo*,,, “to energize, be active, be at work.” It is in the present continuous tense. Satan is constantly at work to promote and produce his viewpoint in order to create disobedience in man. This will be at an all time high during the Tribulation. People are either being energized by the viewpoint and attitude of the world (Satan’s) which produces disobedience, or by the divine viewpoint of Scripture and the Holy Spirit which produces obedience. Notice in this regard that in Hebrews 4:12 we have *energes*, “active,” the noun form of the verb *energeo*,,s. Then in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 Paul uses this same verb of the powerful activity of Scripture. Both of these passages emphasize the active, energizing and working power of the word of God in the lives of men.

(11) “Belial” is another name used of Satan (2 Cor. 6:15). “Belial” is the Greek word *beliar* which comes from an Old Testament word meaning “worthless” or “hopeless ruin.” In 2 Corinthians 6:15 it is used as a name for Satan who is the epitome of worthlessness, hopeless ruin, and the source of all idolatry and the futile religious works of man.

(12) “Beelzebul” or “Beelzebub” or “Beelzeboul” (Mark 3:22; Matt. 12:24). There are three possible spellings of this word because of variant manuscripts and each spelling has a slightly different meaning so I have listed them all. (1) Beelzebul means “lord of the dung.” It is a name of reproach and uncleanness for Satan. (2) Beelzebub means “lord of the flies.” This has the same implication as the above. (3) Beelzeboul means the “lord of the dwelling.” This may portray Satan as the leader and head of the unclean spirits of demon possession! This best fits the context of Matthew 10:25 and 12:29 and has the best manuscript evidence behind it. Note that Matthew, Mark and Luke all define Beelzeboul as the prince of demons.

(13) “Abaddon” and “Apollyon” (Rev. 9:11). Abaddon is the Greek form and Apollyon is the Hebrew equivalent. They mean “destroyer” or “destruction.” As seen previously this name connects Satan with the demons of the Abyss (their leader) and their work of destruction on earth in the Tribulation. Primarily, however, it stresses his character and activity as the great source of destruction and ruin in the world.

Activities of Satan (12:9-12)

His Deception

In verse 9 Satan is spoken of as the one “who deceives the whole world.” The Greek text strongly stresses this as a continuous aspect of Satan’s character and activity. He is the deceiver. Then note that he deceives “the whole world,” literally, “the whole inhabited earth.” Satan, of course, is not omniscient nor omnipresent, but through his network of demonic powers and deceiving spirits he is able to operate all over the earth and at all times. Satan never takes a rest.

“Deceives” is the Greek *planao*,,, a causative verb meaning “to lead astray, cause to wander, mislead, deceive, delude.” He causes men to miss the plan and truth of God by his many methods of deception as: (1) lying against the truth; he is the father of lies (John 8:44, Gen. 3:1-5); (2) denying the truth (cf. 1 John 4:3 with 2 Pet. 2:2); (3) counterfeiting or imitating the truth (2 Cor. 11:3-15); (4) perverting or distorting the truth (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1-5 with Gal. 3:1-3). Satan has many traps and tricks that he uses to deceive. These include the traps of occultism (things covered over, mysterious, hidden, the area of spiritism); religionism (man doing good deeds from a works mental attitude in order to get God’s blessing); the sin trap (luring people deeper and deeper into sin and rebellion with the lie that happiness comes in hedonism); the miraculous trap (i.e., if it is miraculous then God must be behind it); the emotio-

nalism trap (seeking the experiences of emotionalism as a sign of spirituality and God's blessing); and the materialism trap (happiness comes in the abundance of the things you possess). These are not all of Satan's traps, but they comprise some of the major ones.

His Accusations

Verse 9. The atmosphere of our earth has been the special domain and sphere of Satan's operations as Job 1:7; 2:2; and Ephesians 2:2 make clear. However, throughout our history and into the middle of the Tribulation Satan also has access into God's presence, by God's permissive will, to accuse believers. He has had access into the ultimate regions of heaven. This is clear from Job 1:6; 2:2 and Revelation 12:7f. In the middle of the Tribulation, following this angelic conflict in heaven, Satan and his angels will be "thrown down to earth" (Rev. 12:9). "Thrown down" in verse 9 in both incidences is the verb *ballo*, "to cast, throw" or "to put or place." The accusing activity of Satan at this point will be brought to a close. This means the time of his judgment is drawing near (cf. Rev. 12:12 and 20:1-3).

Verse 10. At this point a voice is heard in heaven. It is a voice of praise announcing the millennial kingdom with its salvation accompanied by the power of God and authority of Christ. Salvation in this context refers not to one's personal salvation from sin's penalty, though this is included, but to deliverance from the reign of Satan and the Tribulation and to the completion of that which God will do to establish the reign and rule of Christ on earth.

With the casting down of Satan one more step, and a very important one at that, has been accomplished in moving toward the reign of God on earth. This must occur before peace can be established on earth. The angelic conflict and the slandering accusations of Satan that God has allowed throughout history to demonstrate His divine essence, especially His holiness, will at this point be just about over. Note that verse 10 gives the reason this step has been taken. It says "For the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, Who accuses them before God day and night." "Accuser" is the Greek *kategoros* and "who accuses" is a present adjectival participle of habitual characteristic action of the verb *kategoro*. Both the noun and verb are used of the formal accusations in a legal battle or court scene (cf. Acts 23:30, 35; 24:2, 8, 13, 16, 18, 19; 25:5, 11, 16; John 8:10). These words are also used of informal accusations (Matt. 12:10; Luke 6:7).

In Satan's accusations against believers, he is actually, according to the illustration of Job 1 and 2, attempting to malign and impugn the character of God. When believers sin, Satan accuses us before God. Perhaps it goes something like this: "There is John Doe, and he has just done such and such, and he is one of yours, why don't you judge him," or "There is Jane Doe, and she regularly does such and such. You see she doesn't love you."

The accusations are many and varied and they go on night and day, but the Lord Jesus stands there at God's right hand to intercede and plead our case as our Advocate and Great High Priest (Rom. 8:34; 1 John 2:1-2). Perhaps Christ's answer to these charges goes something like this: "Yes, they have sinned, and yes they do not love me as they should, but I have loved them, and I have died and paid the penalty for their sins—all of them. All aspects of God's character and divine essence have been propitiated or satisfied by my person and work. Be gone Satan, you have no case. Your judgment, Satan, stands and God is holy, righteous, loving and just."

In regard to the accusations of Satan, let's remember that he likes to promote his own dirty work. Accusing others is one of his chief activities. Let's not help him. Let's leave the dirty work to him.

Verse 11. Though anticipating Satan's wrath, this verse teaches us how Tribulation saints will overcome Satan and his attacks in the Tribulation. Three reasons are given for their victory over Satan. "Overcame" is a culminative aorist looking at the conclusion of their battles with Satan, i.e., the victory.

"They overcame by the blood of the Lamb." The blood of the Lamb, the basis of victory, refers to the person and work of Christ on the cross. This is the place, point in time, and the means of Satan's defeat (cf. John 16:8f; Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14). At the cross Jesus answered the accusations of Satan proving that God is perfectly consistent with His divine essence. The cross demonstrated that He is perfect righteousness, justice, holiness, love, mercy, and grace. Therefore men can always resist and overcome Satan if they will turn to Jesus Christ (see 1 John 5:4-6).

"And because of the word of their testimony" draws our attention to the *activity* that overcomes and defeats the attacks of Satan. The word of their testimony refers to the proclamation of the Word, Bible doctrine and the truth of Jesus Christ both by life and by lip. By the word of God known, believed, and applied by faith in consistent Christian living, believers are able to put to silence the accusations of Satan and to reveal him for what he is. Jesus Christ, our

Advocate, answers his accusation in heaven, but we too can answer them by proclaiming and living the Word. Satan and his world system claim that God is not what man needs; the world claims man's need is human knowledge, science, and the material things of life. But we demonstrate the world to be wrong when we do not live as materialists, when we love not the world nor the temporal things in the world (1 John 2:15-17). When we seek to live by God's Holy Word and live as sojourners rather than by the temporal details of life, we counter Satan's accusations (cf. Job 1 and 2 with Matt 4:4).

“And they did not love their life even unto death.” Here we see the *attitude* which overcomes Satan. In this statement, we see two vital attitudes of faith that give the capacity to serve the Lord regardless of what Satan might throw at us. First, there is the perspective of eternity that sees this life as a vapor, a training ground, and a preparation for eternity (1 Pet. 1:17-2:12). But this leads to a second attitude of faith, self sacrifice even unto death, for this life is not the end, it is only the beginning. Obviously then, lying at the foundation of such attitudes of faith is more Bible doctrine—the doctrine of death or dying, the doctrine of our eternal hope and our inheritance, an inheritance that is untouched by death, unstained by evil and unimpaired by time (1 Pet. 1:3-5; Matt. 6:19-21; 2 Cor. 4:16-18; 5:10).

Verse 12. In the middle of the Tribulation all hell will literally break loose on earth and this verse gives us the reason.

“On account of this” refers to the victory of the saints along with the casting down of Satan. Two things are said. First, there is to be rejoicing by the inhabitants of heaven. Satan no more can enter into the heavens and God's kingdom is about to be established on earth with Satan put away. Second, a woe or warning is pronounced upon those living on the earth because Satan who will then be restricted to earth knows his time is short. Knowing this fact, he becomes exceedingly wrathful, all of which he will turn against the world. The verses which follow 12:13-13:18 describe part of the activity of his wrath.

In this section Satan as the great opponent of God is pitted against the Lord Jesus in the following ways: (a) As the accuser he stands in opposition to Christ as Priest and advocate of believers (Rev. 12). (b) As the dragon and source of the beast, the world dictator, he stands opposed to Christ as King of kings (Rev. 13:1-10). (c) As the source of the second beast he stands opposed to Christ as the Prophet, the one who truly reveals God (Rev. 13:11-18).

War on Earth: Phase II (12:13-17)

13 And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male *child*. 14 And the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, in order that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. 15 And the serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood. 16 And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth. 17 And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

The Persecution of the Woman (12:13-16)

With the mention of Satan's wrath and his very short time, the scene moves back to earth and Satan's final activities on earth before he is cast into the abyss (20:1-3). It is important to note that the persecution of the woman who is Israel (12:13-16), the persecution of the godly remnant of believers (12:17), and the rise of the system of the beast (13:1f) all proceed as a result of Satan's expulsion from heaven and restriction to earth for the last half of the Tribulation.

Verse 13 shows us that it is when he realizes his time is short that Satan promotes his attack against Israel. His expulsion from heaven is proof of this. This is the motivating force behind many events that occur during the Tribulation, events that are all related in some way. For instance:

(1) It is probably at this point when the King of the North (which many believe is Russia or at least countries that lie in the southern portion of what used to be the Soviet Union) will move against Israel; this is one of the ways

Satan tries to persecute the woman (cf. Ezek. 38:1-11; Dan. 9:27). This occurs when Israel is in peace and safety living in unwalled villages and trusting in the treaty with the Roman prince.

(2) God destroys the King of the North while evidently still on the mountains of Israel, before she and her allies ever get to Jerusalem (Ezek. 38:16-23). Ezekiel 39:1f could refer to a second invasion at the end of the Tribulation after Russia has somewhat recovered from the first defeat.

(3) This creates a vacuum in the power struggle of the world and the Roman prince now sees his chance for world dominion. This is where he makes his move as the beast under Satan's direction. So he will then move into Palestine, break his treaty with Israel, commit the abomination of desolation and begin to persecute the woman, Israel (cf. Dan. 9:27b; 11:36-41; Matt. 24:15-22). All of this is the beginning of the Great Tribulation.

Verse 14. In this verse we see the first provision of divine deliverance figuratively portrayed as “the two wings of a great eagle.” This is based on two Old Testament passages, Exodus 19:4 and Deuteronomy 32:11-12, where God's protection and deliverance of Israel is likened to an eagle who carried her to safety from the clutches of Egypt. So likewise, God will work to deliver Israel from the clutches of Satan. Matthew 24:16 refers to this same flight where Christ exhorts those in Judea to flee to the mountains when they see the abomination of desolation take place in the city of Jerusalem.

Some writers try to find an historical counterpart by which many of these events may take place. Hal Lindsey is an illustration of this. He suggests that this deliverance could refer to a massive airlift out of the country to some natural fortress like the ancient city of Petra, the city of the Rock in the Jordanian wilderness south of the Dead Sea. He also suggests “since the eagle is the national symbol of the United States, it is possible that the airlift will be made available by aircraft from the U.S. sixth fleet in the Mediterranean.”⁴

Regardless of how God will accomplish this, the point of verse 14 is that there will be some kind of supernatural care and deliverance. However, Zechariah 13:8 reminds us of a sobering truth; two-thirds of the nation of Israel in the land will perish. Evidently many will ignore the warning of Matthew 24:16 and refuse to flee. These will be put to death.

The length of this persecution and protection in the wilderness is described as “a time, and times, and half a time.” “Time” is singular and refers to one unit or year, “times” is plural and refers to two units or two years, and “half a time” is half a unit or six months. Again we have a reference to the last three and one-half years of the Tribulation (cf. Dan. 7:25; 12:7).

Verse 15. The water poured out like a river to destroy the woman figuratively refers to Satan's all out effort to destroy the Nation in the greatest anti-Semitism the world has ever known. Regarding the flood here as literal water, Walvoord points out, “the contour of the Holy land, and the fact that Israel would probably not all flee in the same direction combine to make a physical interpretation... improbable.”⁵

Verse 16 declares that the earth helps the woman by swallowing the flood. This would again figuratively refer to the nature of the terrain of the wilderness and the country around Palestine. This area is unpopulated, rocky, mountainous, and would provide for many places of refuge for fleeing people as with the city of Petra. In other words, in this way the earth would protect Israel and swallow up her persecutors.

The Persecution of the Godly Remnant (12:17)

Some see this verse as pointing to a geographic contrast between the persecution of Israel in the land (vss. 13-16) and Israel outside the land in other portions of the world (vs. 17). However, the contrast is more likely between the nation as a whole symbolized in the term “the woman” versus the godly and believing remnant, “the rest of her offspring who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (vs. 17). The godly remnant are believers in the Lord Jesus, those who during the Tribulation will turn to Christ. The word used here for the remnant translated by the NASB as “the rest” is not the same word used in Romans 9:27 (hupoleimma) or in Romans 11:5 (leimma). Here the word is loipon, but they all come from the same verb, leipo,, and the context clearly shows that the believing and godly remnant are in view.

⁴ Hal Lindsey, *There's a New World Coming*, Harvest House Publishers, p. 178.

⁵ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1966, p. 195.

This verse serves to emphasize that the dragon will become totally frustrated and enraged over his inability to wipe out the woman, but he will become particularly angry with the believing remnant who will turn to Jesus Christ, believe the Word, and stand ready to die for their faith in the Savior.

From the standpoint of cause and effect, the way is now prepared for the events of chapter 13, the rise of the beast and his unholy system.

In this twelfth chapter we are given a kind of panoramic view of the angelic conflict and of the supernatural forces of darkness that are ever at work in the world and have been since the fall of Satan when he drew with him a host of angels who chose to follow Satan rather than God. Here is a sure fact of human history. Though generally unseen with the physical eye, it is quite clear through the revelation of God and occasionally obvious in certain demonic activity seen in the world in the demon possessed. Even then, many reject the cause as demonic and attribute it to some other paranormal source. But the apostle Paul makes clear reference to this conflict in Ephesians 2:2 and again in 6:11-12. In Ephesians 6:11-12 we are told: "Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*."

But in Revelation 12 we also see the anticipation of Satan's doom and that of his kingdom, though the rest of the story or the prophecy of his final doom is withheld until chapter 20. The great promise of the Bible is twofold: First, believers are victors through the victory of the Lord Jesus. Our need is to put on the full armor of God and to resist the devil in the victory of the Savior by always drawing near to the Lord. The second great promise is that Satan is a defeated foe whose days of freedom to create misery and pain and deception are numbered. Truly, may we rejoice with the heavens and those who dwell therein as they are told to do in 12:12. Why? For "The God of peace (the One who alone can give peace with God [reconciliation], the peace of God [the peace that comforts hearts], and world peace [an end to the turmoil we know today in our strife torn world]) will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you" (Rom. 16:20)

Lesson 21: The Beast and the False Prophet (13:1-18)

The Beast Out of the Sea (13:1-10)

1 And he stood on the sand of the seashore. And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns *were* ten diadems, and on his heads *were* blasphemous names. 2 And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like *those* of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority. 3 And *I saw* one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed *and followed* after the beast; 4 and they worshiped the dragon, because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?” 5 And there was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies; and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him. 6 And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, *that is*, those who dwell in heaven. 7 And it was given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them; and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him. 8 And all who dwell on the earth will worship him, *everyone* whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain. 9 If anyone has an ear, let him hear. 10 If anyone *is destined* for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints.

As one studies this section, it is helpful to keep in mind that this prophecy is closely tied to the prophecies of Daniel (cf. Daniel 2:42, 44; 7:7, 8, 20; 8:25; 11:36; 9:27). Also remember that this is still a parenthetical section describing one of the key forces, kingdoms, and personages of the Tribulation. In his first advent, the Lord Jesus said:

He who believes in Me does not believe in Me, but in Him who sent Me. 45 And he who beholds Me beholds the One who sent Me. 46 I have come *as* light into the world, that everyone who believes in Me may not remain in darkness. 47 And if anyone hears My sayings, and does not keep them, *I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.* (John 12:44-47) (emphasis mine).

Two beasts are described in chapter 13, one from the sea (vs. 1) and one from the land (vs. 11). With the beast out of the sea, we come to that one who, regardless of his claims as the white horse rider or peace maker, comes as a great source of darkness into the world. He comes not to save the world, but to damn the world. In essence, what we have in this chapter in the rise of the beast and the false prophet is nothing short of the ‘trinity from hell’ in that both are the product of the machinations of that old serpent, the devil or Satan.

His Appearance and Identity (13:1-2)

Chapter 12 closed with the dragon who, knowing that his time was short, was enraged with the woman (Israel), and with him going off to make war with her children. In the first verse of chapter 13 in our English Bibles, we find him standing on the seashore with the beast rising up out of the sea, but in the Greek text this sentence is verse 18 of chapter 12. There is a logical progression here of cause and effect. The dragon standing on the sand of the seashore continues the story of the dragon of chapter 12 who, as explained in 12:9, is none other than Satan himself. Some manuscripts have “I stood,” i.e., John stood, but the older manuscripts have “he stood,” i.e., the angry dragon.

The logical progression is the angry dragon looks out over the sea, a picture of the Gentile world powers which he dominates. He is looking for two things: (a) For the best method with which to persecute Israel, and (b) for the best way he can rise to greater power in order to be worshipped. Chapter 13 describes the method he will choose, the end-time form of the old Roman empire which, by this point in the Tribulation, has developed into a ten nation confederation with a very subtle leader, one whom Satan will now use in the most hideous ways.

Who is Satan? As seen previously, he is the prince of this world and the god of this age. He is the fallen angel and the anointed cherub who fell from his place of service because he sought to be like the most high. Satan has always been desperately set on *ruling* men and being *worshipped* by them; now he sees his chance. The mystery of lawlessness has always been at work, but after the church age, the Restrainer (God indwelling His church by the Holy Spirit) has been removed (2 Thess. 2:6-7). Also, as Newell points out:

Because men by trifling with the truth and utter impenitence have opened the way, God will now send them a strong delusion that they may believe the devil's lie ("*the lie*" II Thessalonians 2:11, Greek).

The beast, therefore, set before us in Revelation 13, is the dragon's masterpiece of delusion, leading to worship of *himself* (Revelation 13:4).¹

The "sand of the sea" undoubtedly portrays the many people who make up the nations, the number of whom is as the sand of the sea (Rev. 20:8). Standing on "the sand of the sea," suggests Satan's position as the usurper of the earth and its many peoples and of his power over them. Remember that Isaiah likens the nations to a roaring and restless sea that cannot be quiet and whose waters (their humanistic way of life and political agitation) can only churn up refuse and mud; a fitting picture of the products of a world without peace with God. They have no peace because they have rejected the true Prince of Peace and will turn to their own solutions to life and to the antichrist as their means to world peace, but in reality, this will be not much more than a self-centered pursuit for comfort and personal affluence (cf. Isa. 17:12-13; 57:20-21; Rev. 17:1, 15).

Before moving into chapter 13, a brief review of probable world conditions at this point will be profitable:

(1) The white horse rider who conquers (gains control) by peace tactics, power politics, and by his charismatic personality and persuasive language, has already risen on the scene (cf. Rev. 6:1-2; Dan. 8:23-25; 1 Thess. 5:11f). This brings about the ten nation confederation of Europe, a federation of nations that were once a part of the old Roman empire (cf. Dan. 2:42-44; 7:7-8, 20-24). We have the potential for this in NATO and in the European Common Market.

(2) The leader of this confederation will make a seven-year covenant with Israel designed to give Israel protection in the land and solve the very volatile Israel-Arab dispute of the coveted land of Palestine (Dan. 9:27). This treaty begins Daniel's 70th week or the Tribulation.

(3) Three kings of the confederacy rebel, but the rising dictator defeats them (Dan. 7:8, 20-25) and emerges as the undeniable leader.

(4) It appears that the King of the North will at this point in the middle of the Tribulation attack Israel who will then be dwelling in the land in comparative peace and safety because of the covenant or peace treaty. This king of the North comes with his Arab allies, the Pan-Arabic block and her other allies (Ezek. 38:1-9).

(5) These armies (the King of the North and his allies) are destroyed on the mountains of Israel by the direct intervention of God (Ezek. 38:21-23). Regarding Ezekiel 38:1 and this invasion, Ryrie writes:

Vs. 38:1 Chapters 38-39 describe a future attack on Israel and God's deliverance of His people. The invading armies come out of the remote parts of the north (38:15) to invade Palestine but are destroyed by supernatural intervention (39:3). Seven months will be required to bury their corpses (39:11-15), and their weapons will supply fuel for Israel for seven years (39:9-10). The time of the battle is unclear. Israel will be living in security, whether real or imagined (38:11-12), which might indicate that the battle takes place before the middle of the Tribulation, while Israel feels secure under a treaty with Antichrist. But the consummation of the battle involves birds and beasts eating the flesh of the warriors, a scene similar to the description of Armageddon at the end of the Tribulation (39:17-20; Rev. 19:17-18). Also, at the conclusion of the conflict the nations will understand the judging hand of God, and Israel will know that the LORD (Yahweh) is their God (Ezek. 39:21-22). Perhaps the first thrust will begin just before the middle of the Tribulation, with successive waves of the invasion continuing throughout the last part of that period and building up to Armageddon. John envisioned a battle of Gog and Magog at the conclusion of the millennial kingdom

¹ William R. Newell, *The Book of the Revelation*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1966, p. 185.

(Rev. 20:7-9), but this is different in time and characteristics from the one Ezekiel describes. The common use of Gog and Magog does not equate the two battles. Here those words refer to a definite area, but in Revelation they refer to enemies of Christ worldwide.²

(6) This destruction of the King of the North will create a tremendous political vacuum in the world. Until now the head of the ten nation confederation has been a leader of the European Confederation only, but now with the dragon surveying the sea of nations, he sees the way open for world domination through this European dictator whom he has undoubtedly helped to bring to power. So now enters the system of the beast. The white horse rider who won his territory by peace tactics, now becomes the beast under the possession of Satan himself (Rev. 13:2b).

From the context, the dragon looks out over the sea of nations and then implements the system of the beast to carry out his desired goals—the persecution of Israel and his own worship (cf. 13:4-6).

“Then I saw a beast.” “Beast” is the Greek *therion* (cf. 6:8; 11:7) which refers to a wild and rapacious animal or beast. It is to be contrasted with *zōon*, “living creature,” used for the holy angels, and with *kteinos*, “a beast of burden” as an ox. The *therion* points out two things. First, it portrays the brutal, bloody, uncontrolled and wild character of the dictator and his system; it is inhuman. Second, the *therion* portrays this antichrist figure as the epitome and paramount outgrowth of the character of Satan who is himself called “the great red dragon.”

As John is watching this scene, he sees the beast coming up out of the sea. “Coming up” is in a descriptive present which portrays the development of this man and his system through the political and military maneuvers that gradually bring him to power within the nations of Europe.

“The sea” as suggested, is symbolical of masses of people (cf. Rev. 17:15), and especially of the Gentile nations. The system of the beast will be derived from and will be the final Gentile world power to have dominion of Israel during the times of the Gentiles (see Luke 21:24). So Israel, as the nation to whom God promised the land of Israel, is related to the *land*, and the nations to the *sea*. In support of this are following facts:

(1) In Revelation 17:1, 15 and Daniel 7:2-3, all the nations portrayed there, which are linked with the waters or the sea, are Gentile powers as Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome.

(2) In the visions of Daniel 2 and 7, Daniel sees Gentile powers who will continue to rule and dominate over Israel until the return of Jesus Christ. Jesus called this “the times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24). This began in 587 B.C. with the Babylonian captivity and will continue to the end of the Tribulation, until the return of Christ (Rev. 19).

(3) One should also note and compare Daniel’s description of the four Gentile powers (7:4-25), especially the fourth, with that of John in Revelation 13:2-6.

(4) Daniel 9:26-27 clearly shows that the final world ruler would be a Roman, one out of the old Roman empire, a Gentile power.

(5) Finally, some see the “sea” here as a reference to the Mediterranean Sea and believe the beast, though a Gentile, will rise up out of the Mediterranean area. The “sea” here shows us that the beast is both a Gentile and from the Mediterranean area.

“Having ten horns and seven heads.” This monstrous representation portrays the nature of the end time kingdom, the final worldwide political system. But what exactly is the point of the ten horns and the seven heads? What do they stand for?

Remember that in prophecy it is sometimes hard to determine when a passage is speaking about the king or the kingdom since the kingdom is the epitome of the king from whom it gets its character. For instance, even in the U.S., we often speak of the administration in power by the name of the President, i.e., the Clinton administration. Likewise, a passage may refer to the king in one verse and the kingdom in the next, or vice versa. This is evidently the case here. Verses 1 and 2 look more at the kingdom, the empire; verse 3 includes both, and verses 4 and following refer more to the individual, the satanically controlled or possessed dictator. So “the beast” may refer to the end time kingdom, the empire, or to the dictator or both.

² Charles C. Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible, Expanded Edition*, NASB, Moody Press: Chicago, 1995, p. 1323.

The Ten Horns

“The ten horns” is a reference to the ten nation confederation of the future which will form the nucleus of this end time kingdom. According to Daniel chapters 2 and 7, it will be a revived form of the old Roman empire since these ten nations will come out of the fourth nation which would arise after Daniel’s time, historically we know this was Rome (Dan. 7:7, 24). Revelation 17:12 also states that “the ten horns which you saw are ten kings.” These are ten kings who rule over ten nations, fragments of the old Roman empire. After the fall of the empire, Rome was divided up into many separate kingdoms which became the European nations of modern times. But in the end times, these nations, at least ten of them, will confederate together as one, forming what is in reality a revived Roman empire. Since the fall of Rome, these fragments of the old empire have continued to exist, but in the future, they will be brought together in a revived Roman empire.

Rome will undoubtedly become the headquarters of the new empire, both politically and religiously at least during the first half of the Tribulation (cf. Rev. 17:7, 18 which shows the close affiliation of the political part with the religious part in the first half). However, there is good reason to believe, as we shall see later, that this relationship will be broken by the beast who will then move his headquarters to Babylon which will be rebuilt in the last days (cf. Rev. 17:16-18; 18:16-19). We will look at the rebuilding of Babylon in a later study.

The Seven Heads

This system of the beast also has “seven heads. This is explained for us in 17:9-10. “The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits and they are seven kings...” The seven heads are seven mountains and seven kings. Some see this as a reference first to the seven hill city of Rome, and then to seven dynasties or rulers of the old Roman empire, as kings, consuls, dictators, decemvirs, military tribunes and emperors, or as seven successive emperors of Imperial Rome, as Nero (A.D. 54-68), Galba (A.D. 68), Otho (A.D. 69), Vitellius (A.D. 69), Vespasian (A.D. 69-79), Titus (A.D. 79-81), and Domitian (A.D. 81-91) under whom great persecution of the church occurred. So it would thus refer to the city and to those who ruled in Rome. Quite clearly the beast is not only a kingdom or an empire, but also a man (cf. 2 Thess. 2:8-9; Dan. 9:27; 11:36; 7:24-25).

But another and I believe a better interpretation of the seven heads is that the seven heads represent seven phases of Gentile powers or nations which find their culmination in the beast. The ten horns look at the *future* history of the beast and the seven heads, the *past* history. The seven heads are mountains, seven successive historic Gentile kingdoms, who are represented by seven kings or rulers. This is supported by the following:

- (1) Revelation 17:10 tells us the seven mountains are kings. This could indicate that the mountains are symbolical for the kingdoms these seven kings represent.
- (2) Rome is known as the city of seven hills, but the hills of Rome are not mountains.
- (3) The term mountain is commonly used in Scripture as an image of a kingdom (Psalm 30:7; Isaiah 2:3; Dan. 2:35, 45; Jer. 51:5).
- (4) But more importantly, chapter 17 deals with the harlot system of Babylon which goes all the way back to the time of Nimrod and all these Gentile world powers have been her lovers and supporters, not Rome alone (cf. 17:1-2, 15). It is more likely that the seven mountains refer to seven successive Gentile kingdoms which go way back, far beyond Rome.

Then to which nations do these refer? It refers to the major world empires up to the time of Rome and which also were connected with the nation of Israel and her enslavements. These were:

- (1) **Egypt:** This was the first great world empire and the cause of Israel’s enslavement before entrance into the land.
- (2) **Assyria:** Historically this was the next great empire which took the northern kingdom of Israel into captivity in 722 B.C.
- (3) **Babylon** or the Chaldean empire: This is where Daniel’s prophecies begin and where we have the captivity of Judah, the southern kingdom. In Daniel’s prophecies he does not list the three preceding Gentile powers because his prophecies look forward only from his time in history to the final Gentile power and the return of the Lord. But Revelation 13 and 17 both look back (the seven heads) and forward (the ten kings).

(4) **Medo-Persia:** This Gentile power followed Babylon and was the kingdom under which a remnant of Israel were allowed to return to the land to rebuild the city and the temple (cf. Ezra and Nehemiah).

(5) **Greece:** This was the kingdom of Alexander and his successors who likewise ruled over the land of Palestine.

(6) **Rome:** The Roman Empire of New Testament times was the empire of the emperors who reigned from before Christ: Augustus (30 B.C. - A.D. 14), to Domitian when Revelation was written (A.D. 81-96), and afterwards. During this time, Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jews dispersed world wide (A.D. 70 - A.D. 135). Later the Roman empire divided into the eastern and western divisions (the two legs of the image in Daniel 2) and finally fell, becoming fragmented into many nations.

What about the seventh head? Revelation 17:10-11 explains the seventh head. It is really a future kingdom though it has historical roots in the sixth kingdom. Revelation 17:10 says “five are fallen.” These five are Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia and Greece. “One is,” which is the sixth, the Roman empire of John’s day. “And the other is not yet come,” this is the revived Roman empire, the ten nation confederation or the ten horns under the leadership of the white horse rider in the first half of the Tribulation.

Compare 17:11 with 17:8, “The beast which you saw was (refers to his past history, old Rome), and is not (does not presently exist; from John’s standpoint it would soon pass from the scene, i.e., the fall of Rome), and is about to come up (refers to the revived Roman empire).” Now in 17:11, this beast, the Roman empire represented by its king, becomes an eighth kingdom while at the same time being one of the seven, specifically, the seventh. The eighth refers to the imperial form of the revived Roman empire in the last half of the Tribulation under the power of the dictator, the man of lawlessness or the antichrist who is also called the beast.

The Ten Diadems

The “ten diadems” refer to a form of self government and control. When the end time system first begins to rise up out of the sea of nations from the old Roman empire, it will be made up of ten independent nations each with their own king, though under the leadership of the beast. Later, in the middle of the Tribulation they give their power and authority to the beast (Rev. 17:13). However, as the system develops, three rebel and are conquered so that in the last half of the Tribulation there will only be seven crowns or nations (cf. 12:3b with Dan. 7:7-8, 20-22).

The Names of Blasphemy

Next we read that “on his heads were blasphemous names.” This points out the blasphemous character of these Gentile powers. Throughout history these powers have supported the mother-child cult, under many different names, but always in opposition to God and the Lord Jesus Christ. But more importantly, this is one of the key characteristics of this system of the future and especially of its leader. This will be done in three primary ways: (a) by claiming that he is God, (b) by trying to usurp the place of God, (2 Thess. 2:4; Dan. 7:8), and (c) by slandering the true God (Rev. 13:6; Dan. 11:36-37; 7:25).

The composite nature of the beast is seen in the words, “the beast is like a leopard,...a bear,...and a lion (Rev. 13:2a).

Theodore Epp in his commentary on Revelation has an excellent explanation of this composite nature of the beast. He writes:

This verse gives a further description of the coming wicked kingdom and its ruler during the Tribulation. The description of this beast is a composite of the characteristics of the other beasts mentioned in Daniel 7. There the first three kingdoms are characterized by a lion (v. 4), a bear (v. 5), and a leopard (v. 6). These animals represented the kingdoms of Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece. The characteristics of these kingdoms are combined in the last kingdom which will be the ten-kingdom Roman Empire. The Roman Empire in Daniel 7 was seen as indescribable because it was “diverse from all the beasts that were before it” (v. 7).

This empire, as seen in Revelation 13, will have all the brilliance, culture and swiftness of a leopard—a reference to the previous Grecian Empire. It will also have the tremendous strength, tenac-

ity of purpose, and brutality of a bear—a reference to the Medo-Persian Empire. Then too it will have the autocratic and majestic power of a lion—a reference to the Babylonian Empire.³

His Affliction (13:3a)

Verse (3a). “And I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain...and it was healed.” As explained previously, the seven heads of Revelation 17 refer to seven mountains or seven successive world governments extending back to the time of Egypt, but reaching forward to the revived Roman empire of the first half of the Tribulation and the ten nation confederation. Here John sees one of these heads, that is, one of these world powers with a fatal wound that was healed. But Revelation 17:10 also teaches us that these seven heads are also seven kings. Now, as we look at this passage, several questions need to be asked and answered.

Question 1: To which one of the seven heads does this refer?

Revelation 17:8-11 answers this for us. It is the seventh head, i.e., the revived form. It is the head which “was, (old Rome) and is not, (the fallen Roman empire in its fragmented condition) and is about to come” (the revived Roman empire of the first half of the Tribulation, and the imperial form which becomes an eighth in the last half of the Tribulation). The words, “was, is not, and is about to come” are equivalent to the fatal wound that was healed.

Question 2: Does this refer to the empire or to the king or both?

Some believe that Revelation 13:3 refers to some resurrected being of past history as Judas or Nero or even to one of the more recent rulers like Napoleon or Hitler or, because of the fatal wound to the head, even John F. Kennedy. Others believe it refers only to the revival of Rome as a world empire.

The primary restoration here has to be that of the Roman empire, the political system of this satanically-controlled man. This seems clear from Revelation 13:1-2 and 17:8-9 which relates the beast to world kingdoms or nations. In 13:2 the beast is seen as a composite of the kingdoms of Babylon, Greece and Medo-Persia, and in 17:9 the beast is related to seven mountains, world kingdoms on which the woman sits. This is evident from 17:1 and 15 which shows us, under another figure, that of water, that these are nations upon which she sits.

Yet, other verses indicate that a person, a political leader is also in view. In 13:5-6 we see the beast as a person opening his mouth in blasphemy against God. In 13:14 an image is to be made of the beast and in 13:18 his number is the number of man. Finally, the beast’s final doom is to go to destruction, literally “and into destruction he goes” (cf. 17:8, 11, 19-20 with 2 Thess. 2:3). This clearly shows that the political leader is also in view. As pointed out earlier, it is often hard to distinguish between the king and the kingdom because the kingdom is the personification of the king.

Revelation 17:9-12 moves from the kingdom, to the king, to both, and back to the king who goes into perdition or destruction (Rev. 19:20). Therefore, it seems best to take the “deadly wound that was healed” of 13:3, as with the words, “was, is not, and is about to come” (Rev. 17:8, 11) to refer to the fall and restoration of the Roman empire in its imperial form. As mentioned, this is evident because the beast is seen as a composite of empires of past history (13:2). However, it is likely that Satan will bring off an apparent death and resurrection of this man of lawlessness, the leader of the empire, to correspond with the restoration of the imperial form of the Roman empire. This will cause the world to marvel and follow after the beast and accept his dictatorship as the emperor (cf. 13:3-4; 17:8).

Question 3: Will this be a literal and real resurrection of some historic figure either of the past like Judas or Hitler or of some future figure?

The answer is, No! It will be an apparent death and resurrection to counterfeit and create an imitation of Christ’s death and resurrection. It will involve something apparently miraculous, but it will not be the resurrection of someone who has died, decayed, and who will be resurrected to life by Satan.

Note several reasons this will not be a genuine resurrection:

(1) The concept of “the abyss” (Rev. 11:7; 17:8). This does not mean that this man himself will be raised up out of hell or gehenna or hades. This simply means that the source and power of the beast and his system is Satan him-

³ Theodore H. Epp, *Practical Studies in Revelation*, Vol. II, Back to the Bible Broadcast: Lincoln, NE, p. 203.

self. The abyss is the abode of demons and not of man (cf. Rev. 9:1-2, 11; Luke 8:31; 2 Pet. 2:4). The system will be demonically inspired and controlled. This is the point of Revelation 11:7 and 17:8.

(2) The translations “as if it had been slain” (NASB) or “seemed to have had a fatal wound” suggest either an apparent death (near death) but did not really die. Literally the Greek says, “as slain unto death.” There is really no “if” here. Some have argued that the “if” implies this is only an apparent death. Though I do not believe the beast will literally die and be brought back to life, we should note the exact same words are used of the Lord in Revelation 5:6 and certainly the Lord really died. If the leader is involved here, the key may be found in the word “slain” which is sphazo,, “to slay, slaughter.” It was a sacrificial term used of the animals of sacrifice. The use of this word indicates that the deadly wound will be designed to be like the slaying of the Lamb; it will be designed to imitate the death of Christ, if not in method, at least in purpose or function. So the use of this word doesn’t really prove it was a real death, only an apparent death. It suggests it was part of Satan’s strategy to imitate Christ’s death and resurrection. Here is Satan’s masterpiece of deceit.

(3) No where else in Scripture is it indicated that Satan has the power of resurrection or the power to produce life. Instead of being a life giver, he is portrayed as a life taker, a murderer or a destroyer. He has “the power of death” (Heb. 2:14). Only Christ is seen as the One who gives life (cf. 1 Cor. 15:22; John 11:25; 5:24-29).

(4) The wicked or the unbelieving dead are confined in torments until the great white throne judgment and there is no suggestion from Scripture that God would allow them to be brought up from their confinement before their time of judgment.

(5) Satan is, however, the master deceiver and he could easily perform such a deception as an apparent death and resurrection (2 Thess. 2:9; Rev. 12:9; 13:14-15).

So, more than likely this is a counterfeit, a supreme deception, and an attempt to imitate the resurrection of Jesus Christ in correspondence with the revival of the imperial form of Rome in order to gain the worship of the world.

His Acclaim and Worship (13:3b-4)

“And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast.” Concerning this coming world dictator, David Levy writes: “Most world dictators have proven to be persuasive speakers, able to motivate the masses to their political ideology. Like Adolf Hitler, who was able to mesmerize a whole nation by his inspiring speeches, the Antichrist will be no exception.”⁴

His persuasive speech and cunning is actually anticipated in Daniel 8:23. Historically, in the near view of prophecy, this passage pertained to Antiochus and his persecution of the Jews, but ultimately, it seems to look forward to the rise of the beast (see 8:19). Walvoord writes:

There is no question among expositors that Antiochus is in view in this prophecy. What was prophesied was fulfilled literally through him. However, the prophecy looks beyond Antiochus to a future person (the Antichrist) of whom Antiochus is only a foreshadowing. This coming one is said to “stand against the Prince of princes” (v. 25). This can be none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus the prophecy must go beyond Antiochus and look forward to the coming of one whose ministry will parallel that of Antiochus.⁵

So what can we learn from Daniel?

Daniel 8:23-25 And in the latter period of their rule, When the transgressors have run *their course*, A king will arise insolent and skilled in intrigue (ambiguous speech and deception). 24 And his power will be mighty, but not by his *own* power (he will operate by Satan’s power and by God’s permissive will), And he will destroy to an extraordinary degree And prosper and perform *his will*; He will destroy mighty men and the holy people. 25 And through his shrewdness (cunning and craftiness) He will cause deceit to succeed by his influence (his ability to persuade and delude);

⁴ David Levy, “The Coming World Ruler,” *Israel My Glory*, The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, p. 21.

⁵ John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Scripture Press: Wheaton, IL, 1983, 1985, electronic media.

And he will magnify *himself* in his heart, And he will destroy many while *they are* at ease. He will even oppose the Prince of princes, But he will be broken without human agency.

In Revelation 13:3 the words, “the whole earth,” shows the knowledge of this deception will reach everyone. This will be an easy matter with our present media capacity, with TV satellites and world-wide TV reception. This is undoubtedly one of the factors leading to his world-wide authority described in verse 7.

“Amazed” is the Greek *thaumazo*, meaning “to cause one to marvel, wonder, or wonder at.” It is a causative verb. The tense is culminative and looks at the effect, the culmination of this deception of Satan that leads to the amazement of the world.

“And followed after.” Literally the Greek simply says “and the whole earth marveled after the beast.” “After” is *opiso*, a strong preposition of place, “behind, after.” It stresses that the world marvels and is so amazed that it gawks after the beast, following along in startled amazement. This is part of “the strong delusion” and part of “the lie” that Paul speaks of in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12.

In this worship of the dragon and his beast, two things will be acknowledged by the people of the world (except for believers): (a) his uniqueness “who is like the beast” and (b) his power “and who is able to make war with him.” This will be the final touch that brings absolute sovereignty to his reign. Also, this will be the one great goal for which Satan has been striving for centuries. This worship of the dragon shows that not only will demonism be rampant, but openly visible. The world will worship the devil through the system of the beast. Satan will openly be the god of this age.

His Aggression and Activity (13:5-7)

Remember that one of the purposes of the Tribulation is to show the character of Satan and his kingdom. We see it here very clearly through the beast. It includes:

His Blasphemy (The Religious Side)

The horrible blasphemies of the beast demonstrate the anti-religious, anti-God element in the character of the beast. His blasphemies against God and God’s people, however, are ultimately aimed at promoting the worship of the beast himself. He will speak against God and His name. This includes mocking God’s holy character and essence. Perhaps he will even claim he has defeated God or that God is dead. He will speak against God’s dwelling place and those who dwell in heaven; this could include making fun of the goodness and righteousness of believers and of those who have sacrificed their lives for Jesus Christ while the beast and his followers live in the riotous pleasures of sin. Filled with disappointed rage, Satan will use the beast whom he controls to promote such words of blasphemy that it will make the worst blasphemies of history seem trifling by comparison!

His Warfare (The Political Side)

Satan has always hated believers and done everything in his power to persecute the people of God whether Israel or the church, but he has been restrained by the hand of God. Without that restraint, God’s people would have perished from the earth. During the Tribulation, however, his persecution of the people of God will know no limits. It will be given to him by the sovereign plan of God to make war and even to overcome the saints, that is, kill them. As verse 7b shows us, this rule of the beast will end in slavery to Satan and to the flesh. Men will think they have freedom to do as they please, but find themselves with no mind of their own, dominated by the beast and by their flesh.

His Authority (13:2b, 5b, 7b, 10)

The Source of his Authority (13:2b)

“And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority.” In verse 4 we are told that the world will marvel at this beast and wonder, “Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?” To the world of unbelieving and rebellious people, this beast will seem invincible and from the human standpoint, the answer to their question is simply, no one! His power will come from Satan; it is demonic and supernatural, far beyond the abilities

of ordinary men, and far beyond anything the world knows today. He will be so powerful, self-sufficient, and impressed with his power, he will actually honor no one except “the god of fortresses” (Dan. 11:38) or military power and conquests.

Repeatedly, the Scriptures tell us that this last time dictator and his government will be the epitome of a Satan-inspired government. In fact the beast himself will be literally possessed by Satan from all accounts. No human being can be as cunning, as ruthless, lawless, vile and blasphemous as this man without being either demon possessed or at least under the total control of Satan. Note what Lutzer and DeVries have written in regard to this coming world ruler.

... there is a network of organizations committed to bringing about a unified world order to address our major problems with creative solutions. Leading the pack will be a world ruler with the charisma to unify all religions and to weld a political structure with the muscle to forge global subjection. He will be both priest and king, both messiah and world emperor.

Remember that this ruler will derive his strength from the same source as Adolf Hitler, who controlled Germany with such hypnotic magnetism that his leadership was practically irresistible. Several books have been written that document Hitler’s involvement with Eastern occultism. Indeed, the swastika is a Hindu symbol of divinity. Hitler’s mentor, Dietrich Eckart, predicted that Hitler would be a world leader. Hitler was manipulated by invisible forces which he called “Unknown superiors,” in reality, demons who both controlled and terrorized him. Hitler told his friend Rauschning that he was founding the Man-God order and that splendid being would be an object of worship. Rauschning said of Hitler:

One cannot help thinking of him as a medium...the medium is possessed...beyond any doubt, Hitler was possessed by forces outside himself... of which the individual named Hitler was only the temporary vehicle.⁶

Hitler’s hatred of the Jews and his belief in the superiority of the Aryan nations were undoubtedly derived from Hinduism with its belief in the cast system—the idea that certain people are born inferior to others and that weeding out the undesirables is part of good leadership.

The New Messiah will be the Antichrist of Revelation 13. He will be worshipped on earth and will have awesome authority.⁷

In this chapter that gives us God’s revelation of this evil end time system, an interesting phrase is repeated six times (six is the number of manifested evil [cf. vs. 18]). The phrase, “was given to him,” occurs twice in verse 5, twice in verse 7, and in verses 14 and 15. Now what is the Tribulation, especially the last half? It is a time of divine judgments unleashed on the world for its continued rebellion. The repetition of “and it was given to him” indicates God’s judicial unleashing of powers of incipient evil of which this world cannot, in its wildest imagination, dream.⁸

But we must not forget that all of this occurs by the will of a sovereign God who uses Satan as His instrument of judgment on a stubborn, rebellious, unrepentant, and unbelieving world (see again Rev. 9:21). Throughout history God has repeatedly used Satan’s schemes and evil men as instruments of His judgment (cf. Isa. 10:5-13).

Speaking of God’s use of Assyria as “the rod of My anger And the staff in whose hands is My indignation” (vs. 5), God goes on to say, “Yet it does not so intend nor does it plan so in its heart, but rather it is its purpose to destroy, and to cut off many nations” (vs. 7). Then in verse 13 we are told, “For he (Assyria) has said, ‘By the power of my hand and by my wisdom I did this,...’” The Assyrian king was acting from his own evil desires and will, but he was still an instrument raised up by God as a tool of discipline. This is often perplexing for man. He asks, “Why does God permit or allow it to go unpunished and why does He use the likes of the Assyrians or of the beast in judgments?” The prophet Habakkuk had similar questions.

⁶ Gerald Suster, *Hitler: The Occult Messiah*, St. Martin Press: New York, 1981, p. 120.

⁷ Erwin W. Lutzer and John F. DeVries, *Satan’s Evangelistic Strategy for This New Age*, Victor Books: Wheaton, IL, 1989, pp. 146-147.

⁸ Newell, p. 190.

The book presents a picture of a man who trusted God, yet was perplexed. Habakkuk's questions were two: (1) Why did God permit the increasing evil in Judah to go unpunished (1:2-4)? (2) How could a holy God justify using the Babylonians, a people more wicked than the Jews, to punish the Jews (1:12-2:1)? The answer to the first question is recorded in 1:5-11 and to the second in 2:2-20. Thus the book is a theodicy, a defense of God's goodness and power in view of the existence of evil.⁹

In Revelation 13, Satan is allowed to give the beast three things. He gives the beast:

(1) "Power." This is the Greek *dunamis*, which it is often used of miraculous powers, the power to perform miraculous wonders (cf. 2 Thess. 2:9; Heb. 2:4; Acts 2:22; 6:8). Satan will perform miraculous feats through this man as a part of his deception (cf. 2 Thess. 2:9-12 and Rev. 13:3-4).

(2) "His throne." This refers to his position as king or emperor of the revived Roman empire, ruling supremely over the rest of the nations.

(3) "Great authority." This would refer to the extension of his rule beyond the ten nation confederation as spelled out in Revelation 13:7, "authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation." Occurring under the sovereignty of God and as an element of His judgment, Satan will undoubtedly have the ability to raise up political rulers (Luke 4:5-8; 1 John 5:19; John 16:11; 12:31; 14:30; Eph. 6:12). During the Tribulation, as the unseen ruler of this world, Satan will have complete rule through the man of lawlessness, the beast, for a short time.

The Time of His Authority (13:5b)

The beast will be given authority to act for forty-two months. In view of what we learned from chapter 12, this means from the middle of the Tribulation to the return of Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus said to the rabble who came to arrest him, "This is your hour, and the power (Greek *exousia*) of darkness." What a scene followed in the next few hours! But God will give up the whole earth, except His elect, for three and one-half years to this direful scene of Revelation 13.¹⁰

The Extent of His Authority (13:7b-8)

His authority will extend to all peoples, to all the earthdwellers or earthlings, those whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life. True believers, those who do not worship the beast nor receive his mark (vs. 16), are here excluded; they do not worship him, but rather in many cases they will die for their faith. More will be said on the book of life later in this study of Revelation. These Tribulation saints, though many will die for their faith, will overcome the beast and the next words are especially addressed to them in verses 9-10.

The End of His Authority (13:9-10)

9 If anyone has an ear, let him hear. 10 If anyone *is destined* for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints. (NASB)

9 He who has an ear, let him hear. 10 If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. (NIV)

As can be seen from the difference in these translations, there is a major textual problem in the last half of verse 10 which affects our understanding of the meaning of this passage. The problem involves whether the first reference to the verb "kill" is an active future ("will kill"), or a aorist passive ("be killed"). The KJV, RSV, Phillips, NASB all follow the reading of the majority of MSS and render it, "If anyone kills with the sword." Concerning this reading, Johnson writes:

⁹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible, Expanded Edition*, NASB, Moody Press: Chicago, 1995, p. 1442.

¹⁰ Newell, p. 191.

Combining this with the last phrase, the latter part of the verse yields either a warning directed toward Christians for them not to turn to violence and killing to vindicate themselves or a promise of requital to believers that their persecutors will be judged by God.

If, on the other hand, we follow the reading of A¹¹ [MSS witness], the translation will be as in NIV... This yields the sense that Christians who are destined by God for death must submit to his will and not resist the oppressor. It is an appeal to loyalty.¹²

Following the reading of the KJV or the NASB, Ryrie writes regarding verses 9-10:

The phrasing of verse 9 indicates a call to serious attention. An important principle is about to be announced in verse 10. It is the principle of retribution. After all that has been said about the power of the beast, verse 10 is a word of great comfort. The captor will be taken captive; the killer will be killed. When God's purposes are finished through the beast, God will take him captive and confine him to the lake of fire. In the knowledge of this is the patience and faith that sustains the saints who endure these persecutions.¹³

Note that there are three "if" clauses in verses 9-10:

"If anyone has an ear" is addressed to anyone who might have ears to hear the Word of God. The only possible means of deliverance is through faith in the Word of God.

The second two "if" clauses (regardless of the reading discussed above) warn against anyone taking matters into their own hands to oppose this Satanic system by force. This is Satan's hour, but it will be short lived and God's people will triumph in the end. Knowing this and resting in it by faith will give endurance. So here is the assurance that God will bring sure judgment and defeat on the beast.

Finally, we should note one more thing about those who are addressed in verse 9 in the invitation to hear. Walvoord writes:

A close parallel as well as a contrast is also observable between this invitation and the invitation to the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3 where the exhortation is to "hear what the Spirit says unto the churches." The omission of the phrase "unto the churches" in 13:9 is most significant and tends to support the teaching that the church, the body of Christ, has previously been raptured and is not in this period. This instruction is not addressed to the churches. The exhortation in Revelation 13 is much wider. It is to anyone who will listen, and the message is not addressed to the church as such but to the entire world.¹⁴

Summary of the first beast:

(1) He will be a Gentile (Rev. 13:15; Dan. 7) out of the sea, i.e., Gentile nations (Dan. 9:27). "The Prince of the people that shall come," specifically he will be from the old Roman Empire.

(2) Politically he will become the dictator of the revived imperial Roman empire of the last half of the Tribulation (Rev. 13; Dan. 9:27; 7:8). The beast and his system will become the final form of this Gentile world power. He begins as a political peacemaker and leader of a ten nation European confederation, but soon turns into the beast and dictator.

(3) Religiously he supports, as all other Gentile powers before him, the ecumenical religion of Babylon, the harlot system of the first half of the Tribulation (Rev. 17:7), but turns against it in the last half to become himself the object of man's worship (2 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 13:17:16-17).

¹¹ Preferred by Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary of the Greek New Testament*, UBS: New York, 1971, p. 750.

¹² Alan Johnson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12, Frank E. Gaebelein, General Editor, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1981, p. 536.

¹³ Charles C. Ryrie, *Revelation*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1968, p. 84.

¹⁴ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1966, pp. 203-204.

(4) He is under the direct control of Satan and is Satan possessed (2 Thess. 2:9; Rev. 13:2). Thus, he is called the beast (the „rion) because Satan, the dragon is his master (cf. 9:11; 11:7; 17:6; 16:13).

(5) He has many names: (a) The little horn of Daniel 7:8. (b) The king of fierce countenance (Dan. 8:23). (c) The willful king of Daniel 11:36-40 (some refer this to the second beast but this doesn't fit the circumstances of Daniel 11 or Revelation 13). (d) The prince that shall come (Dan. 9:27). (e) The man of sin or lawlessness (2 Thess. 2:3-10). (f) The rider on the white horse (Rev. 6:2). (g) The beast (Rev. 13:1). (h) The antichrist (1 John 2).

(6) His empire is called and viewed as: (a) The beast with seven heads and ten horns (Rev. 17:8-13; 13:1-2), like a leopard, a bear, and a lion. (b) The feet of the image of Daniel with ten toes made of iron and clay mingled together (see Dan. 2:31-45).

(7) His character and rise to power:

- Because of fear of a nuclear holocaust, population explosion, environmental destruction, etc., the world will be crying for “peace and safety.” This man will come on the scene with great persuasive power, personality magnetism, craft and oratorical skill, and he will persuade the West (Europe and probably the Americas) that he has the answer for peace. (The Americas are likely to be included because they are a part of the harlot system which he controls.) He will gain his ascendancy to power as a peacemaker (Dan. 8:25; 1 Thess. 5:3; Rev. 6:2; Dan. 9:27).
- A ten nation confederation will be formed, an alliance against the king of the North and the East (Dan. 2:7:7; Rev. 13:1; 17:12). He begins under demon influence and possession, to be lifted up with pride and to magnify himself and begins to get visions of world power (Dan. 8:25; 11:36; 2 Thess. 2:4).
- Three kings out of the ten rebel and are destroyed (Dan. 7:8, 24).
- The king of the North (perhaps Russia) is destroyed about the middle of the Tribulation and this leaves a vacuum (Ezek. 38).
- Satan is also restricted to earth, totally possessing this man and produces the beast who then begins to persecute Israel, breaks the covenant and overtly magnifies himself as god (Rev. 12:13; 2 Thess. 2:3f; Dan. 8:24; 9:21). He introduces idol worship of himself.
- His apparent death and resurrection followed by his rise to power as emperor of the revived Roman empire will astound the world. It may be that Satan will create the impression of a resurrection of this man from a mortal wound which will coincide with his swift rise as dictator in the middle of the Tribulation (Rev. 13:3, 12, 14; 17:8).
- There will come a challenge of his authority from the East at the end of the Tribulation (Rev. 16:12-16). This is the second phase of Armageddon. All the remaining armies, those aligned with the West and those of the East will be brought together to fight at Meggedo (Rev. 16:16; 19:17-19).
- Jesus Christ will come at this time and the rule of the beast will be terminated by the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rev. 19:19-20; Dan. 7:22, 26; 8:25; 9:27; 11:45).

The Beast Out of the Earth (13:11-18)

11 And I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spoke as a dragon. 12 And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed. 13 And he performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men. 14 And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life. 15 And there was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast might even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed. 16 And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand, or on their forehead, 17 and *he provides* that no one should be able to

buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, *either* the name of the beast or the number of his name. 18 Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.

Now another beast is revealed to John, only this one is distinguished from the previous since he comes out of the earth or land. This completes the trinity of evil—the dragon, the beast out of the sea, and now, the beast out of the earth. The land beast operates under the authority of the sea beast and is totally committed to promoting not himself, but the first beast. The beast out of the land is also called the false prophet in other places in Revelation (16:13; 19:20; 20:10), probably because he promotes the first beast.

His Description (13:11)

“And I saw another beast.” “Another” is the Greek *allos* meaning, “another of the same kind.” He plays a different role, but in character he is another the, rion, one who is beastly, rapacious, cruel, and of course hostile to the flock of God’s people like a wolf, though dressed in sheep clothing. He is seen “coming up out of the earth.” As before, “coming up” is a present participle portraying a gradual, but continual ascendancy as a world figure and leader.

“Out of the earth” distinguishes and contrasts him with the beast out of the sea. These two beasts though similar, are diverse in origin. As the sea symbolized the mass of humanity, the nations, so “the earth, land, the ground, region, or country” (the Greek *ge*,) may symbolize the nation Israel who is consistently related to the land in Scripture. As mentioned, some believe the sea refers to the Mediterranean and so the “earth” or land would refer to Palestine. Some think this beast will be a Jew, a false prophet among Jews who seeks to persuade men to follow the beast as the antichrist. On the other hand the contrast between the two beasts could simply be that the former arises first and at the time of terrible chaos among the nations (who are like the raging sea, Isa. 57:20) when people are fearful and crying for “peace and safety” and for a world ruler to settle world conditions. The second beast may come on the scene after world conditions have been settled somewhat, when chaos has given place to some order and a more stable government has settled in human society (the earth).

Some believe the idea that he is a Jew is supported by the things said about the second beast regarding his actions and character: (a) this beast is the false prophet who promotes the worship of the first beast by performing signs which are similar to Elijah’s, a prophet of Israel (13:12-13), and (b) he has two horns, like a lamb, the sacrificial animal of the Jews. But such a conclusion is not necessary.

However, in the light of the great anti-Semitism of the last half of the Tribulation, it seems unlikely that Satan or the first beast would allow a Jew to live much less occupy such an important position of power and authority. More than likely he is simply an important religious figure representing a rising religious and ecclesiastical movement which this second beast and Satan will use to promote the beast out of the sea (cf. 17:7, 15-16). The harlot in chapter 17 refers to religious Babylon, ecclesiastical Rome. The waters there represent the many nations she has influenced. Walvoord says, “The identification of the second beast as the head of the apostate church is indicated in many ways in the book of Revelation.”¹⁵ While this apostate religious system will be destroyed by the beast (Rev. 17:16), it appears that the false prophet will, because of his close affinity with the first beast, make it through the entire Tribulation period since Revelation 19:20 shows that both the first beast and the false prophet are cast alive into the lake of fire together.

That the false prophet and the second beast are one and the same is clear from Revelation 19:20. The false prophet is the one who “performs signs in his (the first beast) presence (13:12-13), by which he deceived those who had the mark of the beast...” (Rev. 19:20).

“And he had two horns.” The horns are symbolic of great power, but not to the degree of the first beast who had ten horns. His horns were like those of “a lamb.” As the lamb is a religious symbol, a symbol of sacrifice, so this beast is a religious figure, and, as a lamb is also symbolical of a mild, lamb-like manner, so this second beast will adopt a mild lamb-like appearance, but he will be a wolf in sheep’s clothing. So what do we read next?

“And he spoke like a dragon.” That he will speak like a dragon shows us it connects him in character with the dragon, Satan. As with the first beast this beast gets his power from Satan. And just like the sea beast who begins his

¹⁵ Walvoord, p. 205.

career as the white horse rider, proclaiming peace, so this mild religious appearance of the land beast is only a cover up, a sham for his real nature and goals.

There is an important lesson here for it demonstrates the typical behavior and character of any of man's religions when a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is absent because in all man-made religions, the base upon which it operates is man and Satan's deceptions, not God. Most religions will claim to be humanitarian, loving, and concerned for society, but in reality, since Satan is always at the root of the system (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Cor. 11:13-15), they can become vicious, cruel, and murderous as a wild beast whenever people do not toe the party line. A clear evidence of this are the many persecutions that have occurred in the name of religion like the inquisitions of Rome in 1233 and in 1542 and those of Spain in 1478 against Jews and Moslems. The New Age movement of our day is no different. This is a humanistic movement that talks about helping humanity, but in their language, they show a quick readiness to persecute Christians whom they know will stand in their way.

In New Age literature there is talk of a necessary cleansing process that will be needed to quell the opposition of those who resist the new religious/political order. Those who refuse to be initiated into Satan's kingdom by taking the mark of the beast will be eliminated...¹⁶

Lutzer and DeVries describe some of the goals of this new religious/political order. These will consist of things like: an end of nationalism, a new credit card system, a world food supply, and an emphasis on disarmament and the "elimination of nuclear weapons." But note what they mention next that will be a part of the deception of this whole ploy:

All of this is to be done under the banner of love and peace. "Universal brotherhood" will be the slogan that will capture the aspirations and hopes of millions who will be drawn into the centrifugal force of this movement with best of intentions. The goals of this movement will be stated in such a way that it will appear that *only the most obstinate and belligerent could possibly oppose such noble ideals.*¹⁷

But orthodox Jews and Christians will oppose such a satanic system and one that will actually promote the deification of man. So what will happen to these who resist such a system? Will they be ignored and allowed the freedom to believe, train up their children, and worship God according to their own convictions?

A state legislator, appearing on an Omaha talk show, said:

We have to control church schools because fundamental, Bible-believing Christians do not have the right to indoctrinate their children in their faith, because we, the state, are preparing all children for the Year 2000, when America will be part of the One World Global Society and their children won't fit in.

New Agers are not naïve enough to believe that everyone will accept the dawn of this new day. Some will oppose the emerging New Order. For these, there is another solution: intimidation, starvation, and liquidation.

This is not our theory, but the expressly stated agenda of the New Agers who candidly admit that drastic measures will have to be implemented to keep people in line...

... Those religions that will not accept the lie that man is God will be systematically eliminated by whatever means is necessary. In the New Age, disarmament will be the guise used to get the nations of the world to surrender their sovereignty to an authoritative global political machine, which will in turn use those weapons (if necessary) to force everyone, especially the religious objectors, to get on board with the new agenda.

Understand Satan's methodology: there is a vast difference between his advertising and the product that the purchaser receives. George Orwell called it *newspeak*. Talk about disarmament but plan to use weapons on those who refuse to accept your agenda. Campaign for individual freedom but

¹⁶ Erwin W. Lutzer and John F. DeVries, *Satan's Evangelistic Strategy for This New Age*, Victor Books: Wheaton, IL, 1989, pp. 148.

¹⁷ Lutzer/DeVries, pp. 149-150.

plan to eliminate the freedom of those who don't toe the line. Affirm the value of humanity while at the same time you favor the systematic killing of the unborn and the eventual death of millions.¹⁸

And it was the same in the days of ancient Rome. The late Francis Schaeffer wrote:

Rome was cruel, and its cruelty can perhaps be best pictured by the events which took place in the arena in Rome itself. People seated above the arena floor watched gladiator contests and Christians thrown to the beasts. Let us not forget why the Christians were killed. They were *not* killed because they worshiped Jesus. Various religions covered the whole Roman world... Nobody cared who worshiped whom so long as the worshiper did not disrupt the unity of the state, centered in the formal worship of Caesar. The reason the Christians were killed was because they were rebels.

... their worship (speaking of worship of Jesus Christ) became a special threat to the unity of the state during the third century and during the reign of Diocletian (284-305), when people of the higher classes began to become Christians in larger numbers. If they had worshiped Jesus *and* Caesar, they would have gone unharmed, but they rejected all forms of syncretism.¹⁹

His Dominion (13:12a)

“And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence.” “In his presence” is the Greek *enopion* which means in this context, “by the authority of” or “on behalf of.” The point is that he stands ready to do the bidding of the first beast and he has all the authority needed to carry out the wishes of the first beast, but it's delegated authority and he exercises it on behalf of the beast and his worship in the world.

His Design and Determination (13:12b)

“And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast...” The design or purpose of this beast or false prophet is to promote the authority and worship of the first beast, just as the Holy Spirit works to bring glory to Jesus Christ (John 16:14).

“Whose fatal wound was healed” indicates that this deception is part of his propaganda program to sell people on the beast just as the Holy Spirit truthfully, by contrast, uses the resurrection to convince men of the person and work of Jesus Christ. As in the early church, the resurrection of Christ was followed by sign miracles to authenticate the message of Christ and His prophets (Heb. 2:4), so this false prophet does the same in his deception.

His Deceptions (13:13-15)

Verse 13. “And he performs great signs” points us to his first deception through the use of miraculous signs. “Performs” is a present tense of repeated actions which indicates he engages in a display of miraculous signs one after another, though only two are mentioned here. “Signs” is plural. The verb here is *poieo*, which means “to make, do, accomplish, bring about, produce, or perform.” “Signs” is *semeion* which refers to a wonder or miracle that is designed to show or communicate something. The signs are used of course, to persuade men to believe in, follow after, and worship the beast.

Note that the signs are described as “great,” the Greek *meegas* meaning “large, great,” but it is used of that which is great in the sense of significant, prominent, important, outstanding. The signs the second beast performs won't be the run of the mill miracles that one hears about with pseudo healers or the paranormal events of today.

“So that he even makes fire come down from heaven to earth in the presence of men” illustrates something of the power of his miraculous activity. Whatever this will be, it is clearly designed to counterfeit the miraculous works of God, either that of Elijah in 1 Kings 18:38 or that of the two witnesses in Revelation 11:5 (cf. also 2 Kings 1:10-15; Lev. 10:1-2). Some have suggested that this could be a reference to fire from heaven to imitate that which occurred at Pentecost (Acts 2:3) and could be a reference to pseudo-charismatic gifts to create a counterfeit religious community whose allegiance is to antichrist.

¹⁸ Lutzer/DeVries, pp. 152-153.

¹⁹ Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?* Fleming H. Revell: Old Tappan, NJ, 1976, pp. 25-26.

Whatever it is, it is a prominent sign and shows the kind of power Satan will display through his puppets, the beast and the false prophet.

Verse 14. “And he deceives...because of the signs which it was given to him to perform in the presence of the beast...” The next thing we see about the signs is that they are designed to deceive, they are deceptive. “Deceives” is the Greek *planao*, meaning “to lead astray, cause to wander, mislead, deceive.” This word is consistently used in Scripture of the work of false teachers who lead people away from God into some form of false worship (cf. 2 Thess. 2:9-12).

This should be a warning to all of us. Miraculous signs are not in themselves a proof that whatever is going on is from God. There are other issues that must be discerned with the Word of God as the final index and authority, never just our experience. However, we are living in an esoteric, mystic oriented age where reality is too often reduced to a personal experience or some kind of enlightenment. Just note the rise of the psychic “hotlines” and the emphasis in TV shows on the paranormal or on psychic phenomena. Even within the body of Christ, the emphasis has moved away from the Word of God as our authority to an emphasis on phenomena and subjective experiences, the kind promoted in many charismatic circles today.

Next, we are again told these signs are “given to him to perform in the presence of the beast.” The power to produce the signs is Satan’s (Rev. 13:2; 2 Thess. 2:9) and the false prophet performs them in the interest and by the authority of the first beast. As seen above, this is the meaning of “in the presence of,” but the repetition serves to stress the purpose brought out in the next sentence, “telling those who dwell on earth to make an image to the beast...” It is apparent from this that one of the primary purposes of the signs is to influence men on earth to follow the false prophet’s orders to make an image to the worship of the first beast.

Verse 15. “And there was given to him to give breath to the image.” The image which breathes and speaks is the second great deception of these verses. The word “image” is *eikon*, which is not a mere copy but in fact partakes and constitutes the very reality of the thing of which it is a likeness. The image is designed not only to portray a likeness to the beast, but the reality of his rule and worship. Whatever the image will be it will portray a likeness of the beast which becomes a symbol of his power and majesty, and of the character of his system.

We should note that the image is mentioned three times here in this chapter and in 14:9, 11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20 and 20:4. This image becomes the center of the false worship of the beast and the focal point of the final state of apostasy and idolatry.

Finally, we are told that the false prophet is able to give breath to the image. This gives it the appearance of life. However, it isn’t real life, *zoë*, but only breath, *pneuma*. Since breath or breathing is one of the signs of life, men think the image lives, but John is careful not to say that he gives life (*zoë*) to the image. Only God can do that. It is something miraculous, but also deceptive and false.

Then we are told the image of the beast, through this imparted breath, speaks. This is to be a further confirmation of the miraculous nature of the beast’s image. Some might see this as the result of some product of our modern electronic robot-type of technology. But such would hardly convince people of anything spectacular. Evidently it will go far beyond that.

As in the days of Daniel, those who refuse to worship the beast are to be killed. Notice that it is the image itself which causes the non-worshippers to be killed, undoubtedly by orders it gives when it speaks. While many will be killed, thousands will escape unharmed, but their lives will be in constant jeopardy.

His Demand and Decree (13:16-17)

Here we see the means by which the second beast carefully and exclusively distinguishes between those who will worship the beast and those who will not so that they might be identified and killed. He forces all men of every class and category of society to receive the mark of the beast either in their right hand or in the forehead, two places that are prominent and easily seen.

Here is sheer tyranny. The word “mark” is the Greek *charagma* which means “an impress made by a stamp” like a brand used on slaves and cattle. Men will become the slaves of the beast and will somehow carry the identifying mark of their slavery.

To enforce the worship of the beast and to make life impossible without his worship, men cannot buy or sell without this mark. As a result of the decree to worship the beast and be branded with his mark, multitudes of believers will be killed directly because they do not have the mark and refuse to receive it or because they starve to death since they cannot buy or sell. Some will survive, however, by living off the land or because other believers who have food share with those who do not (cf. Matt. 24:15-25 and 25:31-40).

We should note that to receive the mark of the beast is tantamount to the worship of the beast, to blasphemy of God, and rejection of Jesus Christ (cf. 13:8; 17:8; 14:9-12; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4).

What will the mark be like? Verse 17 answers this for us. It is the name of the beast or his number. This number is defined in verse 18 as 666. This is the name or number of the first beast and is one of the options for the mark, either his name or his number.

Please note, this also becomes the means of identifying the beast for who and what he is to the remnant of true believers.

This will not be just a number or identification mark on a plastic card. This will be on the person himself. It is interesting however, that within the identification numbers of various agencies, the IRS and others, the number 666 is beginning to pop up more and more.

God's Declaration Regarding the Number of the Beast (13:18)

The Problem of the Number

On the meaning of this verse and the number of the beast, 666, the views are almost as numerous as the number of commentaries written on the book of Revelation. John tells us to "calculate the meaning of the number of the beast." Misunderstanding of John's meaning here has led to endless speculation regarding the meaning of the number.

Some have considered the number to represent one of the Roman Emperors like Nero or Caligula or Titus. Thus, antichrist would be Nero redivivus (13:3). Others throughout the centuries have tried, using the number 666, to identify antichrist as some current historical figure of their day like Hitler, Mussolini or even Napoleon. Some have thought it stood for the word "Latin" telling us he would be a Roman. All of these simply show the endless speculations which have occupied the minds of students but are of very little worth to the student of this book and which I believe totally misses John's point.

Why all the speculation and the problem? First, students have taken the verb "calculate" to refer to the ancient practice of gematria. Ancient languages, including Hebrew, Greek and Latin use standard letters from their alphabet as numerical signs. For example, alpha (*a*) in Greek stands for the number one; beta (*b*) the number two; iota (*i*) for ten; iota alpha (*ia*) for 11; and iota beta (*ib*) for 12. The Hebrew alphabet also had numerical value. *Alep* stands for one; *bet* stands for two; *gimel* for three and so on. Thus, a series of letters could form a word, and at the same time indicate a number.

Alan Johnson describes the practice. He says:

Gematria took many forms and consisted in trying to guess the word from the number or trying to connect one word with another that had the same numerical value. On the walls of Pompeii, there are some graffiti, dated no later than A.D. 79, that illuminate the practice. One reads: "Amerimnus thought upon his lady Harmonia for good. The number of her honorable name is 45 (me [mu epsilon-lon])." The key to the puzzle seems to be in the word "Harmonia," which was probably not the girl's actual name but refers to the nine Muses (the goddesses of song and poetry); and 45 is the sum of all the digits from 1 to 9 (E. M. Blaiklock, *The Archaeology of the New Testament*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1970, p. 131). Another runs: "I love her whose number is 545 (fme [phi mu epsilon])" (Deiss LAE, p. 277). In these cases, the number conceals a name, and the mystery is perhaps known for certain only by the two lovers themselves.

Similarly, the Jews (esp. Hasidim) used Hebrew alphabetical numbers to indicate concealed names and mysterious connections with other words of the same numerical value. For example, the Hebrew word *nahas* ("serpent") has the same numerical value of the Hebrew word *masiah* ("Mes-

siah”) (358). From this it was argued that one of the names of the Messiah was “serpent.” Some suggest that this may relate to Moses’ lifting up the “serpent” in the wilderness (cf. Num. 21; John 3:14).²⁰

Johnson goes on to say:

Irenaeus (second century) mentions that many names of contemporary persons and entities were being offered in his day as solutions to this number mystery. Yet he cautioned against the practice and believed that the name of the Antichrist was deliberately concealed because he did not exist in John’s day. The name would be secret till the time of his future appearance in the world. Irenaeus expressly refutes the attempt of many to identify the name with any of the Roman emperors. He feels, however, that the gematria approach is John’s intended meaning but warns the church against endless speculations (Contra Haereses 29. 30).²¹

Walvoord says regarding this:

A number of other suggestions are made in that the six Roman numerals, that is I, V, X, L, C, D, adds up to 666. J. B. Smith says, “This alludes to the possibility of a Roman being the antichrist.” Smith also adds “All the numerals from 1 to 36 total 666. *Beast* in the evil sense occurs exactly 36 times (6x6) in Revelation.” Speculation continues ad infinitum using the letter equivalents for numbers in Hebrew, Greek, or Roman numerals. The very variety of the suggestions, however, and the unlikely and unprecedented supposition that someone would rise from the dead to take active part in earthly affairs leaves serious question as to all these imaginative explanations.²²

What then does John mean? The word “calculate” is the Greek *psēphizo*, “to count, compute, reckon” (cf. Luke 14:28 the only other place the word is used in the N.T.). This word was used of calculating the numerical value of a word or number, of voting, of a vote in the sense of resolving to do something. But it also meant to calculate in order to arrive at a value (cf. Lev. 27:23 where this word is used in the LXX translation of the OT Hebrew). In modern Greek it means “to observe.”

The best solution is the simplest one. First, nowhere else does John use gematria as a method, but he regularly uses numbers symbolically and especially the number seven (e.g. the seven spirits of God, churches, seals, trumpets, bowls; 24 elders; 144,000 sealed; six stone water pots [John 2:6]). Then in Revelation 15:2 we read, “...and those who had come off victorious from the beast, and from his image and from the number of his name.” Not simply from his mark, but from the number. This implies a symbolical meaning.

Then what? In Scripture seven is the number of perfection, eight is the number of that which is new, three is the number of the Godhead and six is the number of man which falls short (falls short of the number seven). Man was to work six days and rest on the seventh which portrays the salvation and provision of God, a salvation which man cannot attain by his works because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23).

So John says “here is wisdom.” Where? In doing that which John counsels man to do. Who? Those who have understanding, i.e., spiritual discernment or biblical understanding. Then what are we to do? Number or evaluate the spiritual meaning of the number of the beast, which is, John says, “the number of a man.”

The Significance and Meaning of the Number 666

Though the beast claims to be God, he is not. He is only a man, indeed, an evil and demonically controlled man (cf. 13:4f; 2 Thess. 2:4f). He is far short of the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The three sixes may elude to the satanic trinity—Satan or the dragon, seeking to replace the Father, the beast seeking to replace the Lord Jesus Christ, and the false prophet, seeking to replace the Holy Spirit. But they all fall infinitely short of the triune Godhead. No matter how far we carry the number 666 mathematically as 666666666 it never becomes seven. It always falls short. The point is that this man and his system can never do that which God has

²⁰ *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, p. 533.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Walvoord, pp. 209-210.

promised. Man promises *peace* but brings war; *life*, but brings death; *liberty*, but brings slavery; *happiness*, but brings misery; *significance*, but brings the loss of true meaning and purpose in life.

As the ancient church father Irenaeus proposed, the number may indicate that the beast is the sum of all apostate power, a concentrate of 6,000 years of unrighteousness, wickedness, deception, and false prophecy.²³ The three sixes look at this wickedness in the past, the present and the future culminated in this end time system of the beast.

The general character of the Tribulation is clearly portrayed in this chapter. It is a time of slavery, blasphemy, apostasy, and gross satanic activity. Let us thank God that we have the blessed hope of the rapture (Titus 2:13). But let us not, as we contemplate on all this, forget our responsibility to be involved in the propagation of the gospel of Christ, the only hope for the world.

²³ Johnson, p. 535.

Lesson 22: Special Announcements (14:1-20)

Introduction

This chapter forms the last section of the third interlude of the Book. Again we should note that this material is not chronological in that it does not take up the next events of the Tribulation. Rather it gives us a preview of some of the key events that lie ahead in that period of unprecedented trial. In fact, John now answers two vital questions: What will become of those who refuse to receive the mark of the beast and are killed (vss. 1-5)? And what will happen to the beast and his servants (vss. 6-20)? So chapter 14 prepares the way for the climatic events which will follow from chapter 15 on. This chapter gives us both a backward glance to the beginning of the Tribulation and a forward glance to its end and the glorious reign of the Lord Jesus Christ with His saints.

Revelation 13 revealed the darkest and most grotesque hours of human history with Satan's conspiracy in seeming control of all humanity. But it closed with the declaration of man's number, number 666; a number that falls short of God's perfection. This was both a promise and a declaration that man would fail and God would prevail and so would also God's people. In the two previous chapters we see clearly that God's people will be severely persecuted and sacrificed like sheep. But here we see their ultimate triumph via the triumph of the Lamb of God. For instance, in chapter 7 the 144,000 who were sealed and thus promised deliverance are here seen as delivered.

The Announcement Concerning the 144,000 (14:1-5)

1 And I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads. 2 And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps. 3 And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth. 4 These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb. 5 And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless.

The Setting (14:1)

“And I looked, and behold” is a phrase found seven times (4:1; 6:2, 5; 7:9; 14:1, 14) and each time it turns our attention to another important element in the vision given to John. Here it is the vision of the Lamb standing on Mount Zion accompanied by the 144,000. As previously, the word “behold” is designed to arrest our attention to the remarkable things in this scene.

“The Lamb *was* standing on Mount Zion” is the first important fact that catches John's eye. That the Lamb is standing on Mount Zion is in contrast to the dragon standing on the shifting sands of the seashore. Here is a contrast between stability and rest, and instability and unrest. The contrast is between the Lamb who wins by the sacrifice of Himself versus the dragon who attempts to gain control by his selfish and bloody outrage against humanity. Note that it is the Lamb portrayed here, not the Lion (5:5) because it is through His sacrifice that Christ becomes the Victor.

Students are faced with the need to answer a question about the meaning of Mount Zion. Does it refer to the heavenly city, Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22-23) or to the earthly city of Jerusalem? In Hebrews the reference to Mount Zion is connected with the church and there it symbolizes the strength and security of God's people gathered together with God. But here, John is dealing with the nation Israel and looking forward to the Millennial reign of Christ on earth. Prophetically in Scripture, Zion came to symbolize the place where Messiah would come as the deliverer of Israel and where He would gather together His people (Psalm 48:1f; Isa. 24:23; Joel 2:32; Zeph. 14:10; Rom. 11:26).

In the seven NT references to Zion, five occur in OT quotations. The other two (here and Heb 12:22-23) imply a connection between Mount Zion and the church. Some, by connecting the reference in Hebrews to the one here, have argued for the heavenly location of the 144,000. Others view Mount Zion as the earthly seat of the messianic or millennial kingdom. Whether this Mount Zion has any connection (as to locality) with ancient and historical Zion, John does not say. At any rate, that the 144,000 are singing “before the throne” (v. 3) is not an objection to seeing them as the earthly Zion; it is not the redeemed who are singing but the angelic harpists.¹

Further, the group of 144,000 is the same as that of chapter 7 where they are to be sealed and kept safe through the Tribulation, protected from death to go into the millennial reign of Messiah without going into heaven. This is the implication of chapter 7. Thus, this is prophetic of Christ’s reign in Zion, earthly Jerusalem following the Tribulation. Note in this regard that the word “stood” is in the perfect tense which emphasizes completed action with abiding results. He has taken his stand and reigns.

“And with Him 144,000,…” These are mentioned because they stand in such beautiful contrast with the worshippers of the beast who have his mark and who have sold themselves out to the idolatrous and cultic system of the beast. In chapter 7 we are told the 144,000 are: (a) sealed in their forehead (7:3), (b) that they are bondservants (7:3), and (c) that they are Jews from the twelve tribes of Israel, 12,000 from each tribe. Now additional information is given regarding these bondservants which heightens the contrast between these and the worshippers of the beast.

These are the same 144,000 Jews of chapter 7. The number is the same, they are sealed in their foreheads as in chapter 7, and there is nothing to indicate they are a different group.

“Having His name (the Lamb’s) and the name of His Father written on their foreheads.” This is God’s seal and shows (a) they belong to God and not to the beast, (b) that they have had the guarantee of God’s protection and security through the Tribulation, and (c) they are His servants. As chapter 7 by its context would indicate, they are the great evangelists of the Tribulation who proclaim the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then note that in 14:4 we are told that these follow the Lamb. Perhaps there is an intended connection with those evangelized by the 144,000 in 7:9ff for in 7:17 we read “for the Lamb... shall be their Shepherd and shall guide them...” Chapter 14 completes the drama started in chapter 7. In chapter 7 this whole company of God’s people are sealed (7:1-8), readied for the satanic onslaught, and then a company of those they undoubtedly led to Christ are seen as martyred saints in heaven serving before the throne of God (7:9ff). But here in chapter 14, the whole body of the 144,000 are with the Lamb as victors in the earthly eschatological kingdom. The main emphasis is that here we see these still intact after the days of horrible Tribulation; they are preserved and standing triumphantly with the Lord on Mount Zion in the Millennium.

The Song (14:2-3)

As in chapter 5 the voice heard is described in majestic terms to portray heaven’s response to what John sees here. The three-fold description of the voice stresses the awesome majesty of what John hears as heaven responds in anticipation of the reign of God on earth accomplished by the Lamb. How then should we not also enthusiastically and joyously enter into singing and making melody in our hearts in majestic praise of God.

However, it is important to note that the singers are not necessarily the 144,000, but angelic hosts and perhaps Tribulation martyrs in heaven. The voice is from heaven, from around the heavenly throne (vss. 2-3). The 144,000 are on earth. It is the harpists of heaven who sing the song. Here we are only told the 144,000 can learn the song, while in chapter 15:2-3 they sing the Song of Moses with the company of the redeemed.

But we are not told just exactly what this new song is. It should, however, be related to chapter 5:9 and the new song that was sung by the heavenly choir. Thus it is a song of redemption and vindication. What was seen in chapter 5 as secured for the redeemed by Christ’s death (i.e., that they will reign on the earth [5:10]) has now been realized on Mount Zion (cf. also one further reference to a new song in 15:3).

The word “new” is the Greek *kainos* which refers to that which is fresh and new in quality, unused, unworn. It can mean new in time, but more than anything, it means new in quality, fresh and vital.

¹ *NIV Bible Commentary*, Electronic Version.

In what sense is this a new song? In the Old Testament there are a number of references to a “new song” (cf. Psalm 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 144:9; 149:1 and Isa. 42:10). But what is such a new song? A new song is a consequence of a deeper or clearer grasp of the person and works of God so that it results in a fresh and meaningful impulse of gratitude and joy in the soul as it is expressed in songs of praise and adoration. A new song is not necessarily a song new in time, but one fresh with a new response and understanding so that it is sung as though it were new. This new song is somehow related to the new song of 5:4 and to that in 15:3.

What about the clause “And no one could learn the song except the 144,000...”? The verb “learn” is the Greek *manthano*, which may have several connotations regarding the learning process. One of these is “to learn, appropriate to oneself...through experience or practice.”² Only the 144,000 because of what they will have experienced throughout the Tribulation from beginning to end (having experienced God’s mighty deliverances and victory over the beast) can truly experience the reality and depth of the meaning of the song. *Manthano*, can have the idea of “to hear deeply.”³ John in particular seems to use *manthano*, in the sense of “a deep listening to divine revelation that results in learning”⁴ (cf. John 6:45).

Next we read that the 144,000 “had been purchased from the earth.” This does not mean “removed” from the earth, but “redeemed,” saved from among the people of the earth and thus sealed accordingly (cf. 5:9 and 7:3). “Purchased” is the Greek *agorazo*, which means “to buy, purchase.” It was used of purchasing slaves in the agora or market place. Believers are those who have been purchased from the slave market of sin by the death of Christ. Note these four things regarding our redemption in Christ:

- (1) The Agent of redemption is the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; Rom. 3:24).
- (2) The purchase price is the death of Christ (1 Pet. 1:18-19).
- (3) The object of redemption is man’s sin (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14).
- (4) The result of redemption is forgiveness and freedom but also bond service to Christ (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; 1 Cor. 6:19; Gal. 3:13).

The Separation and Salvation of the 144,000 (14:4-5)

Regarding the 144,000 this verse is perhaps the most difficult because of the reference to defilement with women and the word “chaste” or “virgins.” Does this mean they are men who have never been married, celibates for the kingdom of God (cf. Matt. 19:12; 1 Cor. 7:1-7)? Or does this refer to spiritual faithfulness as opposed to apostasy or cultic prostitution (cf. 2 Cor. 11:2-3; Rev. 2:14, 20-22 with 3:4). There are a number of good arguments for both views, so just how are we to take the verse?

One might assume these are all men because “they were not defiled with women.” On the other hand, one might assume they are all women because they are literally called “virgins,” the Greek *parthenoi*. Neither assumption, however, is necessarily correct. John is probably using these terms in a spiritual sense to declare their spiritual chastity and devotion to Christ.

Such is not an uncommon occurrence in Scripture. In the Old Testament the people of Israel were viewed as the wife of *Yahweh* and unfaithfulness to Him was spoken of as spiritual prostitution and spiritual adultery (cf. Isa. 1:21; Jer. 2:20; 3:20; Hosea 9:1; Exodus 34:15; Deut. 31:16). Similarly in the New Testament the church is viewed as the bride of Christ, as an espoused virgin, and unfaithfulness is viewed as spiritual adultery (cf. Eph. 5:22-32; 2 Cor. 11:2; James 4:4; Rev. 2:20-23).

So the word “virgin” in Scripture does not always have to refer to a woman. Further, the word “defiled” is used by John in the Book of Revelation of moral or spiritual defilement or spiritual or cultic prostitution (cf. 3:4 where John also used “defiled” or the Greek word *moluno*, with 2:14, 20, 22 for a setting of spiritual prostitution).

² William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Electronic Version.

³ *Theological Dictionary of N.T. Words*, Vol. IV, p. 407.

⁴ Alan Johnson, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12, Frank E. Gaebelein, general editor, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1981, p. 539.

During the Tribulation there will exist a great apostate church, or religious Babylon, the mother of all harlotries and the great harlot of the Tribulation. This will be followed by the apostate and idolatrous worship of the beast (cf. Rev. 17-18:24; 13:1ff). But these 144,000 escape all spiritual defilement with these religious systems of the Tribulation. They remain pure, i.e., spiritual virgins. One might compare also a similar use of virgins in the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1-13. In both passages we have references to men and women. The emphasis is not on sex but on spiritual purity. It is for this reason the NASV translates the word *parthenos* as “chaste.”

This view fits with the following words, “these are those who follow the Lamb wherever He goes.” The whole group has remained devoted and faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ; they follow and serve Him as obedient servants in contrast to a world that as a whole goes whoring after the beast.

Then we read “these have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb.” This further explains the above and portrays their spiritual chastity and obedient discipleship as effect and cause. First we had the effect, now we see the cause, the redeeming grace of God.

“Purchased” is the verb *agorazo*, as in verse 3. It refers to their redemption by the person of Jesus Christ. The tense is aorist and in the context of the New Testament it looks at an accomplished fact. “From” is the Greek preposition *apo* and represents in this context not extraction or removal physically, but spiritual separation both positionally and experientially.

“As first fruits” further defines their redemption. There are two concepts in the first fruits metaphor: (a) It first refers to the initial harvest taken in by the farmer with more to come. It indicates more is to come and is a pledge, a down payment that that is so. The 144,000 are the first converts of the Tribulation who will go into the kingdom, but others, as we saw in Revelation 7:9f, will follow. (b) However, the first fruits was that which was offered to God as an expression of being totally separated and set apart to Him as an offering and a sacrifice to God. This is the real emphasis and primary thought here in this context and by the words “to God and to the Lamb”; they were a holy and pure sacrifice.

This does not mean they will be sinless. Jesus Christ is the only human personality that is without sin. But this does emphasize their lives and testimonies will be above reproach. The Tribulation will be a time characterized by deceit, by lies and everything false. But these will be truthful; they will speak and live the truth with veracity so that their lives will be without blame before the unbelieving world. Men will not be able to look at their lives and point a finger at Jesus Christ or at the Christianity they will proclaim.

How important this is for us to recognize today. Too often the testimony of the church is negatively affected by the testimony of believers whose lives are blameable. Compare the following exhortations to the church today (1 Pet. 1:17; 2:11-12; Tit. 2:11-14; Col. 1:22; Eph. 1:4; 5:27).

The Announcement of the First Angel: The Eternal Gospel (14:6-7)

6 And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; 7 and he said with a loud voice, “Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters.”

Matthew 24:14 says: “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come” (cf. Mark 13:10 also). While this gospel in Revelation 14 is not called the “gospel of the kingdom” nor “the gospel of grace” (Acts 20:24) nor the “gospel of Christ (1 Cor. 9:12, 18; Gal. 1:7) some believe it must include these concepts for this message to be called a gospel (“good news”) and it must also help to fulfill Matthew 24:14 along with the preaching ministry of the 144,000. However, Walvoord has a different understanding of this passage. He writes:

The expression “the everlasting gospel,” actually without the article (“everlasting gospel”) is an arresting phrase. It is everlasting in the sense that it is ageless, not for any specific period. Ordinarily, one would expect this to refer to the gospel of salvation. In verse 7, however, the content of the

message is quite otherwise, for it is an announcement of the hour of judgment of God and the command to worship Him.

Some expositors use the term “gospel” to include all the revelation God has given in Christ and hence conclude that there is only one gospel with various phases of truth belonging to this gospel. There are others who prefer to distinguish various messages in the Bible as gospel or “good news” even though they contain only one aspect of divine revelation, hence, the expression “gospel of grace,” referring to the goodness of grace, or to the gospel of the kingdom, dealing with the good news of the kingdom of God. The everlasting gospel seems to be neither the gospel of grace nor the gospel of the kingdom, but rather the good news that God at last is about to deal with the world in righteousness and establish His sovereignty over the world. This is an ageless gospel in the sense that God’s righteousness is ageless. Throughout eternity God will continue to manifest Himself in grace toward the saints and in punishment toward the wicked. To refer to the gospel of grace as an everlasting gospel is to ignore the context and usage of the term.⁵

Concerning Matthew 24:14 and Mark 13:10, remember that this prophecy is not a prophecy of what will be accomplished by the church with the end then coming. The church is commanded to go to the uttermost part of the earth, to all nations, into all the world and to preach the gospel to every creature within those nations (Acts 1:8; Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15), but the actual accomplishment of the proclamation of the good news to every tongue (language and dialect) tribe and nation with the end following (i.e., the visible return of the Lord Jesus Christ) is better seen as accomplished by the 144,000, their converts, and the two witnesses. The angel with the eternal gospel, which includes the announcement of judgment, will be a strong motive for the world to respond to the gospel of grace.

The Messenger of this Gospel

This is another angelic being but not one of the seven angels of the seven trumpets. Here we have an angelic being probably in some recognizable form preaching the gospel from the heavens. This should not surprise us. Reasons:

(1) Angelos is the Greek word for angel and means “messenger.” Angels are messengers and servants of God. Their very name signifies communication.

(2) Throughout the history of redemption God has used various methods to communicate His revelation and the gospel to man (cf. Heb. 1:1-3; 2:1-4).

(3) In the Old Testament angels were often used by God to communicate doctrine and warn men of doom. In Genesis 19:1-15 they warned Lot and rescued him. In Daniel 10:10f an angel revealed the meaning of the vision to Daniel, and the Law on Mount Sinai was ministered by angels (Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2).

(4) During this age God has not used angels to preach the gospel, though in the first century he did use angels to reveal certain things as with Peter in Acts 10. In the Tribulation, however, God will use angelic beings, perhaps because of the wickedness and deceit of these days. In our passage there is an angelic being flying in the midst of heaven and speaking with a loud voice. Believers who know God and believe the Scriptures have no trouble believing such statements of Scripture. But in our day, this doesn’t seem so unbelievable to unbelievers because of what is going on in the realm of the occult. Satan’s angels speak in demonic apparitions and in demon possession. Such things are documented fact.

“Flying in the midst of heaven.” “Flying” is in the present tense and stresses this angel will be constantly on the move. Remember that according to Scripture, there are three heavens: (a) our atmosphere out to about 100 miles, (b) the starry heavens, and (c) the third heaven, the abode of God (2 Cor. 12:2; Deut. 10:14). The heaven referred to here is probably the first atmospheric heaven, but it is possible that it could be the second heaven, the heaven of the stars from whence this angelic messenger will be constantly orbiting the earth as a kind of satellite sending down his message to earth. The earth will probably at first claim he is an “E.T.” but not after his message is heard around the earth.

⁵ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1966, p. 217.

The Message

“Having an eternal gospel to preach...”

(1) **It is a gospel message.** It contains good news because of what it announces. This is not exactly the gospel of the New Testament, and though this could be included, it is not mentioned here.

(2) **It is an eternal message.** The Greek word eternal is *aionios* meaning “age long or ageless.” The point is the message is ageless and pertinent from age to age. It is a message which has been proclaimed since the beginning of creation and will continue on through history because it centers in the call of men to worship the sovereign Creator of the universe. It is a message which creation itself proclaims (Psalm 19; Romans 1:18f; 2 Pet. 3:3-7).

(3) **It is universal in scope.** It is to every nation, tribe, tongue and people. Though it contains the warning of God’s judgment, it is God’s last call of grace to all the world.

(4) **Its content.** The gospel as we normally think of it is not stated here though it may be a part of his message. In Scripture, as mentioned previously, we have: (a) the gospel of Christ, i.e., the good news of salvation through the person and work of Jesus Christ from sin’s penalty, power and presence, (b) the gospel of grace which emphasizes salvation is on the basis of grace, and (c) the gospel of the kingdom, the good news God will establish His kingdom on earth through the two advents of the Lord Jesus Christ. But the good news this angel proclaims has four key elements, three commands and two causes or reasons:

Command #1: “Fear God” refers to a holy reverence that recognizes the sovereign authority and power of God to deal with man in His holy wrath. It is to recognize the true God who can destroy the soul rather than just the body as with the beast.

Command #2: “Give Him glory” refers to the praise and honor that should accrue to God from man due to man’s knowledge and high estimation of God as the sovereign Creator of the universe.

Command #3: “And worship Him who made...” The word “worship” means to show reverence or respect. This word emphasizes the external display as seen in obedience, prayer, singing, and formal worship, while the word “fear” emphasizes the mental attitude behind the worship. In the Tribulation men will be forced to fear and formally acknowledge the beast and his image. In this message the angel is demanding that men reject the beast and formally turn to God to worship Him (cf. Rev. 14:11).

Reason #1: “The hour of his judgment has come” is a reference to the final judgments of the Tribulation, the bowl judgments which are about to occur. These will conclude with the return of Christ Himself (Rev. 19) and lead to the removal of all unbelievers. The emphasis then is to not delay because the time is short.

Reason #2: This is seen in the reference to God as the Creator in verse 7b. This calls attention to the ageless and universal message of the creation itself. Age after age creation has called man to recognize God’s existence and to seek after Him (cf. Acts 17:26-27 with Psalm 19:1-6). This means men are without excuse and that the hour of the Creator’s judgment is about to fall (Rom. 1:18f). Though this is the essential and primary element of the angel’s everlasting gospel, perhaps he will say more than this for from age to age a person’s capacity to reverence, glorify and worship God has come only through believing and knowing Christ (cf. John 14:6 with Acts 4:12; John 4:23-24).

The Announcement of the Second Angel: The Fall of Babylon (14:8)

8 And another angel, a second one, followed, saying, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality.”

This verse introduces us to another future event and one that will become a further means of endurance for Tribulation believers (vs. 12) and a comfort to believers even today as we observe the growth of religious and commercial Babylonianism in our time (Rev. 17 and 18). Revelation 14:8 also forms another striking antithesis to the apparent prosperity of the beast and the false prophet and their system as seen in chapter 13.

Today we are seeing the rise and formation of international and multinational commerce, not merely commerce between nations but international commercial ties which control the governments and political powers within those

nations. This involves a mystery of lawlessness, a spiritual adultery that has existed among the nations since the times of Nimrod to some extent, but which will reach its zenith in the Tribulation. More details will be covered on this subject religiously and politically in chapters 17 and 18 where the fall of Babylonianism will be described in more detail by John.

Now we are introduced to another angelic being. This is a second announcing angel, one that is different from the angel of verse 6 or from the seven trumpet angels. Literally the Greek has “another angel, a second one.”

“Followed” is the Greek *akoloutheo*, which means “to follow in the path of or behind another.” Evidently this angel will likewise fly about the earth as a kind of satellite proclaiming the doom of Babylon.

“Saying” is a present tense form (an iterative present) which suggests the repetition of his message all over the earth as a warning to men. Here is the grace of God warning men and comforting believers. It is a warning to unbelievers not to trust in the Babylonian system, religiously, politically, or commercially because it is a doomed system. Can you imagine the comfort and encouragement this will bring to believers who will be living under the persecution of the beast?

“Fallen, fallen (is) Babylon the Great.” “Fallen” is the Greek *pipto*, meaning “to fall, come to ruin.” This fall is highlighted and emphasized strongly in the following ways. (a) The verb is an aorist indicative and it may be what we call the prophetic or dramatic aorist. It dramatically points to a future event with the certainty of an event which has already been fulfilled. The aorist indicative generally is used of a completed historic event. Here it is used prophetically of what is certain in the sovereign plan of God. (b) Then, the word “fallen” is repeated for emphasis. It is first in the sentence, and there is no finite verb. “Is” is in italics. Literally the text reads “Fallen, fallen, Babylon the Great.”

All of this is designed to highlight the certainty and fact of the fall of the religious, political, and commercial systems of the world portrayed in the word “Babylon.” As I will suggest later, during the Tribulation this system will be centered in a rebuilt city of Babylon, the new center and symbol of Babylonianism. So as is stressed above, it becomes a warning against putting one’s trust in this system as it exists in the world of today or of tomorrow. It is under the judgment of God and is surely doomed along with this world that is passing away.

Finally, in addition to being a means of emphasis, note that the repetition of the word “fallen” may refer to the fall of Babylon in its twofold existence—its fall religiously (Rev. 17) and its fall politically and commercially (Rev. 18).

“Babylon” is from a Greek word derived from the Hebrew *Bab el*, the Hebrew form of the Assyrian word *Bab-ili*, the gate of God. This is a name given to the ancient city of Babylon started by Nimrod of Genesis 10 and 11 (cf. Gen. 10:8-10; 11:1-9). The original name given in Scripture was *Babel*. In Hebrew it means confusion and declares God’s judgment on this first international tyrant and his religious and political system. More on this in chapter 17.

The fact it is called “the Great” identifies Babylon as that city and political and religious system so well known throughout history, i.e., the system originating in the ancient city of Babylon.

“She who” is a relative pronoun agreeing in the Greek with Babylon the Great. This gives further identification as well as the reason for the fall of Babylon. Literally, “who from (out of) the wine of the passion (anger, wrath) of her fornication (immorality) has given all the nations to drink.”

The verb for drink is *potizo*, a causative verb that means, “to give to drink.” Verbs ending in *zo*, are somewhat causative, but it doesn’t mean “to force to drink.” The nations of their own accord followed her and took from the cup she offered.

There are three key nouns here: “wine,” “passion,” and “fornication” or “immorality.” Wine is described by the nouns passion and fornication. So the wine consists of two things: passion and fornication.

“Wine” refers to that which intoxicates and disorients. Here that which intoxicates is the secret mysteries and false and idolatrous doctrines that Satan has used to turn nations further away from God. It includes, as we shall see later, international or multinational commercialism. This is a wine that intoxicates a world seeking its security and happiness in riches and pleasure rather than in God (Rev. 18:2, 3, 9-13; 16-19).

William R. Newell gives an interesting quote concerning international commerce in his commentary on Revelation 18 as he deals with the fall of Babylon. The book was copyrighted in 1935 and he actually quoted Seiss from his book on *The Apocalypse* which was written in 1865, over 130 years ago. Here is what Seiss wrote:

In what, indeed, does the mightiest and farthest reaching power on earth now already center? A power which looms up in all lands, far above all individual or combined powers of church, or state, or caste, or creed? What is it that today monopolizes nearly all legislation, dictates international treaties, governs the conferences of kings for the regulation of the balance of power, builds rail-ways, cuts ship canals, sends forth steamer lines to the ends of the earth, unwinds electric wires across continents, under the seas, and around the world, employs thousands of engineers, subsidizes the press, tells the state of the markets of the world yesterday that everyone may know how to move today, and has her living organizations in every land and city, interlinked with each other, and coming daily into closer and closer combination, so that no great government under the sun can any longer move or act against her will, or without her concurrence and consent?

Think for a moment, for there is such a power; a power that is everywhere clamoring for a common code, a common currency, common weights and measures; and which is not likely to be silenced or to stop till it has secured a common center on its own independent basis, whence to dictate to all countries and to exercise its own peculiar rule on all the kings and nations of the earth. That power is COMMERCE; the power of the ephah and the talent—the power borne by the winged women of Zechariah 5; the one with her hand on the sea and the other with her hand on the land—the power which even in its present dismemberment is mightier than any pope, any throne, any government, or any other one human power on the face of the globe.

Let it go on as it has been going, and will go, in spite of everything that earth can interpose to hinder, dissolving every tie of nationality, every bond of family or kindred, every principle or right and religion which it cannot bend and render subservient to its own ends and interests; and the time must come when it will settle itself down somewhere on its own independent base, and where Judaism and heathenism, Romanism and Protestantism, Mohammedanism and Buddhism, and every distinction of nationality—English, German, French, Italian, Greek, Turk, Hindu, Arab, Chinese, Japanese, or what not—shall be sunk in one great universal fellowship and kingdom of *commerce!*⁶

If this was true and obvious in Newell's day and even before, how much more can we not see the intoxicating powers of commerce and materialism in our world today with our satellites and the internet.

The word, "passion" is thumos, "passion, anger, wrath." Passion here and in 18:3 is a possible meaning, but in all the other passages in Revelation where John uses thumos, the meaning is clearly "wrath" or "anger" (cf. Rev. 12:12; 14:10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1, 19; 19:15). In 14:10 and 19 it is used of the wine of the wrath of God. This may suggest that the meaning here is not "passion," but "anger" or "wrath" also. If so, what does this mean?

(1) It may refer to "wrath" in the sense of Romans 1:18f and God's judgment that occurs when men love the creature more than the Creator and turn away from the knowledge of God. God gives them over to their own vain imaginations and satanic delusions as in idolatry or Babylonianism or humanism. Remember there is an emphasis in Revelation on the worship of God as the Creator (cf. Rev. 14:7). Note in this regard two Old Testament passages, Jeremiah 5:7-10 and 50:38. The madness or spiritual insanity of which Jeremiah speaks (50:38) is the Babylonian idolatry of which all nations drink and which God uses as an instrument of wrath, "a golden cup" full of wine in the hand of God intoxicating the nations of the world because they have turned away from God.

(2) It also refers to the ultimate destruction of Babylonianism and all nations who have drunk of the wine of the spiritual fornication of this harlot system. This wine then is a judgment from God and leads to the judgment of the Tribulation (Rev. 14:10; Jer. 25:12-29). So the next judgments of the Tribulation are the bowl judgments poured out in quick succession with the seventh bowl leading to the fall of Babylon (Rev. 16:17-19).

⁶ William R. Newell, *The Book of Revelation*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1966, p. 283 quoting Seiss from his book "*On the Apocalypse*" written in 1865.

“Of her immorality” (the Greek *porneia*, “any kind of illicit sexual activity”) is used figuratively of spiritual prostitution and apostasy from God. It particularly refers to the various idolatries and human ideologies of man as found in the religious and politico-commercial system of the beast.

Further Explanation with Illustrations

The name Babylon is designed to take us back to the original city of Nimrod and Babel because this became the seat of Satan’s ancient counterfeit strategy to destroy and corrupt the knowledge of God as well as God’s plan of salvation as anticipated in Genesis 3:15. This was accomplished by Nimrod’s political, commercial, and international system as demonstrated in the tower of Babel and by the mother-child cult instituted by Nimrod’s wife, Semiramis. History shows us this system has never ceased to exist in one form or another and will exist in a revived form in the Tribulation as never before (Rev. 17 and 18).⁷ The two Babylons refer to ancient Babylon of the Old Testament and the Babylon of the future spoken of in the New Testament.

God consciousness, the fact that man can know that God is there, is a message that has been proclaimed by nature since the creation of the world and all nations at one time have believed in the fact of a supreme being, the Creator and Sustainer of all things. In fact, there is historical evidence the ancient nations believed in the doctrine of the trinity, though in a distorted form.⁸ For illustrations of this, see figures I and II in the material below. These concepts of the knowledge of God became totally and completely perverted and idolatrous and lost due to man’s love for the creature more than the Creator, but the vestiges of this truth were still present. Due to God’s wrath which turns man over to his own vain imaginations, man became a sitting duck for the wine of Babylon and her deceiving mysteries (Rev. 17:2, 4-5).

One of the distinguishing features of the ancient system of the Chaldean “mysteries” and that which was a part of their initiation rites into the system was the drinking of what was called a mysterious drink. The drink was made of wine, honey, water, and flowers which were all symbolical of the doctrines of the cult. The drink made the participant intoxicated, mentally dimmed, excited, and duly prepared for what they would see and hear in the licentious Babylonian rites. For an illustration see figure III.⁹

Obviously, through these mystery rites and symbols, the real concepts and truths of God were perverted and forgotten. The primary one worshipped was the woman and her child and the first person of the triad was ignored or forgotten.

According to the sacred books of India, the Brahm or the Brahma is the first person of the Hindu triad. The religion of the Hindustan is even called by this name, yet he is rarely worshipped, and there is scarcely a single temple in all India now in existence of those that were formerly erected in his honor.¹⁰ So also with papal Rome today and in ancient Babylon, we find that the grand objects of worship are the goddess mother and her son who are represented world-wide in pictures and images as an infant or child in his mother’s arms. It is significant that some of these pictures date back to long before the birth of Jesus Christ. See figures IV and V.

The system of Babylon, as Revelation 14:8 indicates with the words “all nations,” is world wide. This is easily demonstrated historically. From ancient Babylon and the kingdom of Nimrod, this cult spread all over the world. In Egypt its worship centered in the names of Isis and Osiris; in India in the names Isi and Iswara; in Asia in the names Cybele and Deoios; as Diana in Ephesus, and as Fortuna and Jupiter in Pagan Rome. In Greece it appeared under the names of Ceres, the Great Mother with the babe at her breast, or as Irene, the Goddess of Peace, with the boy Plutus in her arms. Even in Tibet, China, and Japan Jesuit missionaries have reported finding the signs of ancient mystery Babylon, the counterpart of the Madonna and her child was devoutly worshipped as in Papal Rome itself. She was called Shing Moo, an idol portraying a woman with a child in her arms and a glory (halo) around her head.¹¹ Further,

⁷ The history and spread of this system is described and documented in *The Two Babylons or The Papal Worship Proved to Be The Worship of Nimrod and His Wife*, Alexander Hislop, Loizeaux Brothers, Second American Edition, 1959.

⁸ Hislop, p. 14.

⁹ All the figures shown here were taken from Hislop’s *The Two Babylons*, pp. 5-19.

¹⁰ Hislop, pp. 19-20.

¹¹ Hislop, p. 20.

there is strong evidence this did not come to the orient from Rome or the Roman Catholic Church, but some of it existed from very ancient times.

The names have changed, but certain elements are always there as the mother with the child in her arms, or the lady in heaven. Thus, Babylon has become the biblical name and symbol for this world-wide religious system which has touched all the nations of the world to some degree or another. She is indeed the “Mother of Harlots” (Rev. 17:5).



Figure I



Figure II



Figure III

Figure I is an Assyrian figure. The center head of the old man represents the concept of the Father. The zero or circle signified “the seed” and referred to the son, the promise of a Savior. The wings and tail of the bird signified the person of the Holy Spirit.

Figure II is from a Siberian coin which portrays a three-headed god representing the concept of a triad, though in perverted form.

Figure III is a figure of a woman with the cup from Babylon offering the cup of fornication to the participants. It was from Babylon and exhibited in Greece. But it is interesting that Rome adopted this symbol on one of their medals in 1825. Pope Leo XII was on one side and the church of Rome, symbolized as “the woman with the cup” was put on the opposite side. Around the edge of the medal was the legend “the whole world is her seat.” A truly international idea.

Note figures IV and V for similar figures taken from ancient Babylon and India respectively.



Figure IV



Figure V

**The Announcement of the Third Angel:
Judgment on the Beast Worshipers
(14:9-11)**

9 And another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or upon his hand, 10 he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11 “And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; and they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.”

This passage is a very sobering one; one which many would like to denounce or reason away. The judgments described here are terrible and awesome and often repugnant to human sensitivity, but these judgments are described elsewhere in Scripture and were specifically taught by Jesus Christ Himself. Whether man (the creature) is repelled by the judgments described here is really not the issue. The issue is that the eternal God and Creator has revealed them to be fact. The problem with man and the reason these judgments seem repugnant or wholly distasteful is man's inability to comprehend the awesome holiness of God's character (Isa. 6:1-7).

The specific reference in this announcement to the judgment of the beast worshippers ties this section to chapter 13 and the apparent success of the beast. The beast's system, Babylonianism (vs. 8), is doomed and so are his worshippers (vs. 9-11).

These verses also bring out some striking comparisons and contrasts with the preceding and following verses.

(1) As the beast worshippers drink of the wine of the wrath of Babylon's immorality, so they will drink of the wine of the wrath of God.

(2) The beast worshippers will be unable to rest day or night from their eternal doom and judgment, but the saints of God will rest from their labors forever.

(3) While the beast worshippers have rest from the tortures of the beast and the saints are tormented on earth, there is a reversal of roles after death or the Tribulation.

(4) Then there is a contrast of loyalties which form the basis for the temporary rest on earth versus the eternal rest in heaven (cf. vs. 9b with vs. 12).

As one studies and contemplates this passage of Scripture he should also keep in mind Jude 21-23 which says:

Keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. And have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh.

The Messenger (14:9a)

"Another angel, a third one." Following the pronouncement of the fall of Babylon by the second angel, John next sees a third angel flying in heaven pronouncing judgment on the followers of the beast.

"With a loud voice." As with the everlasting gospel, this message is likewise proclaimed with a loud voice to arrest the attention of the world. With the gospel we have the good news, but here we have the bad news, and with both we have the words, "with a loud voice." This is designed to emphasize that all will hear these announcements. There will be no excuse. Here is another manifestation of God's grace seeking to get men to respond to the good news by confronting them with the bad news while there is still time. God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth," "not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (1 Tim. 2:4 and 2 Pet. 3:9b).

The Message (14:9-11)

The People Doomed (14:9b)

"If anyone worships." The "if" is a first class condition and sets forth a reality, a fact taking place, or which will take place. Both the words "worship" and "receive" are in the present tense. They look at action or events (to us yet future) which will be occurring in present time, i.e., going on in the Tribulation. Here is a warning as well as a pronouncement of doom on all who will be falling in line with and accepting the beast and his system. It looks at men in the process of joining up with the beast. God in His grace will be warning them; do not do it, it means your doom! For those who will have already done so it becomes descriptive of the results of their choice and actions.

"Anyone" is the Greek *tis*, an indefinite pronoun that refers to male or female, bond or free, Jew or Gentile, religious or immoral, rich or poor, young or old. No one is excluded. As anyone who believes in and receives the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior may be saved (John 1:12, 3:16), so anyone who rejects Christ and receives the beast, the false messiah, will be lost (an evidence of unbelief and rejection of Jesus Christ) and shall suffer eternal doom.

The Punishment Described (14:10-11)

“He also shall drink.” Literally the Greek text is somewhat emphatic. It reads, “and he himself shall drink.” The Greek text adds the intensive pronoun *autos*, “he” or “himself.” It is added to stress the point that you cannot worship the beast and drink the cup of the wine of Babylonianism without also drinking of the cup of the wine of God’s wrath. For certain, the beast worshippers (the Christ rejecters) will drink of the judgment of God in the future at the great white throne judgment according to the context as the reference to being “tormented with fire and brimstone” suggests. Man today scoffs at the coming of the Lord and acts as though there is no coming judgment. Just get all the gusto you can for you only go around once and that’s it. This verse stresses eternal judgment is coming (cf. 2 Pet. 3:3f).

“Of the wine.” This is in contrast to the wine of fornication (vs. 8).

“Of the wrath.” “Wrath” is *thumos* and refers to a more volatile anger, one which bursts out from God’s inexorable holiness. When used of God it refers to the expression of God’s divine justice in white hot anger. By contrast the Greek *orge*, a synonym, refers to the settled attitude of anger or the wrath of God.

The rest of the verse reveals several things about God’s wrath:

(1) Its **Degree** is seen in the words, “mixed in full strength.”

“Mixed” is the Greek word *kerannumi* which was used of the preparation of wine by the addition of special spices or water. In ancient times wine was mixed with water, diluted to reduce its effect, or mixed with other ingredients to heighten its effect as in the Babylonian mystery religions. So *kerannumi* came to mean “properly prepared.”¹² The verb is in the perfect tense which, in this context, refers to the results, the portion prepared to accomplish God’s purposes of judgment. This wrath has been prepared and stands ready (Matt. 25:41).

“In full strength” is the Greek *akratos* which means “unmixed, undiluted.” The emphasis of this whole clause is that God’s wrath at this point in time will in no way be diluted with His grace and mercy. At this point all of God’s mercy and grace will be withdrawn. Now the longsuffering of God in His mercy and grace holds back the divine justice and holiness of God, but a time is coming when the man who is without Jesus Christ as his Savior will face the unalterable and absolute wrath of God’s holiness.

(2) The **Agent or Means** of judgment is seen in the words, “And he will be tormented with fire and brimstone...” (vs. 10b)

“Fire and brimstone” refer to the ingredients or content of the lake of fire already prepared for Satan and his angels (Matt. 25:41). These are one and the same. The lake is the place and the fire and brimstone the ingredients (Rev. 20:10; Matt. 25:41,45; Rom. 2:3-9; 2 Thess. 1:6-9).

The modern view of man is that the whole idea of hell or the lake of fire is not only distasteful, but sub-Christian and contrary to the nature of a God of love. It is further argued that Christ only referred to such an idea as an accommodation to the beliefs of the day, but that He really did not believe in them. Such views are totally inconsistent with the whole tenor of Scripture. The authors of Scripture believed in eternal judgment and one which included the eternal fires of hell.

The accommodation idea is totally inconsistent also with the whole ministry and preaching of Christ. He never hesitated to correct erroneous theology or practice in other issues, but taught the Scripture and reinterpreted the Law in opposition to the religious leaders. Why then should he not do so here? The truth is He clearly believed in and taught the fact of an eternal judgment of fire (Matt. 25:41,46).

(3) The **Nature or Character** of this judgment is “torment.”

“And he will be tormented...” “He will be” is a first person singular verb. This individualizes the doom and emphasizes the individual and personal experience every unbeliever must face. No one can face hell for the unbeliever since he has rejected Christ. “Tormented” is the Greek *basanizo*, and meant “to examine by torture as with a torture rack.” Then it came to refer to any kind of extreme torture or torment whether physical, mental, or emotional. Due to the fact there will be a second resurrection (a bodily resurrection) of the unjust this torment will be all three—

¹² Fritz Rienecker, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, Vol. II, edited by Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1980, pp. 499.

physical, mental, and emotional. Remember, the resurrection of the unjust refers to unbelievers who are unjustified and without the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

(4) The **Witnesses, the Judge, and the Executors** of this judgment are described in the words, “in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb” (vs. 10c).

The word “presence” used in the phrase, “in the presence of,” is the Greek *enopion* which may have two meanings both of which are applicable here. First, it may mean “in the sight of” in the sense of a witness or as a judge (Rom. 14:23; 1 Cor. 1:24; 1 Tim. 2:3). The angels will personally witness the judgment of the unbelievers at the great white throne judgment. Second, it may mean “perform by the authority of” (Rev. 13:12, 14; 19:20). It appears the angels will be agents God uses to boot the Christ-rejecting world into the lake of fire. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Judge and the angels the executors of His judgment.

The concept is this: (a) The beast worshippers and all unbelievers will be resurrected and brought before the great white throne on which the Lamb sits. They are before Him as Judge (Rev. 20:11-15). (b) The good angels will also be gathered as witnesses of this judgment which will demonstrate the holiness and love of God since God has provided a solution to man’s sin even though these have rejected it (1 Pet. 1:12). Angels are intimately interested in our salvation because it demonstrates God’s perfect character and love and His just decision in sending Satan to the lake of fire.

The basis of the judgment and thus the basis of the sentence to the torture of fire and brimstone is reception of Christ or rejection of Christ. That which shows rejection of Jesus Christ is the worship of the beast. This shows rejection (ultimate and final) so that person’s name is blotted out of the Lamb’s book of life even before death (Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:11-15). When one worships the beast by receiving his mark, it indicates that he has reached a place which precludes repentance. The execution of this sentence to be tormented by the fire and brimstone of the lake of fire may very well be carried out by the angels. They will cast the unbelievers into the lake of fire (20:15). “Was cast” is an aorist passive of *ballo*.,.

(5) The **Duration** of the Torment (vs. 11a) is forever, unceasing, and without rest.

“The smoke” evidently stands for their cries and pain which consume their purpose and meaning for existence. “Goes up” is a progressive present and means the smoke “keeps on ascending.” The torment never lets up. “For ever and ever” is literally “unto ages of ages.” This is without the article and stresses the qualitative idea of infinite duration. This is the strongest Greek expression for eternity. The word order is literally “unto ages of ages ascends up.” This passage shows the error of the view or belief that God will annihilate the unsaved.

“And they have no rest day or night.” “No rest” is anapausis which signifies rest that comes from a temporary cessation from something. They won’t know even a moment’s rest from this torment. Remember it is “undiluted.” “Day or night” further emphasizes the concept of no rest.

Verse 11b again identifies the people involved, those who have received the mark of the beast and worship him (i.e., the Christ rejecters).

This may sound to some like an old-time message of hell, fire and brimstone which may surprise some who think that modern man has been able to escape these old fashioned ideas. But modern man has only escaped these ideas by the blindness of his own mind and ignorance of the truth of God. This is what the Bible emphatically teaches and the Bible has the seal and approval of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, whom God raised from the dead as proof not only of the truth of Scripture, but of the fact that every unbeliever must face Jesus Christ at the great white throne judgment (Acts 17:30-31).

The Announcement Concerning the Blessing of the Saints (14:12-13)

12 Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. 13 And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, “Write, ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!’” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.”

In contrast to the preceding judgment, and the following judgment of the harvest of the earth, here is word of comfort to Tribulation saints.

The Perseverance (14:12a)

“Here is the perseverance of the saints.” “Here” is the Greek word *hode*, an adverb that means, “in this circumstance” or “in this event.” The awesome warnings of doom in the preceding two announcements (verses 8-10) was by contrast to be a means of encouragement and hope to the saints of the Tribulation who would be undergoing persecution by the beast.

“Perseverance” is the Greek *hupomone*, which refers to the capacity to endure regardless of the intensity or the duration. Literally it means “to remain under.” The ability to remain under the horrible conditions of persecution will be aided by the knowledge of the doom of the beast as reemphasized and promised by the announcing angels.

By way of application it reminds us that being consistent in personal Bible study and gathering with others where one can hear the Word proclaimed and taught is a strong aid to personal endurance and stability in the trials of life.

The People (12b)

“Saints who keep the commandments of God, and their faith in Jesus.”

First, they are described as “saints.” This is the Greek word *hagios* and literally means, “set apart ones.” This is a term for believers of either the Old or New Testament. Here it is used of Tribulation believers. Saints are those who, as believers in the Lord, are set apart for God’s blessing and care. They should also be those who are set apart to Him for Christ-like living in the power of the Spirit. It does not in itself mean they are saintly or refer to some special holy person. All believers are saints, as were the Corinthian believers who were anything but saintly. Paul called them carnal (cf. 1 Cor. 1:2 with 3:1-5).

Second, they are described as those “who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.” Keeping the commandments or obedience to the Word is the result of faith in Jesus Christ, but in this context it is the product of the encouragement taken from the truth of the preceding announcements. Perhaps the particular obedience in mind is refusal to worship the beast, receive his mark, or become a part of the idolatry of the beast.

Because of the clause, “the perseverance of the saints,” some take this passage as teaching the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. Some confuse the Reformed doctrine called the perseverance of the saints with the doctrine of eternal security, but they are not exactly the same. Eternal security says that once a person is saved he cannot lose his salvation because he is kept by the power of God through the finished and sufficient work of the Savior. The Reformed doctrine of perseverance says much more than this. It says that all who are truly saved will persevere in a life of godliness and holiness; that there may be temporary times of sin and carnality, but no true believer will persist in such a state for very long and will eventually come back to the Lord.

Wilkin has an excellent discussion on this issue as it relates to this passage:

We might paraphrase v 12 in this way: This [knowing the fate of those who take the mark] is a motivation for believers to endure the persecutions and to persist in obeying God’s commands and in keeping the faith.

Nowhere does v 12 say that *all* Tribulation saints will persevere in obeying God’s commands and in keeping the faith. Rather, it says that one of the reasons those who persevere will do so is because they know that the unsaved have a devastating destiny.

It goes without saying that as Tribulation saints reflect on the fearful future of the lost, they will be moved to contemplate their own futures as well. They will be reminded that if they endure they will reign with Christ (2 Tim 2:12; Rev 2:26; 3:21) and will have other eternal rewards as well (Matt 5:11-12; 6:19-21; Rev 22:12).

E. D. Hirsch, an expert on biblical interpretation, reminds us that a given set of words can have several different meanings depending on what he calls the *illocutionary force* of the statement in context (*Aims in Interpretation*, pp. 26, 52-53, 67). The *illocutionary force* of Rev 14:9-12 is clear-

ly hortatory. Of the approximately thirty commentaries I consulted on this passage, nearly all attest that the aim of these verses is to motivate Tribulation believers to persevere. The view which suggests instead that these verses are promising that all believers will persevere wholly misses the point.

Matt 24:12 confirms the fact that some, actually many, Tribulation saints will fail to endure. The love of many believers will grow cold during that terrible time.

Third, one is left with only one viable alternative. Implicit in these verses is a guarantee that God will not allow any Tribulation saint to take the mark. As He does now, so then He will give special grace in times of testing. He will not allow any believer to be tempted beyond his ability to withstand the test (1 Cor 10:13).

Of course, it is indeed conceivable that a believer might fail to utilize the special grace which God will give him. In such cases we can be sure that God will remove him from the tempting situation—quite possibly by taking him home.

I believe that the rapture will precede the Tribulation, and so I don't expect any of us to be around facing the trials spoken of. Even so, Rev 14:9-12 challenges us to persevere in the faith (there are still plenty of trials and difficulties for us in this age) that we might realize the fantastic future of the overcomer.¹³

The Pronouncement From Heaven (14:13)

A fourth voice now comes from heaven (either Christ's or an angel's) pronouncing a beatitude and evoking a response from the Spirit of God. Another possibility here is that the voice is that of the Spirit Himself. The last half of the verse would then identify who speaks from heaven. (For the four previous records of a voice from heaven compare 10:4, 8; 11:12 and 14:2).

The principle is that here is a direct communication from God from heaven rather than through angelic messengers. Why? Because of the importance of the message, but more so because God is interested in personally bringing comfort to His own.

This shows God's personal care and interest in His own. By way of application it shows how God is personally interested in revealing Himself and speaking to our hearts according to our need (exhortation, rebuke, comfort, instruction, etc.). The issue is do we have ears to hear. If only we would diligently seek Him and His counsel in His Word by which He speaks to us today, as a voice from heaven (Jer. 29:13; Psalm 119:2, 10-18, 49-50; James 1:19-21).

What John is told to write is a beatitude, a pronouncement of blessing or divine happiness upon those individuals who comply with certain truths or principles of Scripture, but always on the basis of grace. In Scripture a beatitude is always seen as a reversal of man's viewpoint by setting forth God's viewpoint, values, priorities and ideas. To the earthling, obeying the beast and worshipping him is more blessed than death; even slavery is better than death. To many unbelievers death is feared, viewed as an unknown, or the end. But to believers, God's viewpoint and the promises of His Word teach the direct opposite. To accept the beast is to forfeit trusting in Jesus Christ and so to forfeit eternal life. But death is never the end, it is only the beginning. This life is a place of preparation because our choices and works follow us into eternity.

The phrase "the dead who die in the Lord" refers to martyred believers (those who put their trust in Christ and share in His eternal life), those martyred for their stand in Christ. But they are blessed. The beast can kill their physical bodies, but their souls and spirits go immediately to be with the Lord. They will be given resurrected, immortal bodies, and will live in the eternal kingdom of God (Luke 12:4-5).

The words "from now on" are interpreted variously: (a) from the time of John's writing onward, and so it would be a reference to all saints who die; (b) from the time of this period of intensified persecution by the beast to the end of the Tribulation. The context fits the latter view. This is spoken for the comfort and encouragement of those who will be facing martyrdom in the Tribulation. However, while it is written to them by interpretation, it is nevertheless

¹³ Bob Wilkin, *Grace Evangelical News*, June, 1991, pp. 2-3.

true for all believers from the time of Christ. Many were martyred in the days of the early church for their faith in Jesus Christ. It even applies to Old Testament saints.

The key point is simply that it is better to be dead at the hands of the beast than to follow him and reject Christ. Why? Because of what awaits the believer in heaven and the eternal future.

The reasons are now given by a direct statement from the Spirit of God. Here and in Revelation 22:17 are the only places where the Spirit of God speaks directly Himself (cf. Acts 13:2; 16:7; Heb. 3:7; 10:15; Rom. 8:16; 1 John 2:27; 1 Tim. 4:1).

The words the Spirit speaks:

“Yes” is a particle of verification or affirmation. Here it affirms the assertion regarding the blessedness of martyrdom. This is followed by some specific reasons.

The clause, “that they may rest from their labors” points us to God’s purpose in death, i.e., the cessation of the saint’s labor, toil, and weariness, but also the blessed experience and rest of God’s presence and the paradise of heaven. But that is not all; God promises to reward believers for their labors. Their works will not be forgotten (1 Cor. 15:58).

“They may rest” is the Greek *anapauo*,. It means to “have relief, cease from labor.” But in the original text the verb is in the middle voice which may stress the subject as somehow participating in the results of the action. It thus means “to enjoy rest” or “really experience the blessings of the rest.”

By way of application, how many times do people cease from labor but are unable to actually rest, enjoy it and relax? In God’s presence and out of this old world, rest will truly be rest. Part of the reason for this is in what follows in the final clause.

“Labors” is the Greek *kopos*. It refers to hard work, toil producing a weariness which exhausts. Here it particularly refers to labors endured in persecution from the beast (cf. James 1:12 where God offers a special crown or reward for enduring trials).

“For their deeds follow them.” This is both an explanation and a promise. It is an explanation in that it points out one of the reasons these martyrs will be able to truly enjoy their rest. Their labors will not be in vain. Rewards will follow which will more than compensate for their losses on earth. Heaven’s joys and those of the eternal state will blot out the memory of earth’s painful labors and trials (Rev. 21:4; Isa. 65:17-18).

“Deeds” is the plural of the Greek *ergon*, “work, deed, action,” or “employment, task.” The plural points to all the specific service or works of the believer that are done as unto the Lord and in the power of the Holy Spirit. These the Lord will reward. God will remember and reward them all.

The verb “follow them” is a present tense of continuous action and means “to accompany.” The emphasis is that the works of the believer, if accomplished through the filling of the Holy Spirit, will accompany the believer into heaven and into the eternal state. They will bring special joy because of the glory they bring to God, and the privileges they bring to the believer such as service, and responsibility (Matt. 25:19-23).

The Announcement of the Harvesting of the Earth (14:14-20)

14 And I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud *was* one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head, and a sharp sickle in His hand. 15 And another angel came out of the temple, crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, “Put in your sickle and reap, because the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe.” 16 And He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth; and the earth was reaped.

17 And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle. 18 And another angel, the one who has power over fire, came out from the altar; and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, “Put in your sharp sickle, and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe.” 19 And the angel swung his sickle to

the earth, and gathered *the clusters from* the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God. 20 And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses' bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles.

After the brief pause to comfort the saints, John returns to the subject of God's divine wrath poured out upon the earth. This is done by way of the picture of a harvest by which God reaps the earth (14:14-20) and by way of the seven last plagues, the seven bowl judgments which are poured out on the earth (chapters 15 and 16). The vision of chapter 14 symbolically portrays the final acts of God's judgments in the last days of the Tribulation consisting of the seven last plagues which conclude with the final phase of Armageddon when all the nations are gathered together in the Valley of Megiddo (cf. Joel 13:9-17; Rev. 16:12-16; 19:17-21).

In these verses we have the final declaration of the defeat of the beast and his system which had appeared to be so successful in chapter 13. Such was not really the case. God was only allowing the iniquity of man to ripen to its zenith to show the full extent of where man's humanism and religionism will go without God and His salvation for man in Jesus Christ. These verses will emphasize this truth.

One may note four key elements in these verses: (a) The *Reapers*—The Son of Man (the Lord Jesus Christ) with His holy angels (vss. 14-15, 17-19). This stresses the source. It is an act of God carried out by His angelic agents. (b) The *Reaping* or harvesting of the earth in two figures—a harvesting of the earth as dry grain, and a harvesting of earth as clusters of the vine (vss. 15-16, 18-20). (c) The *Reason* for the Reaping—because the earth is ripe, withered, or dry (vs. 15) and because her grapes are ripe, full, bursting with juice (vs. 18). And (d) The *Results* of the Reaping, a world-wide harvest on earth with a bloody carnage occurring particularly in Palestine where the armies of the nations are gathered together to do battle with Christ (cf. vss. 19-20 with Rev. 16:12-16, 19:17-21; Isa. 63:1-4).

The Harvesting of the Earth (14:14-16)

The First Reaper (14:14) "One Like the Son of Man"

"And I looked and behold, a white cloud." The first thing called to our attention is the white cloud. "White" is a symbol of righteousness or holiness and the "cloud" symbolizes the presence, majesty and glory of God.

"And One sitting on the cloud was one like the Son of Man." The sinner sits on the cloud like a throne, and he appears as a Son of Man. This is clearly a title of the Lord Jesus Christ and emphasizes the humanity of Christ as the One who came to die for man, but who, as the God-Man and King would one day come to judge men as Man. The issue is when men reject Christ and His Word, they will face Him as Judge. Compare the words of Christ in John 5:22, 27 with 12:46-48 and Acts 17:31. The harvest of the earth proceeds from the holiness of God who in His perfect righteousness must judge a Christ rejecting world. The world will be reaped according to its own sowing.

"Having a golden crown on His head." The word "having" is the present tense of a continuous condition and emphasizes the permanence of the crown because of that which Christ accomplished by His first advent. "Gold" in Scripture is a symbol of deity, of value, of what is imperishable, and of righteousness. "Crown" is the Greek *stephanos* which refers to the victor's crown rather than diadem, the crown of royalty. Christ is coming to conquer, having the right and power to do so as the victorious Savior.

"And a sharp sickle in His hand." The word "having" also goes with these words. It emphasizes that no one can stop this judgment until the work is done. That the sickle is sharp teaches us this harvesting will be complete, thorough, and effective. Newell has some interesting comments here. He says:

Not the glory of His person, or the *process* of His coming, but the fact that He is ready with a reaping instrument, is here emphasized. Rights over the harvest, (whatever the harvest is to be) are manifest. "Thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbor's standing grain," said the law. Therefore, He is to reap a field over which He has authority. Now, it is striking to discover that the "sickle" is mentioned just twelve times in the Bible, and seven of these are in our verses here! Also that the Greek word translated "sharp" (*oxus*) occurs seven times in The Revelation: four times describing

the sickle here, and three times, that two-edged sword which proceeds from the Lord's mouth for searching *judgment*.¹⁴

The Second Reaper (14:15) "Another angel"

This does not suggest that the person of verse 15 is an angel. "Another" simply relates this agent to the other angels mentioned earlier in the chapter. Angels are messengers whom God uses to carry out His purposes, even with the Son of Man.

"Came out of the temple" calls our attention to the fact this angel comes from the heavenly temple, from the very presence of the Father (cf. vs. 17).

"Crying out with a loud voice..." Here an angelic *being* gives orders to the Son of Man, but Christ Himself said that the Father had set within His own limits "the times and epochs" (Matt. 24:36; Acts 1:7). This is therefore, the Father giving directions to the Son of Man to execute the final judgments through this angelic messenger. Please note the words, "because the hour to reap has come" (cf. Heb. 10:12-13; Psalm 2:7-9).

Reaping is symbolic of death and destruction which will be wrought upon the earth. Does this reaping include both saints and sinners? From the parable of Matthew 13 we learn that "the harvest is the end of the age and the reapers are the angels" and that "the Son of Man will send forth His angels and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness and will cast them into the furnace of fire" (Matt. 13:39-41a). But in the parable as Christ told it before giving the meaning, he said of the tares (the enemy or unbelievers) and of the wheat (the people of God, believers), "allow both to grow together until the harvest; and I will say to the reapers, 'first gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up, but gather the wheat into My barns'" (13:30).

Note that while the angels gather the tares for judgment, the righteous are left on earth where the kingdom will be established. It seems evident from this and the context of Revelation 14 that the sickle of Revelation 14 is for the judgment of unbelievers only. Believers are not here in view.

"Because the harvest of the earth is ripe." The phrase "is ripe" is the Greek verb *xe,raino,,* which means "to dry" or "be dry, be parched, withered" (cf. Mark 11:20 where this verb is used, also James 1:11). It refers to a dry or withered harvest. Ryrie says, "The inhabitants of the earth are withered, lifeless and fully ready for judgment."¹⁵ Man-kind was to be a productive vine for God's glory but the nations turned from God. Then God chose and called out the nation Israel who was to be a choice vine, but she too turned away (Isa. 5). So God brought forth the True Vine, the Lord Jesus Christ who alone brings fruit and glory to God and only those who believe in Him and abide in Him can be productive. Everyone else must wither and be gathered for judgment (cf. John 15).

The Reaping (14:16) "... and the earth was reaped"

The final judgments of the Tribulation which culminate in Christ's return are referred to in one quick and sweeping statement. Here we have the ultimate source of reaping, the Lord, the act, and the result. The verb "was reaped" is a culminative aorist looking at the final victory of Jesus Christ. This promises and states the fact of victory before the details are given later in Revelation. The details will come in the following chapters.

The Vine of the Earth and the Wine Press of God's Wrath (17-20)

In the pictures portrayed in these verses we have an anticipation of the coming of Jesus Christ at the final battle of Armageddon in the Valley of Megiddo. The metaphor changes slightly from the harvest of the dried grain or tares to that of the gathering of grapes and the winepress of God's anger.

The church of Jesus Christ is gone. Christ (the true Vine) has been rejected by the nations and Israel. With the exception of the remnant of believers from every tribe, tongue, and nation, all the earth has given themselves over to Satan and the kingdom of the beast. Thus, the earth has become like a great vine full of clusters of grapes ripe for

¹⁴ William H. Newell, *The Book of The Revelation*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1966, p. 228.

¹⁵ Charles C. Ryrie, *Revelation*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1968, p. 92.

harvest and the winepress or judgment. Perhaps Moses' words in Deuteronomy 32:32-35 will help us see the picture of how God views the nations.

For their vine is from the vine of Sodom, and from the fields of Gomorrah; their grapes are grapes of poison, their clusters, bitter. Their wine is the venom of serpents, and the deadly poison of cobras. Is it not laid up in store with Me, sealed up in My treasuries? Vengeance is Mine, and retribution, in due time their foot will slip; for the day of their calamity is near, and the impending things are hastening upon them.

In the scene of 14:17-18 we have two angels. The first (vs. 17) comes from the heavenly temple, from the presence of God to execute the harvest. He too had a sharp sickle. Then another angel comes on the scene. This angel is first described as "the one who had power (or authority) over fire." Fire is the element which consumes and may stand for (a) God's presence (Ex. 3:2); (b) God's glory (Ex. 24:17); and (c) God's judgment (Gen. 19:24; Rev. 20:15). This angel proceeds from God's presence and acts on behalf of God's glory to authorize judgment on earth. The connection with fire may also have something to do with the altar. This altar is the altar of incense full of coals from the burnt offering of sacrifice. As we saw earlier in Revelation 6:9-11 and 8:3-6 this represented the prayers of the saints asking God to act, to judge the enemies of God in righteousness. Here God is acting to vindicate His saints persecuted and martyred for their faith in Jesus Christ.

This angel thus speaks to the angel with the sharp sickle (literally for emphasis "the sickle, the sharp one"), and commands him to put in his sickle and to harvest the ripe grape clusters from the poisonous vine of the earth. The words "are ripe" represent the Greek *akmazo*, which means "to be in its prime, be at its peak of ripeness." Then to add to this, the word "grapes" here in the last part of the verse is the Greek *staphule*, which refers to a "a bunch of grapes, a ripe grape cluster," one ready for picking. Concerning this picture Ryrie says, "The picture here is that all the false religion of man is fully ripe and ready for harvest. Thus the harvest is ready because man in his own efforts apart from the life of God has fully developed an apostate religious system."¹⁶ The iniquity of man has become full or reached its zenith. Can the world be far from that now?

Verses 19 and 20 take us to the result of this condition, the winepress of God. The grapes harvested are to be thrown into the winepress to be trampled.

The winepress trodden outside the city with the blood coming out from the press refers to the gathering of the armies of the nations to Megiddo in the north of Jerusalem for the great battle with the Lord Jesus Christ as described in Revelation 19:17-19 and Joel 3. This will result in the bloodiest battle and carnage of human flesh the world has ever known. From this battle blood will flow, like grape juice from a winepress, from the north of Palestine at Megiddo some 175 miles south down the Jordan Valley through the whole land of Palestine. Blood up to the horse's bridle is a hyperbole for the enormous carnage that will occur (cf. Isa. 63:3-6).

A similar apocalyptic image for the final judgment on idolaters occurs in the pre-Christian book of Enoch, where the righteous will slay the wicked. Here in Revelation the judgment is not the task of human vengeance but belongs exclusively to the Son of Man and his angelic reapers (cf. Rom. 12:19-21)¹⁷

Please note this blood bath will be executed by the Lord Jesus Himself. In His first advent He came as the meek Jesus, giving His life for the ransom of men, like a Lamb silent before His shearers. But here He comes as the mighty conqueror in the full wrath of the Holy God of the universe.

¹⁶ Ryrie, *Revelation*, p. 92.

¹⁷ *NIV Bible Commentary*, electronic version.

Lesson 23: **Prelude to the Seven Last Plagues** **(15:1-8)**

Introduction

Chapter 15 is introductory and prepares the reader for the execution of the judgments described in chapter 16. They are first described as the seven last plagues and then as seven bowls full of the wrath of God (vs. 7; 16:1). These seven plagues will chronologically bring to an end the ordered events of the Tribulation judgments in a dramatic crescendo. The plagues described here are extremely severe and occur in rapid succession, which adds greatly to their severity. The plagues are culminated by the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and the final phase of Armageddon. The purpose of chapter 15 is a vindication of God's holiness. It shows these judgments stem from the holiness of God and the perfection of His plan. Under the three figures of God's final judgment—the cup of wine (14:10), the harvesting of the earth (14:14-16), and the vintage (14:17-20), chapter 14 has anticipated what is now more thoroughly developed under the symbolism of the seven bowls.

Remember, the seven plagues and seven bowls used in this chapter refer to the same judgments. The use of different terms is designed to display the different aspects and character of these last judgments. They are plague-like calamities, and each is poured out suddenly, all at once as the contents of a bowl when it is turned over.

Review

Chronologically speaking, remember that we are first given a graphic description of six seals (6:1-17), but the seventh (8:1) is never described. We are only told that when it is broken, there is silence in heaven (8:1). The implication is that the seven trumpets come out of the seventh seal and actually express the content of the seventh seal (8:1-9:21; 11:15-19). This seventh trumpet takes us up to the return of Christ and includes within its judgments the events of the seven last plagues or bowls of chapters 15 and 16, which occur rapidly at the end. The final great event is the return of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory (19:11-21).

Again, let's not forget that chapters 10:1-11:4; 13-14; and 17:1-19:10 are interludes and do not advance the Tribulation events chronologically. They simply fill in the picture of the Tribulation giving important details about key personages, events and concepts. Alan writes:

The inclusive series of bowl judgments constitute the “third woe” announced in 11:14 as “coming soon” [see comment on 11:14]. Since the first two woes occur under the fifth and sixth trumpets, it is reasonable to see the third woe, which involved seven plagues, as unfolding during the sounding of the seventh trumpet, when the mystery of God will be finished (10:7)... These last plagues take place “immediately after the distress of those days” referred to by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse and may well be the fulfillment of his apocalyptic words in Mt 24:29. Significantly, the next event that follows this judgment, the coming of the Son of Man in the clouds (Mt 24:30-31), is the same event John describes following the bowl judgments (19:11).¹

The Prelude to the Bowl Judgments **(15:1-8)**

1 And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, *which are* the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished. 2 And I saw, as it were, a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had come off victorious from the beast and from his image and from the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God. 3 And they sang the song of Moses the bond-servant of God and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and marvelous are Thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Thy ways, Thou King of the nations. 4 “Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? For Thou alone art holy;

¹ Alan Johnson, *Zondervan Bible Commentary*, electronic version.

For ALL THE NATIONS WILL COME AND WORSHIP BEFORE THEE, For Thy righteous acts have been revealed.”

5 After these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened, 6 and the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple, clothed in linen, clean and bright, and girded around their breasts with golden girdles. 7 And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever. 8 And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power; and no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

The Sign in Heaven (15:1)

John sees another sign in heaven, which he described as great and marvelous. “Another” (allos) means another of the same kind. It is a different sign, but with the same purpose. As seen previously, the term “sign” refers to something that is used as a symbol to signify and teach an important truth. Here in this scenario, the seven angels with the seven last plagues point to God’s judgment on the beast, his system, and his worshipers. The other signs previously mentioned are those in 12:1 and 3 (Israel, the woman, and the red dragon who is the head and source of the empire of the beast).

The sign is called “great” because of the awesome implication of these judgments in both extent and degree. “Marvelous” means “wonderful, awe inspiring,” and shows the effect this sign had on the heart and soul of John. It should have the same effect on us the same way as we think on the results these plagues will have. Not only will they result in the return of the Lord, but they also will lead to the establishment of His righteous rule on earth when God’s will will be done on earth just as it is in heaven.

In the “seven angels with seven last plagues” we again see the number seven, the number of perfection and completion. That there are seven plagues again reminds us these judgments will accomplish a perfect and complete work on earth to prepare its inhabitants for the return of Jesus Christ. These plagues will demonstrate as never before the rebellious heart of man and the character of Satan and His kingdom. In so doing, they will vindicate the glory and holiness of God. These judgments are not vindictive, but they are vindicative.

“The seven last plagues” is literally “seven plagues, the last ones.” This construction draws our attention to the fact these are the last of God’s judgments of this period and suggests the preceding judgments (seven seals and trumpets) were also plagues. “Plague” is *plage*, “a blow, stripe, wound,” then a “calamity, plague,” is metaphorical of divine judgment. These plagues constitute God’s wrath poured out on man in his rebellious and sinful state. “Last” shows these are the climactic judgments, those that occur in rapid sequence and with greater intensity. As the last judgments, they will be concluded by the personal return of the Lord Jesus and His personal defeat of the enemies of God and His people.

“For in them is filled up the wrath of God.” This clause, introduced with “for” (the Greek *hoti*, a causal conjunction pointing us the reason these are the last plagues), explains and points us to the reason for these plagues as the last ones.

“Is filled up.” The combined force of the tense and the verb used here stress the concept of culmination, completion. The verb is *teleo*, and means “to complete, bring to an end” in amount, number, degree, effect or purpose. It is in these last plagues that God’s wrath finds its culmination and accomplishes His purposes.

“The wrath of God.” In the Greek language there are two words used for God’s “anger.” There is *orge*, “anger,” which emphasizes the divine attitude toward sin as it proceeds from the holiness of God. But then there is *thumos*, “wrath,” which points to the expression of God’s anger or God’s holiness in action or His wrath overflowing in righteous indignation. Here we have the last and final judgments of the Tribulation, but they will also perfectly accomplish God’s righteous purposes through this seven-year period.

(1) As the time of Jacob’s trouble. The Tribulation is first of all God’s discipline on the Jews for their willful rejection of Christ as their Messiah and for their stubbornness. It will purge out the rebels and cause the rest to turn to Christ (cf. Ezek. 20:33-44; Zech. 14:9-10).

(2) The Tribulation will bring God’s judgment on the Gentiles for anti-Semitism. It will be a strong source of motivation for men to repent and turn to faith in Christ, and judge the rest for their unbelief and rebellion.

(3) As to Satan the Tribulation is to demonstrate the true character and program of Satan as the source of sin, misery, war and murder.

(4) It will demonstrate to mankind as a whole (Jew and Gentile) the true rebellion and spiritually corrupt nature of man and the depths to which he will go when given the chance. Remember, at this time the restraint of the Holy Spirit who is at work today through the church, the body of Christ, will have been completely removed. The Tribulation, without this special restraint, will be a time of unprecedented lawlessness and unrighteousness, which will demonstrate the failure of man and how desperately he needs the Lord Jesus Christ.

(5) As to God and Christ it will demonstrate their absolute holiness, grace, faithfulness to their promises, and that God is still on the throne and He is just in his decisions against Satan and unbelieving man.

So these last seven plagues will complete these purposes as well as bring an end to the judgments (16:9-11, 13-14, 21).

The Sea of Glass (15:2a)

The phrase “as it were” in the NASB qualifies this statement. John didn’t see a real sea, but a broad expanse like a sea of white transparent glass or stone that has a glassy appearance and reflects an image. But why this picture? What does this teach us? (a) The glassy expanse like a sea is designed to communicate the concept of the reflection of God’s glory. Perhaps also it stands as a symbol for the Word of God and its many promises and truths that reflect God’s character or person, plan, principles, and purposes. (b) In 4:6 it was likened to crystal and stood for the perfect righteousness of God (Hab. 1:13; Isa. 59:2). (c) Here in 15:2 it is seen mingled with fire, which, as a symbol of judgment, stands for the perfect justice of God and his actions with men. (d) It is also seen upholding the saints who stand firmly upon it. This reflects the immutable faithfulness of God in His grace and love to His people through His perfect plan of salvation in Christ. This plan, like a rock, upholds man and brings sinful man into God’s presence if he will come to God through Jesus Christ (John 14:6).

The Saints Who Were Martyred (15:2b)

Because of the reference to the beast and his work which sets the context, these are clearly the martyred dead of the Tribulation. They are described as “those who had been victorious over the beast...” The word for victorious is *nikao*, and means “to be a victor, conquer, to prevail.” Biblically, the means of conquering is faith in Jesus Christ and the Word, but this is always a victory based on the victory accomplished by the Savior’s death for us through the cross and His resurrection (John 16:33).

Nikao, however, is used here with the preposition *ek* three times, one for each of the areas of victory—the beast, his image, and his mark. *Ek* means “out of, from, away from.” It is used to introduce the person, place, or thing from which a separation takes place. Here, *nikao*, carries the idea of deliverance. Because of their victory in Christ, they were delivered **from** the beast, **from** his image, and **from** his mark. The three-fold repetition emphasizes the element of victory and deliverance. These believers will find themselves living in the sphere of the beast’s power and under great pressure to worship him, his image, and to wear his mark even to the point of death for refusing to do so. By faith they will refuse and will come out victorious from it all. Death is not a defeat but a glorious victory (1 Cor. 15:54-57). This is to be contrasted with church age believers in which Tribulation saints come out victorious **from** the Tribulation pressure, church age saints are **kept out** and never enter (*tereo ek*) (see the study in chapter 3:10).

These martyrs are seen standing on the glassy expanse. As mentioned, this reminds us their victory and position is a result of who and what God is to the believer as revealed in the Word. He alone can uphold us. All victory comes from faith in the Lord and His immutable and faithful promises. “Standing” is an intensive perfect, which emphasizes the permanence of this position in contrast to the temporary victory that would have been theirs had they rejected Christ and worshipped the beast.

John sees these saints holding harps of gold. This is part of their reward as mentioned in 14:13 (a position before God, abiding in worship and praise to God’s glory). “Holding” is a descriptive present pointing to the continuance of their worship of God. “Harps” are lyres, stringed instruments plucked or played with a plectrum or with the fingers. It is somewhat a combination of a mandolin, banjo and guitar. This certainly gives precedence for the use of musical instruments in worship.

The Songs of Moses and the Lamb (15:3-4)

These are two distinct songs. Note that “song” is mentioned two times and in both cases it has the article which specifies two distinct songs. However, they do seem to be harmonized into one. *The Song of Moses* emphasizes the power and faithfulness of God both in Exodus 15 and Deuteronomy 32. *The Song of the Little Lamb* emphasizes the redemptive work and plan of God in Christ. It lays stress on Christ’s submission to the plan of the Father. “Lamb” is *arnion*, the diminutive form which is also a term of endearment. It means, “a little lamb.”

In verse 4, the question is asked, “who will not fear?” Of course, the answer is no one! The Tribulation will not only vindicate God’s holiness and character, but it will clearly demonstrate that He is the almighty and brings every man to his knees even though it will be too late for some to turn to Christ.

The Sanctuary Opened in Heaven (15:5-6)

“And after these things I looked.” “After these things” refers to the sign, the seas of glass, etc. This implies an interval of time between these two sections. John distinguished these two sections, for though their theme is much the same (vindicating God’s holiness as the cause of the Tribulation judgments), their emphasis is different.

In the first section we saw the saints in glory praising God and fully understanding the cause of wrath, but here the emphasis is on the divine side which emphatically and impressively stresses the source and cause of what is about to happen. So literally John says, “After these things I saw and understood.”

“I looked” occurs for the third time (vss. 1, 2, 5). The verb is *horao*,, “to see and understand.” John not only saw this with his eyes, but he spiritually grasped the meaning of this vision (as should we).

God is a holy God and one of the great purposes of the Tribulation will be to demonstrate this and to prove Satan’s age-old lies are just exactly that, lies. God is a God of love and of holiness and He must condemn the sinner who rejects His plan of salvation in Christ. Furthermore, He is perfectly just and righteous in rejecting the sinner who rejects His love and grace. The complete lawlessness of the Tribulation era will demonstrate this. The two age-old lies of Satan are: (a) If God is truly love, He would not send His creatures to hell, and (b) God would be unjust to do so.

“The temple.” “Temple” is *naos*, which refers to the Holy of Holies. The design was given to Israel in Exodus. The earthy tabernacle with the *naos* was a picture and type of the heavenly place (Isa. 6:2f). Today the believer’s body is called the *naos* (1 Cor. 6:19) because God the Holy Spirit Himself dwells within every believer. Within the earthly counterpart of the Holy of Holies was the ark over which the *shekinah* glory, representing God’s presence, hovered. *Naos* stands for the very abode of God and His personal presence.

“Of the tabernacle of the testimony.” Literally, “the tabernacle, the one of witness.” The whole tabernacle was a testimony and witness to the grace plan of God in Jesus Christ. However, of special importance here is the witness of the Ark of the Covenant, which was within the *naos* (Rev. 11:19). Note the following points regarding the Ark of the Covenant.

(1) The ark stood for the divine presence of God. It is here the glory of God’s presence hovered over the mercy seat of the ark and from whence God would commune with Israel (Ex. 25:17-22; 30:6; Lev. 16:2; Num. 7:89; 2 Kgs. 19:15; Ps. 80:1).

(2) By its contents, the ark stood for God’s faithfulness. It contained: (a) the law or the tables of stone, which represented the whole law and guided the people as a way of life and pointed them to Messiah; (b) Aaron’s rod that budded, which portrayed resurrection and God’s choice of leaders; (c) the pot of manna, which portrayed the person of Christ and God’s daily provision, but it also taught them happiness comes only from the Lord and not the details of life (Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4).

(3) The ark stood for God’s holiness, grace, and love through the tables of stone within, the cherubim above and on either side of the top of the ark, and by the mercy seat, which formed a lid for the ark. But how? The tables of stone declared the perfect holiness of God and demonstrated the sinfulness of man since no man is able to keep the law. The law declared man a sinner and cut off from God. The sprinkling of blood by the high priest on the mercy seat (under or in front of the cherubim) showed that God’s holiness could only be satisfied by the shedding of blood.

This foreshadowed the person and work of Christ on the cross as did the whole ritual of the tabernacle, priesthood, and the sacrifices (cf. Acts 7:44; Ex. 32:15; 38:21; Numb. 1:50, 53; 17:7-10; Ex. 16:33; Heb. 9:1-5).

John saw that the temple in heaven “was opened.” In front of the Holy of Holies was a large curtain, a veil, which separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. The high priest could only go into the Holy of Holies only once a year and then only after proper sacrifices. He went in with blood to sprinkle over the mercy seat signifying the way into God’s presence was not yet open (Heb. 9:7-8). When Christ died on the cross one of the things accomplished was the tearing of that veil in the temple from top to bottom, signifying the way had been opened and the work complete (Mark 15:38). It signified the barrier, those things that separate man from God, had been removed—sin, the penalty of sin or death, and man’s absence of spiritual life and righteousness.

Today man can have access into the very presence of God through the person and work of Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:4-6, 11-18; 3:12). However, today and also in the Tribulation, Jesus Christ now forms a new barrier, a new veil, one that excludes from God’s presence all who reject Christ (John 14:6; 3:3, 16). Upon these, the judgment of God must fall because of their failure to trust in Christ (John 3:13, 36).

This opening of the naos in Revelation 15 symbolizes the parting of the veil, but in reverse order. Here, rather than access to God, it symbolizes the outpouring of God’s perfect justice and wrath for rejection of Christ. Here the veil is pulled back, not to let man in, but to pour out God’s justice.

“And the seven angels...came out of the temple.” As the ministers and agents of God’s holy justice, these angels proceed from the presence of God acting on behalf of God’s holiness, righteousness, and justice. That they are “clothed in pure white linen” refers to the nature of their commission as representatives of God’s holiness. Pure white portrays righteousness and reminds us of the truth of 1 John 1:5b, “God is light and in Him is not darkness at all.” “Linen,” as in the garment of the wife of the Lamb (19:8), symbolizes righteousness in action. They have been clothed with this linen as a symbol of their commission and work in the outpouring of the righteous acts of judgment.

“And having their breasts girded with golden girdles” is also symbolical. Gold stands for the glory of God and girding was an act of preparation. What they are seen doing here is preparatory for bringing maximum glory to God and will cause all creatures to fall on their knees and acknowledge the sovereignty and perfect holiness of God.

The Seven Golden Bowls Given to the Angels (15:7-8)

The “four living creatures” are undoubtedly cherubim who manifest and protect certain aspects of God’s glory and essence, especially His holiness. They are seen here engaged in this role by distributing the bowls to the seven angels. Previously these seven angels were given the responsibility for these last plagues. The giving of the seven bowls sets forth their authorization to use the plagues and describes the overall nature of what the plagues would be like, i.e., like a bowl which is overturned causing the contents to be poured out all at once or suddenly.

“Full of the wrath of God.” The word “full” is a descriptive participle from the Greek verb *gemo*,, which means “be full to the brim.” Verse 1 teaches us the seven last plagues complete the judgments of the Tribulation. There we have *teleo*,, “to complete, fulfill.” Here in verse 7 the verb *gemo*,, “be full,” adds to this emphasis and stresses the full devastating character of each bowl.

“Wrath” is again *thumos* which refers to God’s divine justice and anger in action.

“Who lives for ever and ever.” Literally the Greek reads, “of the wrath, the one of God, the One who lives unto the ages of ages (eternally).” This is a solemn reminder that God, as the eternal One, is first a long-suffering God. For centuries God has withheld his judgment in grace (2 Pet. 3:8-9). At this point, not only will God’s period of grace be over, but once God pours out His justice in divine wrath it will have eternal ramifications. Through the Lord Jesus Christ man has the opportunity and the means to come to God and be with Him eternally, but if he rejects God’s grace in Jesus Christ, he must eternally face God’s wrath (14:11).

“And the temple was filled with smoke.” The “temple” of course is the heavenly temple, the very abode of God, the Holy of Holies of God’s presence.

“Was filled” is a causative verb which means to “cause to be full.” It is the perfect holiness of God’s divine essence that causes the temple to be filled with smoke. As the setting in Isaiah 6:3-4 shows us, the smoke represents the holiness of God; here it is acting in divine justice against sin. Our passage in Revelation tells us this smoke proceeds from two sources: (a) “From the glory of God.” “Glory” stands for God’s divine essence and particularly God’s righ-

teousness and justice. Together they form the holiness of God. (b) “And from his power.” This refers to God’s sovereign omnipotence, His inherent and sovereign power to execute and carry out the demands of His holy character.

“And no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues...were finished...” The smoke, which points to the awesome holiness of God, will make access into the presence of God impossible. This strongly stresses the principle of Habakkuk 1:13a, “Your eyes are too pure to approve evil and You cannot not look on wickedness with favor...” It also reminds us of Romans 3:23, “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” The smoke illustrates the truth of God’s righteousness; He is unable and unwilling to have fellowship with sin. Further, the seven golden bowls proceeding from God illustrate the concept of God’s justice acting to judge sin in the world.

Note that this smoke continues until the plagues are finished, until God’s holy character is satisfied and God deals with sin. This teaches us that God will so completely turn to anger and justice in these final moments that all else seems to cease. Absolute and undiluted wrath will be the business of these final days. It will be as the Psalmist says in Psalm 76:7, “You, even You are to be feared; and who may stand in Your presence when once You are angry.”

This chapter has prepared the way for the judgments to follow as cause and effect or root to fruit. The judgments of chapter 16 stem from the ineffable holiness of God. “It is an ominous sign of impending doom for those who persist in their blasphemous disregard of the sovereignty and holiness of God.”²

² John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1966, p. 230.

Lesson 24: The Bowl Judgments (16:1-21)

Introduction

In order to keep the chronological sequence and order of the Tribulation events in mind, let's review several points about the seven seals, trumpets, and the seven bowls, which together make up the Tribulation judgments:

(1) Since there are no judgments described with the opening of the seventh seal as with the previous six, and since the seven trumpets judgment follow immediately (8:1-6), it seems evident that the seventh seal consists of the seven trumpets.

(2) The seventh and final trumpet judgment (11:15-19) does not describe one specific judgment as with the other six trumpets, but signifies that whole part of the Tribulation program of God's wrath that will, at the end, bring in the kingdom through the return of Christ. However, it will also cause great anger and rebellion on the part of the unbelieving world. Only the results of the seventh trumpet are described in Revelation 11:15-19. The judgments themselves, which make up the seventh trumpet and which accomplish the victory described in 11:15-19 are the seven bowl judgments called the seven plagues, the last ones (15:1-16:21). The seven bowls are the seventh trumpet and spell out what the seventh trumpet consists of by way of its judgments.

(3) Chapters 12-14 were parenthetical with chapter 15 being introductory to chapter 16 which now takes us to the specific judgments of the seventh trumpet.

(4) There is a great deal of similarity in the judgments of the trumpets and bowls. In both, the first series deals with the earth (cf. 8:7 with 16:2), the second series deals with the sea (cf. 8:8-9 with 16:3), the third series deals with the rivers and fountains of water (cf. 8:10-11 with 16:4), the fourth series deals with the sun (cf. 8:12 with 16:8), the fifth series deals with darkness (cf. 8:12 with 16:10), the sixth series deals with the Euphrates (cf. 9:13-14 with 16:12), and the seventh series deals with lightnings, thunders, and earthquakes (cf. 11:19b with 16:17-21)

(5) However, a careful study of these two sections will reveal some striking differences: (a) The first four trumpets deal with only one-third of the earth while the bowl judgments are universal in scope. (b) The bowls are also much greater in intensity as well as in degree of coverage and effect. (c) They fall quickly as a liquid poured out of a bowl and in rapid succession—like trip hammer blows. It is best, therefore, to see the bowls as different from the trumpets judgments.

(6) These last seven judgments cause the further hardening of the hearts of men. Remember they are called plagues and have much the same result on the world as the plagues of Egypt had on Pharaoh. These plagues will show: (a) The total rebellion and independence of the creature to his Creator. Because of the callousness and hardening built up in the hearts of men, these judgments will result in anger and blasphemy from the heart and mouths of men rather than fear and reverence and trust. They are hardening plagues which God uses to His own glory (cf. vss. 9, 11, 21). (b) But these plagues (bowl judgments) will crush man's rebellion and remove the rebellious from the earth. The completion of this will be accomplished by the return of Christ with His armies (Ezek. 20:38; Joel 3:2-17; Matt. 13:40-43; Rev. 19:11-21).

The First Bowl: Painful Sores (16:1-2)

1 And I heard a loud voice from the temple, saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out the seven bowls of the wrath of God into the earth." 2 And the first *angel* went and poured out his bowl into the earth; and it became a loathsome and malignant sore upon the men who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image.

Verse 1: The seven angels are now commanded to pour out their bowl of judgment upon the earth. John heard what is described as a loud or great voice, probably the voice of God, coming out of the temple. Our English translations somewhat obscure an important emphasis of this chapter because of the various ways they have translated the

Greek word *meas*. *Meas* means “large, great, huge, or loud,” depending on what it modifies. The NASB, for instance, translates *meas* with “loud,” “fierce,” “great,” and “huge,” all good translations, but the English reader might not notice the repetition whereas the Greek reader will more readily notice the repetition of this adjective. This emphasizes the intensity or unprecedented nature of what will begin to take place on earth at this point in the Tribulation. *Meas* is used eleven times in this chapter in connection with its events: a great voice (vss. 1 and 17), a great heat (vs. 9), the great river Euphrates (vs. 12), the great day of God Almighty (vs. 14), “a **great** earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so **great** an earthquake...” (vs. 18), the great city, Babylon (vs. 19), and great hailstones (vs. 21).

Verse 2: Immediately, in obedience to the voice from the temple, the first angel “poured out his bowl on the earth; and it became a loathsome and malignant sore on the men who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image.”

“Loathsome” is *kakos* which means “evil, injurious” and refers to what brings about a crippling effect. “Malignant” is *poneros* which means “active, malignant” and looks at what is painful, destructive, and even vicious. This stresses the effect, degree, and intensity.

From Revelation 13:8 it is quite apparent that only a small fraction of the world will resist the beast, refuse to take his image, and believe in Jesus Christ. But those who do are now the only ones who escape this judgment and the judgments which follow. The warning of 14:9-11 against worshipping the beast and which anticipates his ultimate doom and that of his system is here confirmed in this preliminary judgment. Note that the beast is unable to help or heal the sore. “Sore” is *helkos* and refers to an ulcer-like sore. This is the word used in the Greek Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word for boils inflicted on the Egyptians in Exodus 9:9-11.

The Second Bowl: Seas Smitten (16:3)

3 And the second *angel* poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like *that* of a dead man; and every living thing in the sea died.

The Greek text here is very graphic. Literally it reads, “And it (sea) became blood as of a dead man,” i.e., like a dead man wallowing in his own blood. Every living thing (sea creature) in the sea will die. Some would try to limit this to the Mediterranean Sea. However, these judgments are global and the same word *thalassa* would be used whether it was one sea or all the water masses.

Here the judgment is universal. This is global catastrophe. Under the second trumpet one-third was affected, but now, in keeping with the nature of this judgment, the rest of the sea and marine life is struck. It will wreck fishing and it is bound to affect ocean navigation, transportation and shipping.

The Third Bowl: Rivers Smitten (16:4-7)

4 And the third *angel* poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of waters; and they became blood. 5 And I heard the angel of the waters saying, “Righteous art Thou, who art and who wast, O Holy One, because Thou didst judge these things; 6 for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and Thou hast given them blood to drink. They deserve it.” 7 And I heard the altar saying, “Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Thy judgments.”

This judgment, as with the third trumpet, involves the fresh water supply. Again, there is no limit; it is global with great devastating effects. Though the results are not mentioned, they can be imagined. There will be no pure water except perhaps what will already be stored; none in the rivers and lakes.

“The angel of the waters” is literally, “the angel, the one of the waters.” This apparently refers to an angel who has jurisdiction over the waters of the earth as one of the varied ministries of angels. As the one in charge of this area he makes an important statement vindicating the holiness of God and setting forth the reason in this judgment (vss. 5-6).

These apostate and rebellious people have slain and shed the blood of believers, thus, just as the saints receive rest and reward for their faith, so these will receive punishment fitting the nature of their crimes. They have only

blood to drink. They have been blood thirsty—now they get their fill. This gives us another indication that during the Tribulation the shedding of the blood of believers will be without parallel in history.

The reference in verse 5, “who are and who were” refers to the eternal essence of God. As the Eternal One, one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. God is long-suffering but eventually God’s holiness must act and His judgment against sin will be delayed no longer.

Verse 7 deals with another voice adding to the vindication of God’s acts. So again we see an important emphasis: Throughout history Satan has maligned the character of God who sentenced Satan and his angels to the lake of fire (Matt. 25:41). This has been displayed in the rebellious hearts of men of all ages who persistently operate under the delusions of Satan. But the Tribulation will show God is a God of holiness who is acting justly in His judgment against sin.

The Fourth Bowl: Scorching Heat (16:8-9)

8 And the fourth *angel* poured out his bowl upon the sun; and it was given to it to scorch men with fire. 9 And men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues; and they did not repent, so as to give Him glory.

Like the fourth trumpet, the heavens are again affected, especially the sun. In the fourth trumpet one-third of the sun, moon, and stars are affected diminishing their light by one-third (night and day). The earth will have been living under these conditions all these months between these judgments as a constant appeal to men to repent. Now, by contrast, only the sun is affected and its condition is here reversed. Rather than being diminished it is now increased in its intensity. All unbelievers get a suntan they won’t be bargaining for and all the sunscreen in the world will have no effect.

Whether this is caused by the earth and sun moving closer together or simply that God increases the heat of the sun we do not know. The point is, God will increase the intensity of the sun’s heat and light rays to such a degree that it will scorch and burn the skin of men. Some scientists claim we are not experiencing global warming while others maintain the earth is cooling off. Both are in for a surprise (1 Cor. 1:25).

“And it was given to it (the sun) to burn men with fire” i.e., extreme heat rays from the sun as the next verse will show us.

In describing the grace of God, Psalm 19:6 reads, “... there is nothing hid from the heat of the sun.” Such will surely be the case here in an intensified way, only then it will be judgment. There will be no escape from this judgment for unbelievers. The sun’s rays will penetrate everything. Some relief will come at night, but even then the heat will be unbearable.

Literally the Greek has “to scorch *the* men with fire.” The use of the article specifies a particular group of people, those mentioned in connection with the first bowl, unbelievers, worshipers of the beast. Evidently, believers will somehow be protected from this.

“And men were scorched with fierce heat and they blasphemed the name of God.” This again demonstrates two things: (a) men clearly recognize the source of the plagues, but (b) they will have become so hardened in their souls they refuse to repent. They will have reached the point of no return. This was clear when they took the mark of the beast.

This hardening of the soul (or heart) poses a warning for all of us. Anyone who becomes negative toward the Lord, grows indifferent to His Word, and ignores the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit, can begin to harden his heart and become more and more callused (cf. Heb. 3:7f; Eph. 4:17-19). One way we can see such a condition developing in our lives is by the way we murmur and complain or look for “pity parties” among our friends. This is a sure indication that the heart has become somewhat hardened (cf. Heb. 3:7-19; with 1 Cor. 10:5-10. Note particularly verse 10.).

The Fifth Bowl: Darkness (16:10-11)

10 And the fifth *angel* poured out his bowl upon the throne of the beast; and his kingdom became darkened; and they gnawed their tongues because of pain, 11 and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they did not repent of their deeds.

As with the fifth trumpet, this bowl judgment results in darkness, as also in the ninth plague of Egypt (Ex. 10:21-23).

The Object of the Fifth Bowl—the throne of the Beast (16:10b)

First, we are told the bowl is poured out “upon the throne of the beast.” The Greek construction of this phrase (the preposition *epi* with the accusative case) refers to motion in a direction which completely attains its goal.¹ Regardless of his apparent power, he will not be able to escape God’s judgment.

Second, the beast refers to a person as well as to a political system, therefore, his throne is a definite place. I believe it will be rebuilt Babylon on the Euphrates River, the ancient capitol of Satan’s wickedness in the land of Shinar (Zech. 5:5-10). This is the land beast of Revelation 13 who will receive his power from Satan and who will become the object of man’s worship. Men will marvel at the beast and proclaim “who is like the beast, and who is able to make war with him” (Rev. 13:4). Remember, he will be seen as the solution to the world, the answer to mankind, the hope of the world.

Due to world conditions on every front and in every area of the globe, things will look hopeless. People will be in despair or certainly very fearful prior to the Tribulation. For the varied problems of the world, man will have turned to a variety of sources looking for hope. These will come in many forms and sizes. There will be the false prophets of modern science, scholarship and research, false religions, the occult, the cults, false prophets like Mr. Moon, the new world views, social ideologies and finally, the world will look for answers in some new and great world leader whether political, religious, or both. Such a man will come, but he will be “the man of lawlessness” and “the son of perdition who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god...displaying himself as God” (2 Thess. 3 and 4). He will also be “the one whose coming (his historical ascendancy to power) is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders” (2 Thess. 2:9).

Now suddenly at this point in the Tribulation, like a bowl poured out, a judgment of darkness is poured out on the beast’s throne, the very place of his rule, and neither Satan nor this man can alleviate this judgment. This will clearly illustrate that there is only one hope, the Eternal God and Creator, the Lord Jesus Christ whom the world has by-in-large rejected; the One who alone is the Light of the world. What irony strikes here (John 1:3-5, 9-11)!

This judgment also anticipates the doom and eternal prospects of the beast and his subjects; they will be cast into outer darkness because they have turned away from the true Light of the world.

The Effects of the Fifth Bowl (16:10-11)

The first effect is seen in “his kingdom became darkened.” The verb “became” in the Greek text suggests suddenly. It looks at the sudden envelopment of the throne of the beast in total darkness. Of course, we are reminded of the “thick darkness” in Egypt which was so thick it could be felt (Exodus 10:21). “Darkened” is an intensive perfect which stresses the existing results of the blackout over the earth. Since the beast rules practically the entire world, and since these are the last plagues of the Tribulation which complete the wrath of God to establish God’s rule on earth, this darkness is undoubtedly world-wide.

As you read this, do not lose sight of the fact that this is a brief forecast of the outer darkness, pain, and torment that men will face in the lake of fire (Matt. 5:30; 22:13; 8:12). It is a literal taste of hell. But it is also designed to symbolize the nature of the beast and his kingdom, his power, and Satan who gives him his power. It is a kingdom of great darkness (Col. 1:13a; 2 Cor. 4:4; 11:13-15).

¹ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Translated by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, University of Chicago Press, electronic version.

The second effect: “And they gnawed their tongues because of the pain.” We have in this an accumulated effect of the preceding bowls, the sores, the seas smitten, the fresh water turned into blood, the scorching of the sun, and now total darkness. Men are shut up in their quarters with their sores and pain and there is no alleviation, no hope—only constant torment. Literally the Greek says “they kept on gnawing their tongues out of agony.” Here is a graphic picture of the most intense and excruciating agony and pain, and a pain that cannot be alleviated.

In 9:21 the word “sorceries” is the Greek *pharmakeia* from *pharmakeuo*, “to administer drugs.” In connection with the witchcraft of that day there will be widespread use of drugs. Nearly everyone will have access to drugs to deaden their pain. But even this will have no effect to relieve their pain.

The third and final effect: “And they blasphemed the God of heaven...and they did not repent of their deeds” (vs. 11). In these words we are clearly told that the world will be conscious that the “God of heaven” is the source of these judgments. There will, at this time, be no more atheists or agnostics. All men will know, like the demons, that God exists, but they remain stubborn in their rebellion. Oh, the hardness and stubbornness of the human heart! These verses clearly refute the idea of a final universal salvation of all men who will finally repent when faced with God’s judgment.

The Sixth Bowl: The Euphrates Dried (16:12-16)

12 And the sixth angel poured out his bowl upon the great river, the Euphrates; and its water was dried up, that the way might be prepared for the kings from the east. 13 And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs; 14 for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. 15 (“Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his garments, lest he walk about naked and men see his shame.”) 16 And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called HarMagedon.

In verse 12 the bowl is poured and we are told of its purpose; it prepares the way for the kings of the east. Then in verses 13-16 we are given a commentary on this judgment. First, there is divine activity followed up by increased demonic activity (vss. 12-14a). Then there is the effect of this on human activity (vs. 14); and finally again, divine activity (vss. 15-16).

The Object of the Bowl (16:12a)

“The great river, the River Euphrates.” Literally the Greek says “the river, the great one, Euphrates.” This word order and the word “great” stresses the prominence of this river. This is the largest river in western Asia and has figured largely in history and prophecy. The following are a number of important facts about this great river.

- (1) It formed the Eastern boundary of ancient Rome and its conquests.
- (2) It forms the Eastern boundary of the land as promised to Abraham (cf. Gen. 15:18; Deut. 1:7; 11:24; Josh. 1:4).
- (3) For a brief season David and Solomon extended their authority to the Euphrates (1 Kings 4:21; 1 Chron. 18:3; 2 Chron. 9:26).
- (4) The river is 1,800 miles long and has always stood as a natural barrier separating the east from the west.
- (5) The river forms in Armenia and 1,800 miles later empties into the Persian Gulf. About 90 miles from the Persian Gulf it is joined by the Tigris.

The Purpose of This Bowl (16:12b)

“And its water was dried up that the way might be prepared for the kings of the east.” Isaiah 11:15b and Zechariah 10:11 are similar prophecies of the drying up of this river. The purpose? To facilitate the movements of the troops of the oriental kings or the eastern confederacy for the final Battle of Armageddon.

“The kings from the east” is literally “the kings from the rising sun.” This is a poetical expression signifying the kings from where the sun rises, as China, Japan, India, Persia, and Afghanistan. So here we see God’s divine activity; God acting in His sovereignty using the wrath and rebellion of Satan and man to carry out his own purposes. Knowing the mind of Satan and man, the Lord will dry up this natural barrier to an invasion of the land of Palestine.

The Divine Commentary of This Judgment (16:13-16)

The Demonic Activity (16:13-14a).

It is God’s purpose to deal with the nations in judgment in the land of Palestine. Knowing Satan’s purpose and objectives, God will use him and his demonic activity to inspire the nations to move into Palestine.

The immediate source of this activity, acting on their own objectives, is the trinity from hell—the Dragon or Satan, the beast (the dictator of the revived Roman Empire in its final form), and the false prophet who works miracles on behalf of the first beast (Rev. 12:3, 9, 13).

The means of accomplishing this are three demonic spirits who proceed from the trinity to go out into the nations working miraculous signs. This will somehow be used to act on the minds of the kings and people of the nations to move against Palestine. Exactly what these signs are we are not told. But undoubtedly they somehow stir up old desires and hostilities:

(1) Strong anti-Semitism (Zech 14:1-3; Rev. 12:17). The Arabs have long hated the Jews and of course in our time this has taken on increased proportions. There appears even now growing sentiment against Israel among much of the world. The actions of these demons will somehow bring this to a climax at this time.

(2) Then there is the lust of the nations for control of Palestine and its warm water seaports which would enable the one controlling Palestine to control the oil of this part of the world (Ezek. 38:12).

The Divine Activity (16:14b-16)

The kings of the world will be gathered together for war with one another, but it is a war in which man is ultimately brought against God. The armies do not know this, they think they are coming to gain control of Palestine, but God uses this to accomplish this confluence of nations for his own divine purposes (Joel 3:1-3; Zech. 14:1-3). The war is called “the war of the great day of God, the Almighty”(vs. 14) and the place it is fought is called “Har-Magedon” (vs. 16). Modern man often refers to this conflict as Armageddon, the final conflict that will be fought in the Valley of Megiddo.

An explanation of the Day, Time, and Place

The Greek literally says, “unto the campaign (or war) of the day, the great one, the one of God, the Almighty One.”

The phrase “of God, the Almighty” is designed to emphasize that this day or period (it covers more than one day) will fully demonstrate the omnipotence and sovereignty of God.

The word “war” is the Greek word *polemos* which signifies a war, an entire campaign and not merely one isolated conflict or battle. What is in view here is a major war as in World War II. Here we have World War III—assuming it is the next world war. So here is World War III which extends over the entire last half of the Tribulation involving several phases or invasions of Palestine and conflicts. This will finally culminate in the gathering of all nations at the very end of the Tribulation at Har-Magedon. Ezekiel 38; Daniel 11:40-45; Zechariah 14:1-3 and Joel 3:1-17 all describe these military events that will culminate in the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The location of the war (vs. 16) is “Har-Magedon.” Concerning this place Walvoord says:

Geographically, it relates to the Mount of Megiddo located adjacent to the plain of Megiddo to the west and the large plain of Esdraelon to the northeast. Megiddo is the Hebrew word corresponding to the Greek word Armageddon. This area was the scene of many of the great battles of the Old Testament such as that of Barak and the Canaanites in Judges 4 and the victory of Gideon over the

Midianites in Judges 7. Here also occurred the deaths of Saul and Josiah. The area, though it is a large one, is not sufficient for the armies of all the world, though the valley of Esdraelon is fourteen miles wide and twenty miles long. What this Scripture seems to indicate is that this area is the central point for the military conflict which ensues. Actually the armies are deployed over a 200-mile area up and down from this central location (cf. 14:20). At the time of the second coming, some of the armies are in Jerusalem itself (Zech. 14:1-3).²

Napoleon marched across this area and remarked that all the armies of the world could do battle here because of the broad expanse of this territory. Of course, it isn't actually that big, but it is a very broad expanse perfect for a very large congregation of armies.

Other areas involved are: (a) Joel 3:2, 13 the Valley of Jehoshaphat. This refers to an area further south and east of Jerusalem (cf. Ezek. 39:11, the Valley of Passengers mentioned here is the same area). (b) Isaiah 34 and 63 picture the Lord coming from Edom and Idumea south of Jerusalem with blood on His garments which shows part of the conflict occurs here as well. (c) Then as Walvoord mentions, Jerusalem is itself invaded by the armies of the world in the final phase of this campaign. Zechariah 12:2-11; 14:2; Daniel 11:40-45; Ezekiel 38:9-16; and Revelation 14:20 all show us this campaign covers the entire land of Palestine.

The participants in this war are: the king of the north and his allies (Ezek. 38). While there is some disagreement here, many believe this will include Russia, Persia (modern Iraq), Ethiopia (northern Sudan or maybe Arabia), Put (Libya and the African block), Gomer (Germany), Beth-togarmah (Turkey), and the king of the south consisting of Egypt and the Arab states. Then there will be the king of the west, the ten nation confederation of the Mediterranean states of Europe. Finally, it will include the kings of the east, the oriental block or nations east of the Euphrates.

The Warning to Believers (16:15)

This verse is a parenthesis written to the faithful remnant of the Tribulation to give them comfort, hope, as well as a warning lest they become discouraged and lose their testimony. These plagues are but a proof that the Lord's return is near. So in this verse the Lord Himself now speaks.

He says, "Behold." This means, "stop, and think, take note"! "I am coming" is what we call a prophetic present which views a future event as certain, as though already in the process of occurring. Here the Lord is assuring the Tribulation saints that His coming is certain.

"As a thief" stresses the fact that while the general time of Christ's return in the Tribulation can be known because of the signs and specific events of the Tribulation (like the drying up of the Euphrates), the exact moment cannot be known (Matt. 24:36; Acts 1:7). Therefore, Tribulation believers are warned to stay awake, producing righteousness for the Lord. They are to live with a view to His return. Some would try to apply this to the church, but though there is some similarity to 1 Thessalonians 4:13f in the fact that Christ will come silently for believers, take what is His, and leave the world in disarray, the primary picture of Christ's coming for the church is that of a Bridegroom. The thief concept primarily deals with the Tribulation or the day of wrath (cf. 1 Thess 5:2-3).

Thus, special blessing or happiness is promised to the believer, even in these horrible times of the Tribulation if he follows the warnings and exhortations of this verse. They are told to do two things:

(1) "To stay awake." The Greek word here is *goreo*, and is used of alertness and fellowship with the Lord (cf. its use in 1 Thess. 5:6f). It refers to one who has the right priorities and is living for the Lord and His return. To stay awake is to stay in fellowship. This is the root aspect.

(2) "He keeps his garments." Here is the fruit, the results. Keeping his garments refers to righteous behavior or good works which the believer wears like a garment; it is practical living from fellowship with Christ (Rev. 14:13; 19:8; 11:18).

"Lest he walk about naked and men see their shame." Men cannot see the imputed righteousness which God imputes to the account of believers which gives them a righteous standing and access to God. But they can see the practical results of this in Christian behavior, or the fruit of the Spirit and the Word, Christ-likeness. Otherwise what they see is empty profession or spiritual nakedness (i.e., carnality).

² John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1966, p. 238.

Romans 13:11-14 makes a similar application to believers for our day and in this sense the passage in Revelation 16:15 has application for us today. We can see events which are unfolding today that could very well be preparatory to the Tribulation—politically, spiritually, morally and in other ways. Since the Lord returns for the church before the Tribulation, this means His coming for us, though always imminent, must be drawing nearer every day. This along with the nature of our future with Him should likewise motivate us to putting on the Lord Jesus Christ that we might be fully clothed with His life and glorious character.

The Seventh Bowl: Widespread Destruction (16:17-21)

17 And the seventh *angel* poured out his bowl upon the air; and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, “It is done.” 18 And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake *was it, and* so mighty. 19 And the great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath. 20 And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. 21 And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe.

The seventh bowl, the final judgment of the Tribulation is actually a series of judgments that will be poured out upon the whole earth. As the Tribulation is a time of unprecedented trial or judgment, so the seventh bowl is the most severe and totally devastating judgment of the whole Tribulation, ending with the personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth. His personal return is not mentioned in these verses or this chapter, but from the circumstances and the sixth plague, the return of Christ has to be a part of this judgment.

The Greek word *meegas* is repeated seven times in these verses. This emphasizes the unprecedented nature and finality of this series of judgments. It also stresses how this series of judgments perfectly (the emphasis of the number seven) accomplishes and brings to an end God’s program of judgment. Of the eleven times the Greek word *meegas* is used in this chapter, seven are in relation to this last bowl.

The Great Voice (16:17)

First, note that this bowl is aimed or poured out upon the air. “Air” is the Greek *aer* which refers to our atmosphere, the air we breathe. Remember, Satan and his demon hosts have been (since chapter 12, the middle of the Tribulation) restricted to the earth which, however, would include our atmosphere. Also remember that according to Ephesians 2:2 Satan is called “the prince of the power of the air” (*aer*). This is the domain and the base of operation for Satan and his spirit hosts and their strategies. Further, in modern day our atmosphere has become vitally important in military matters over which Satan will have control. This points to a principle: this series of judgments, though its final effect is upon the earth, is a final judgment upon Satan and his domain or rule.

Second, as John saw this bowl poured out, a voice is heard. It is describe as “loud” or “great.” It is the voice of God, perhaps that of the Son Himself to whom all judgment has been given (John 5:27). The voice comes “out of the temple (*naos*) from the throne.” This is the smoke-filled temple into which no one was able to enter because of the absolute and undiluted wrath of God being poured out in these seven bowls. So with the pouring of the seventh, John hears “it is done.” This is a Greek word *gegonen*, a consummative perfect (from *ginomai*, “to come into being, come to pass, take place, done) that refers to action as not merely ended, but which was brought to its appropriate end and with results that continue. At this point, God’s purposes of judgment in the Tribulation will be perfectly accomplished by this final series of divine wrath.

If you recall, there was another moment in history when our Lord made a similar statement. When on the cross, in those final hours of darkness, he cried out *tetelesthai* “it is done” or “it is finished.” At this point, Christ had borne our iniquities and His substitutionary work was complete. He had been judged for man’s sin. This too was a consummative perfect emphasizing that God’s work of reconciliation was accomplished with nothing more to be done other than for men and women to personally believe in the Lord Jesus Christ (John 3:14-21, 36; 6:28-29).

But, as the above verses also show, if one rejects the work of God in Christ and his judgment for our sin, then he is under the wrath of God which must also be accomplished; first in the Tribulation and then in eternal perdition in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11-15). As the author of Hebrews asks us, “how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” (Heb. 2:3)

The Great Earthquake (16:18, 20)

Before the mention of the great earthquake, John sees “flashes of lightning” and hears “sounds and peals of thunder” (vs. 18a). As it has been throughout the Book, this is preparatory and a warning of the extreme judgment that is about to fall.

Then we read “and there was a great earthquake.” Several things are important here: First, this earthquake is likewise unprecedented in history. The rhetorical device of redundancy is employed to emphasize this. “Such as” is the Greek *hoios*, a special qualitative relative pronoun meaning “of such a nature or kind.” “So great” is the Greek *te,likutos*, a special demonstrative or quantitative pronoun meaning “so great, so mighty.” “Mighty” is again the Greek *meegas* mentioned before.

Verses 19-20 then give the extent and effect of this earthquake with its worldwide devastation. In verse 20 we are shown two results that are not only astounding, but mind boggling. (a) “Every island fled away,” i.e., they disappeared into the ocean. Imagine the tidal waves this will cause. (b) “And the mountains were not found” is literally, “and mountains were not found.” The word “mountains” does not have the article which implies not all the mountains will be removed. Perhaps as a result of the great faults in the earth breaking open and shifting about, the mountains will break up and fall into the cracks of the earth. Zechariah 14:4 tells us that at Christ’s return to earth the Mount of Olives will split or crack open and form a great valley. Perhaps it is at this point, at Christ’s return to earth, that this great earthquake occurs.

This mind stretching phenomena points to three important facts:

(1) The world will be left in shambles. All man’s monuments and his great buildings will literally crumble before his very eyes. A few years back while we were living in East Texas, in the early nineties, I remember construction was nearing completion of a skyscraper in Houston that we were told would be one of the tallest buildings in the world. It had only plate glass for its outer walls from top to bottom. Can you imagine what such an earthquake will do to such structures, assuming they are still standing at this time?

(2) This judgment will drastically change the topography of the earth.

(3) Finally, these events will cause a tremendous loss of life on a worldwide scale that is impossible to calculate.

The Great Cities (16:19)

“And the great city was split into three parts.” Some see this as a reference to Jerusalem because Jerusalem is called “the great city” in 11:8. Also, the following two statements seem to indicate three different areas are in view: “the great city,” “the cities of the nations,” and “Babylon, the great.”

But John could just as easily have had something else in mind, i.e., the great city Babylon and those cities that come under Babylon’s yoke. The fall of these cities will break the yoke of Gentile world dominion referred to by the Lord as “the times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24). This is “the period of Gentile domination of Jerusalem, which probably began under Nebuchadnezzar (587 B.C.), was certainly in effect in A.D. 70 and continues into the Tribulation (cf. Rev. 11:2).”³ This should not be confused with what Paul spoke of as “the fullness of the Gentiles” in Romans 11:25. The fullness of the Gentiles refers to the completion of God’s purpose in the church age during which time God is calling out from among the Gentiles a people for His name, namely the church (Acts 15:14; Eph. 1:22-23; Rom. 11:7-32). The fall of these cities mentioned in Revelation 16 will bring to an end the Gentile domination as it now exists over the nation Israel.

I am personally convinced that Babylon will be rebuilt in the future and will become a great city and the center and headquarters for the Babylonian system of the last days, at least politically and commercially. In ancient times

³ Charles C. Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible, Expanded Edition*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1995, p. 1665.

Babylon was the chief center of Gentile dominion, the seat of Babylonianism, and so it will be again in the future. Here she will be judged and her dominion ended including the times of the Gentiles. The details and evidence for this will come in chapters 17-18.

The Great Plague of Hail (16:21)

We are told these hail stones are about 100 pounds each. The Greek word for this weight is *talantaios*, which referred to a weight of from 108-130 pounds. That's big hail and it will cause an awesome amount of damage on earth. This judgment that might be compared to that of Sodom and Gomorrah or to that on the king of the north or Magog mentioned in Ezekiel 38, only this will extend to the whole earth.

This judgment is so severe that it is called a plague, extremely severe (another use of *meas*). The amazing thing is that at this point, all of man's dreams will crumble—houses, fortunes, kingdoms, mountains—everything, but man's stony heart. What irony! His heart will have become so hard and rebellious from continued rejection of God's grace that he can only blaspheme God. His heart will be harder than stone.

Chronologically, the next event will be the return of the Lord to earth as King of kings (chapter 19). The next two chapters, however, halt the sequence and give us a parenthetical look at Babylon because of her prominence historically and in the future kingdom of the system of the beast.

Though from the contemporary point of view all the details of these dramatic judgments are not immediately understood, the unmistakable impression of the Scriptures is that the whole world is being brought to the bar of justice before Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords. There is no escape from divine judgment except for those who avail themselves of the grace of God in that day by faith in Jesus Christ. The utter perversity of human nature, which will reject the sovereignty of God in the face of such overwhelming evidence, confirms that even the lake of fire will not produce repentance on the part of those who have hardened their hearts against the grace of God.⁴

⁴ Walvoord, p. 242.

Lesson 25:

Babylon as Seen in Scripture: An Introduction to Chapters 17-18

Introduction

Revelation 17 and 18 are two of the most intriguing chapters of the Bible, yet two of the most difficult and disputed. Both of these chapters deal with the subject of Babylon and form a unit of prophetic doctrine, namely, the destruction of Babylon. However, these are two of the most difficult chapters of Revelation to interpret and expositors vary widely in their understanding of this section of the book. Walvoord writes:

Any interpretation of Revelation 17 and 18 is difficult because expositors have not agreed as to the detail of their interpretations. In general, however, it is helpful to consider chapter 17 as dealing with Babylon as an ecclesiastical or spiritual entity and chapter 18 as dealing with Babylon as a political entity.¹

While reasons will be given later to support this, two different aspects of Babylon are contemplated in these chapters, two separate aspects of Babylon and her fall (perhaps suggested by the repetition of the phrase “is fallen” in 18:2 and 14:8). Chapter 17 describes Babylon in its mystery form, as a religious system or spirit of false worship; chapter 18 describes Babylon as a political and commercial system embodied in a city, the city of Babylon of the future. So we have two Babylons: religious Babylon and political Babylon. As mentioned at the conclusion of chapter 16, these two chapters do not continue the chronological sequence of events (they do not follow the seven bowls). In fact, nothing does except the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and the judgments associated with His return.

Instead, chapters 17 and 18 are an amplification of one of the main features of the Tribulation, the place, function, and final judgment of Babylon. Chapter 17, which deals with the destruction of religious Babylon, would have to occur somewhere around the middle of the Tribulation when the beast is finished using her as a means to his rise to power. Chapter 18 describes the destruction of political (economic or commercial) Babylon as it is embodied in the city of Babylon, the headquarters of the beast. The destruction undoubtedly occurs at the seventh bowl when the great city of 16:19, along with other cities, fall in the great earthquake.

Seeing and understanding this concept of the two Babylon—the religious and politico-economic—is the key to understanding chapters 17 and 18.

Some believe there are two prominent cities representing two prominent systems and both are called Babylon. The first is Rome, the head of the religious system in the first half, which is also entrenched in the political realm as she has always been (17:18). The other city is the capitol of the great political and commercial system of the last half of the Tribulation after the woman is destroyed (the religious system), and when the beast assumes his great power. This will be his primary headquarters, though a secondary headquarters will be Jerusalem, when he carries out the abomination of desolation. However, since the religious aspect, even as seen in Rome today, had its beginnings in ancient Babylon or Babylonianism, the great city mentioned in 17:18 most likely refers to the rebuilt city of Babylon because this city and this name personifies the whole system religiously, politically, and commercially.

Chapter 17 is in part an amplification of chapter 13 in that it shows us one of the ways the beast and his political system rise to power. He uses the religious influence and power of the woman, the religious system of mystery Babylon. This system will have its tentacles in every part of the world where there is any kind of religion at all, apostate Christendom (the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Orthodox Church, Protestant unbelieving churches), the Jewish religion, and the cults. These will all come together in one great ecumenical movement, a super world religion, and the beast will use this to extend his authority and power throughout Europe, parts of Africa and perhaps the Americas. Chapter 18 is an amplification of the last bowl described in 16:17-21.

Babylon is mentioned 260 times in Scripture, and is second in importance only to Jerusalem. Biblically it is viewed as the Devil’s city while Jerusalem is viewed as God’s city. They are always seen in opposition to each other. Babylon is the result of apostasy against God’s plan of salvation, the first international, political and religious ecu-

¹ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1966, p. 243.

menical movement in the history of man, and one which has never ceased to exist in one form or another. Jerusalem is the result of God's call of a man and a nation to perpetuate His plan of salvation and nationalism for the world.

As mentioned, there seems to be two aspects or faces of Babylon, one is religious and is in existence today, and one is political and commercial. Babylon embodies one great Satanic system. Certain questions naturally arise. Will this last day Babylon encompass different geographical locations or cities like Rome as well as a rebuilt Babylon on the Euphrates? In other words, will there be two literal cities? Or will it be the same city viewed in different ways under different circumstances?

The Origin and Explanation of Mystery Babylon

Its Location

As you undoubtedly know, the city of ancient Babylon is in Iraq, about 50 miles south of Baghdad on the Euphrates river. What you may not know is that prior to Desert Storm and the conflict in Iraq, Saddam Hussein had for several years been working to uncover the ancient ruins of Babylon with a view to rebuilding the city and establishing himself as practically the incarnation of Nebuchadnezzar, the great Babylonian king who took Judah captive from 606 to 586 B.C. This captivity by Nebuchadnezzar began **the times of the Gentiles** (Luke 21:24), the period of gentile domination over Jerusalem and Israel which has and will continue to keep all descendants of David from sitting on the throne of Israel until the return of the Lord Himself.

Babylon's Biblical Beginnings

Babylon comes from the Hebrew *Bab-el* which some say is a Hebrew form of the Assyrian *Bab-ili*, which meant "Gate of God," and is used of the ancient city on the banks of the Euphrates River. However, in Hebrew *Bab-el* means "confusion."

Genesis 10-11

Babylon is first found in Genesis 10 in the table of nations. Here Moses traces the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. We have here the Japhethites, those least connected with Israel, then he traces the Hammites, those responsible for a great deal of sin and trouble in the world, and then the line of Shem, those who became Israelites.

But when Moses traces the descendants of Ham, those responsible for a great deal of trouble for Israel throughout her history, Moses wrote the following:

Now Cush became the father of Nimrod; he became a mighty one on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the Lord" And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel and Erech and Accad and Calneh, in the land of Shinar (Gen. 10:8-10).

Babel is the first reference to Babylon and its beginnings. Nimrod is recorded as the founder of Babel, later called Babylon (Gen. 10:10; 11:2-3, 5, 9). Nimrod's nature and character are seen in both his name and in his actions as described in Genesis 10:8-10 and in his origin in Babylon.

His name means "Let us revolt or rebel." It didn't have this meaning to the Babylonians, but this is the biblical meaning by context and by the form of the word. In Genesis 10:8 he is called "a mighty one," and in 10:9 "a mighty hunter before (against) Yahweh." Genesis 10:10 gives us the result. A kingdom is formed as a result of his tyranny or the exercise of absolute force (10:9-10). God's ideal of a king is a shepherd who leads his people under God and in God's plan. Nimrod was against God and His plan and formed his own kingdom by force. This kingdom originally consisted of Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh in the land of Shinar, southern Babylon above the Persian Gulf and along the Euphrates River.

He was the son of Cush, the son of Ham (Gen. 10:6, 8). He was a Hamite upon which no blessing was pronounced in contrast to Shem and Japheth, the other two sons of Noah. This shows us that God recognized in the Ha-

mites a greater proneness toward godlessness and rebellion. Note, however, Canaan was the descendant who was cursed because of even more vile tendencies (Gen. 9:25-27).

Nimrod was a rebel from beginning to end. As the first king of Babylon, he had within him the nature and character that would exist in the Gentile nations throughout history and especially in the final form in the Tribulation—tyranny and apostasy.

Genesis 11:3-4 records the out-and-out rebellion of the people of Shinar against the plan of God, undoubtedly under the leadership of Nimrod (cf. 10:10). Their rebellion is seen in their attempt at building a city and tower that would reach to heaven, i.e., high in the sky. The purpose of this was to make a name in defiance against God's plan of nationalism (11:4f). Under God's direct orders, man was to scatter and replenish which meant the establishment of nations divided by geographical boundaries and family ties or races (9:1). Concerning the table of nations described in Genesis 10, Ross writes:

It all appears to be a witness to the fulfillment of the divine commission to fill the earth (9:1); but the present to,lydo,t section includes also the account of the dispersion at Babel. When we also consider that account, we learn the reason that the nations spread out and filled the earth, separating into different areas with different languages—it was divine judgment on a rebellious people.²

Ancient history reveals that it was common practice to build huge mounds or towers called ziggurats made of sun dried brick. One such ziggurat was discovered at Erech, a place in Nimrod's kingdom going back to about 3,000 B.C. These were sacred temple towers dedicated to heathen deities often in connection with astrology, the zodiac, and the mother-child cult. "Ziggurat" means "pinnacle, mountain top."

It seems quite clear then, that this tower stood for rebellion against God, rejection of Him, His plan of salvation in the coming Redeemer (Gen. 3:15), and a rebellion against nationalism. It was the first attempt at world unity apart from dependence upon God. Here was an attempt at a man-made world unity by means of force. As Stigers says, "it is the will of God, so long as sin is present in the world, to employ nationalism in the reduction of sin (*Commentary on Genesis*, p. 129)."³

God judged this act with the confusion of tongues which automatically created nationalism by the linguistic differences. So where nationalism was to be perpetuated by obedience to God's command (Gen. 9:1), by geography through scattering, and by differences in races or families, now linguistic differences were added to force nationalism on the heathen world to enforce God's original plan (Gen. 11:8).

Because of God's judgment, the descendants of Noah stopped building the city (11:8) and its name was called Babel, a short form for *Balbel* from *Balal* "to confuse." Babel really means confusion and again, let me stress, it expresses God's judgment on internationalism. The Assyrian counterpart *Bab-eli* meant "Gate of God" but as given by God in the Hebrew Scriptures it meant "confusion."

This became the central city of Babylonia even beyond the time of Alexander the Great. The apostle Peter may have written from here (1 Pet. 5:13). However, its greatest glory was during the time of Nebuchadnezzar 600 years before Christ. Cyrus the Mede captured the city from the Chaldeans, Alexander the Great in turn captured it from Medo-Persia, and both made it their capitol. From this you can see its importance to the Gentile world powers and how it stands in opposition to Jerusalem and the purposes of God. Important to the study of Babylon and its origin is the origin of its religion and idolatry which spread from Babylon to surrounding nations and beyond. This will be discussed below.

Genesis 14

After we are introduced to Babylon in Genesis 10 and 11, Babylon disappears briefly from Scripture, but appears again in Genesis 14. Here is one of those accounts we have generally missed, but it is a very important account in the overall teaching of the Bible about Babylon and it becomes the beginning of what can be considered as "**The Tale of Two Cities.**"

² Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, 1988, p. 221.

³ Ross, p. 234.

Sodom and Gomorra were attacked and defeated by a confederation of kings and taken captive. This included Lot, the nephew of Abraham. Two things are particularly significant here:

First, Sodom and Gomorra were located in the land of Canaan or Palestine probably at a spot that is now under the southern end of the Dead Sea. But where is this? It is a part of the land God had promised to Abraham in the Abrahamic covenant which had its beginnings in Genesis 12:1, recorded for us, significantly so, right after the account of the tower of Babel.

Second, in the beginning of the chapter the kings are described for us. Dr. Charles Dyer points out that historically, the leader of these kings that came in against the land, a land that God had promised to Abraham, was a man by the name of Chedorlaomer, king of Elam. But note who Moses lists first. Amraphel king of Shinar which is the land Babylon.⁴ The NIV has a notation in the margin regarding the name “Shinar,” “that is Babylonia.”

It seems that by mentioning this king first, we see who Moses viewed as the real leader of this confederacy. Here is God’s perspective on this invasion.

What’s interesting after Abram defeats these kings is what happened when coming back into the land. He stopped at a place called Salem which later came to be known as Jerusalem. There Abram received a blessing from Melchizedek, King of Salem. Melchizedek means “king of righteousness” and in the Bible, he is a type of Christ (Heb. 7:1f). So, beginning in Genesis 14, we see in seed form what Dr. Charles Dyer called, “The Tale of Two Cities.”⁵

Historically, we can summarize Babylon’s early history in Genesis with the following:

First, we have the rise of the city of the ungodly, Shinar or Babylon which had its beginnings not only in rebellion against God, but in an attempt to be like God.

Second, we see this city intruding on the land which God had promised to Abraham through whom the Messiah would come.

And third, suddenly brought into this narrative is the city of Salem, later to become Jerusalem, with a king who is a type of Christ, whose name means king of righteousness, and who meets Abraham and gives him a blessing.

Fourth, right after this, we have God Himself appearing to Abraham to reinforce His covenant with Abraham with specific boundaries given in connection with the land of promise and victory over the inhabitants of the land (cf. 15:1, 18-21).

Isaiah 36-37

Babylon then disappears from the book of Genesis and the next place we find her mentioned in an historic way is in Isaiah 36-37. Here Hezekiah King of Judah is faced with invasion and is threatened by Sennacherib King of Assyria. In this passage we find Hezekiah reading the terms of surrender from Sennacherib, but Hezekiah turned the matter over to the Lord and was delivered.

However, in chapters 38-39 we have a lapse of faith by Hezekiah. Because of this, Isaiah the prophet predicted that all he had stored would be taken to Babylon where some of the King’s sons would become officials of the palace of the King of Babylon. This was a prophecy of the Babylonian captivity which took place about 100 years later.

Hezekiah’s descendants represented the Davidic kingdom and the line of Messiah. Their city, Jerusalem, was the place of the temple with the Shekinah glory. This represented the presence of God and was the place of God’s worship. All of this represented God’s reign and kingdom on earth. What does this mean?

(1) Through the Babylonian captivity, Nebuchadnezzar invaded the land, destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the temple, and deported Judah’s king.

(2) This was a product of God’s judgment against Israel for her continued disobedience as He had predicted through the prophets, but nevertheless, the first kingdom that man had started, Babylon, literally attacked and de-

⁴ Taken from a tape by Dr. Charles Dyer, professor at Dallas Theological Seminary.

⁵ Dyer.

stroyed the kingdom of God on earth. From this point in history, there has not been a king from the line of David sitting on the throne of David in Jerusalem.

In a sense, though temporary, this is the triumph of mankind over God's kingdom. The book of Daniel pictures this in the statue with King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon as the head of gold. This statue as described for us in Daniel 2 represents what our Lord referred to as "the times of the Gentiles" spoken of earlier.

So historically we see three things about Babylon:

(1) It begins as the place of man's rebellion through tyranny and a united world effort which God judged by the confusion of languages.

(2) It's also the instrument that seeks to take away the land promised by God to His people, the Israelites,

(3) and it is the kingdom that destroys or at least disrupts God's kingdom here on earth and starts the times of the Gentiles, the time of Gentile domination.

The Origin of Babylon's Religion

Ancient records indicate that Nimrod had a wife named Semiramis who was the founder and first high priestess of the Babylonian mystery religion. She gave birth to a son named Tammuz, whom she claimed was conceived miraculously. This son was considered savior of his people and in effect was the first false Messiah—a counterfeit of Genesis 3:15 and God's promise of a Savior. The son was to have been killed by a wild beast, but brought back to life.

The religious system of Semiramis had many secret rites in the worship of its idols. These were called mysteries (secrets) into which new members had to be initiated. When the initiates were initiated they were given a cup containing a mysterious drink made of wine, honey, water and flour. This represented the doctrines of the cult, but these also made the participant intoxicated and prepared for what the participant was about to see, hear and do. These rites involved consecrated male and female prostitution and the most sordid sexual immorality carried out in connection with its idolatrous worship. The fornication is both physical and spiritual (Rev. 17:2-5).

The rites incorporated the worship of the mother (who was called "the queen of heaven") and the child. While the rites varied, and the idol images often varied from country to country as the cult spread from one location to another, they all contained one central feature, the worship of the goddess mother and her child. Often the names changed, but no matter where you went, pictures and images of a mother with a child in her arms were found. (See the study on Rev. 14.)

The religious system which began in Babel (or Babylon), became the mother, the source of all pagan religions of the world. This is the reason she is called "Mother of Harlots" (Rev. 17:5). This system spread to Greece, Egypt, Italy, Phoenicia, Israel, India, Asia Minor and Europe. Canaan was full of this iniquity and is one of the reasons God commanded Israel to destroy its inhabitants. Their failure to do so led to Israel's own downfall and involvement with the Babylonian system.

The Destruction of Religious Babylon

As we study about Babylon, it is important to remember that Babylon refers to more than a city in Revelation 17 and 18. It stands for a system of evil, religiously and politically. Americans speak of "Wall Street" and "Madison Avenue." These are actually streets, but they also stand for the center of the financial and advertising enterprises of this country.

Revelation 17 describes the apostate religious system as it will come to its zenith in the first half of the Tribulation, but it will be destroyed by the Ten Nation Confederation in the middle of the Tribulation. The true church will have been raptured, but the apostate and false religious systems continue on and become united under the one world system of Babylon, which will may well be headed up by Rome.

As some of the parables of Matthew 13 suggest, and Paul and Peter explicitly warn us, the church age will be characterized by growing apostasy (see 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:13; 2 Pet. 2:1-3:4). This apostasy will take the form of ecumenicity—the movement of uniting all religions together into a one-world church governed and controlled by

Rome. To accomplish its goals, this apostate ecumenical system will of necessity employ a number of practices to bring off its goals of a world-wide, universal church.

(1) Eclecticism: This is that philosophy of religion which refuses to accept any one system of doctrine, but seeks to take the so-called best from all systems of belief. Eclectics, at least outwardly, seek to be fair to all and therefore yield to all.

(2) Latitudinarianism: This is that system of religion which cares little about creeds or doctrine. In this system sincerity is more important than what is believed. But as above, it opens the door for anything.

(3) Syncretism: This system seeks to unite all opposing theological and philosophical positions by arriving at a common denominator or by coming to a new synthesis.

In all of these there will be persecution and rejection of the truth on behalf of establishing a world church. True Christianity is exclusive. It sees that there may be some truth in other religions but only Christianity has **The Truth** in the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Scripture (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). The world hates this commitment to absolute truth, especially as it is promoted in Scripture (the Written Word) and in the person and work of Jesus Christ (the Living Word). After all, the world is the child of the Antichrist, and as mentioned in previous lessons, while claiming to be eclectic, latitudinarian, and syncretistic, the one-world system of the last days will have no tolerance for true Bible-based Christianity and will seek to persecute and annihilate believers in Christ unmercifully.

Political Babylon to be Rebuilt on the Euphrates in the Tribulation

The announcement of the fall of Babylon in chapter 18 which comes immediately after the destruction of the harlot in chapter 17, causes many to think that these are one and the same event. However, there are several things which show they are two different events, though described in similar terms. We have here the fall of religious Babylon followed later by the fall of political and commercial Babylon.

(1) The woman of chapter 17 is made desolate, naked, and burned with fire by the beast with the ten horns, whereas the fall of chapter 18 is accomplished directly by God at the end of the Tribulation (cf. 16:19-21). The fall of religious Babylon (chapter 17) occurs when the beast assumes his religious role in the middle of the Tribulation and assumes world political power. The world apostate ecumenical system is destroyed in favor of the new world religion which worships the political dictator of chapter 13 whose capitol city will be in rebuilt Babylon.

The destruction of Babylon in chapter 18 should be compared with the preceding announcement in 16:19 where the great city is divided and the cities of the Gentiles fall. This event comes late in the great Tribulation, just prior to the second coming of Christ, in contrast to the destruction of the harlot of chapter 17 which seems to precede the great Tribulation and paves the way for the worship of the beast (13:8).⁶

(2) The context of chapter 18 with its many references to the kings and merchants and commerce shows that, in this setting, Babylon is viewed in her political, economic, and commercial character, rather than in her religious role (vss. 11-19).

(3) As Walvoord suggests,

The term "Babylon" in Scripture is more than a reference to the false religious system which stemmed from ancient Babylon. Out of ancient Babylon came the political power represented first in Nimrod and later in Nebuchadnezzar in his great world empire. In some sense this is continued in the commercial system which came from both the religious and political Babylons. It seems that chapter 17 deals with the religious aspect and chapter 18 with the political and economic aspects of Babylon.⁷

Both aspects have continued down through the centuries. For an Old Testament reference to the commercial aspect, see the vision of the woman with the ephah (a sign of commerce) in Zechariah 5:5-11).

⁶ Walvoord, p. 259.

⁷ Walvoord.

(4) Walvoord points out another significant difference which suggests we have two different aspects of Babylon in chapters 17 and 18.

According to verse 9 the kings of the earth as well as the merchants will all mourn the passing of the Babylon of chapter 18. There is apparently no mourning connected with the destruction of the woman in chapter 17.⁸

The ten horns and the beast hate the woman (17:16). This would strongly suggest we have two distinct destructions. All of this indicates that the Babylon of chapter 18 is a city that will be rebuilt as the capitol of the world empire in the great Tribulation period and that Babylon in this chapter refers to ancient Babylon which is to be rebuilt rather than to Rome.

Some argue against the rebuilding of Babylon and claim that we must not take the references to Babylon in Revelation too literally. They say this chapter refers to a spiritual Babylon, a city which will become the incarnation of ancient Babylon, but will not be a literal Babylon. They maintain Babylon has already been destroyed and Old Testament prophecy teaches us it will never be rebuilt. But let's consider some prophetic facts about Babylon.

(1) The Bible predicts the destruction of Babylon will be final and complete (Jer. 50:35, 39-40; Isa. 13:1, 19-22). These verses show that it will no more be inhabited and that its destruction will be as Sodom and Gomorrah with absolutely nothing left (Jer. 51:24-26).

(2) Scripture also predicts that the destruction would be sudden, quick (Jer. 51:8).

(3) The Old Testament predicts this destruction will come in the "Day of the Lord" (Isa. 13:6-11; 13:1; 14:1-3; Jer. 50:1-6).

(4) At the time of her destruction there will be a disturbance in the sun and moon (Isa. 13:10).

(5) Universal peace will result from the overthrow of Babylon (Isa. 14:7-8).

(6) A literal interpretation of Zechariah 5:5-11 demands a restored and rebuilt Babylon. These verses involve the vision of the ephah. A woman called "wickedness" is seen sitting in an ephah measure, covered with a round piece of lead. An ephah to a Jew was a perfect symbol of commerce and was the largest dry measure of the Jews. The ephah is then borne away by two women with wings of a stork "to build for it an house in the land of Shinar" (the land of Babylon). This vision anticipates a final concentration of wickedness and commercialism in a great center in the land of Shinar (Babylon) which would reach out over the whole earth. This is the exact portrayal of Babylon as seen in Revelation 18.

(7) The historical situation concerning Babylon shows much of the prophecies mentioned above have not been fulfilled and must await a final and complete fulfillment. The prophecies regarding Babylon are an illustration of dual reference with a partial (near) fulfillment versus a complete (far) fulfillment.

When the Medes and Persians conquered the city they came suddenly and gained immediate control, but they did not destroy the city. Instead Cyrus the Mede beautified the city in 540 B.C. Hundreds of years later many Jews still lived at Babylon and a Jewish Talmud actually originated from there. In the twelfth century A.D. Babylon had grown and several mosques had been erected. Later a city by the name of Hillah was built there and in 1900 it had a population of ten thousand. The land around Babylon is fertile today and dates are grown in abundance (Isa. 13:21f).

Other cities around the area of Babylon were built from the ruins of ancient Babylon; in fact the city of Hillah was built entirely from the ruins of Babylon. Bricks with the word "Babylon" stamped on them have been found as far away as Bagdad.

It is obvious from this historical information that the city was not destroyed suddenly nor completely. Instead, it continued to be inhabited after it was conquered and the land around her did not become desolate, but continued to be populated and fertile. This is a fact of history. Her ruins were used in building other cities and there was no disturbance in the sun or moon, nor did universal peace follow.

The Word of God is true and these prophecies still await a future fulfillment.

⁸ Walvoord.

The description of Babylon's destruction in Revelation 18 declares it will be destroyed suddenly ("in one day her plagues will come" [vs. 8]; "for in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste" [vs. 17]). The destruction will be complete and final, "it shall be found no more at all" (Jer. 51:63-64); "So will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer" (Rev. 18:21). Babylon will be destroyed with fire from heaven as God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah (Rev. 18:18; 16:17-21). Universal peace will follow the destruction.

All of this coincides exactly with the prophecies of the Old Testament and shows that Babylon must be rebuilt in the Tribulation in order to be destroyed as prophesied in "the Day of the Lord."

Rome may well be the religious Babylon of the world in the first half of the Tribulation, but I am convinced that Babylon on the Euphrates will be rebuilt and will be the political and commercial capitol in the last half of the Tribulation.

Lesson 26: The Judgment of Religious Babylon (17:1-18)

The Description of Religious Babylon (17:1-6a)

1 And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I shall show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, 2 with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality." 3 And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns. 4 And the woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality, 5 and upon her forehead a name was written, a mystery, "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." 6 And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus.

Verse 1. John is called to come and see the judgment of Babylon, but in the process he also gets a description of the woman (Babylon). The subject of this section is the judgment of religious Babylon. The judgment describes her condemnation, sentence, and penalty passed. The emphasis is the particular character and nature of the penalty that God has in store for Babylon.

In keeping with the laws of the harvest, Scripture teaches that whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap. The harlot system has seduced men and nations and tried to rule them politically. Nations have bowed and scraped to her for centuries, but a time will come when they will revolt and destroy her.

Babylon's description as "the great harlot" refers to the spiritual prostitution and fornication that categorizes the apostate church of the Tribulation which is unfaithful and rejects the Lord Jesus Christ as her husband (2 Pet. 2:1-2). "Great" refers to the harlot system which will reach its zenith after the removal of the true church (genuine believers) by way of the rapture. The prostitute exists today in many forms (Roman Catholicism, liberal Protestantism, the cults, etc.), but after the church is gone, or perhaps even before it is gone, they will unite and become one great ecumenical religious system.

"That sits on many waters" refers to world-wide unification and control. "Waters" refers to the "nations" and the many people of those nations. "Sits on" suggests the concept of control as well as unification. The nations are religiously united and politically affiliated with each other through the power and control of this religious system and its head. When the church is raptured, the apostate system which will already have spread its tentacles all over the world, will quickly unite and become the one-world church.

One of the things we should be watching for are tendencies and movements among the religious groups of the world toward a united world church, and we have been seeing this for years. One of the recent "uniting factors" is the present day tongues movement. It seems the tongues experience becomes a uniting force that unites Roman Catholics, Charismatics, liberal Protestants, and even the cults, and this regardless of the divergent doctrinal views, many of which are clearly contrary to Scripture.

Verse 2. "With whom (the harlot) the kings of the earth have committed fornication" is a reference to the leaders of the non-communist block of nations in which the religious system has her tentacles. This is an alliance of church and state which is an unfaithful act for both. This causes both to prostitute (compromise) their responsibility before God. Both state and church were established by God, but must remain separate if they are to carry out their purpose. They are to support one another, but the moment they merge, both liberty and spiritual freedom are lost (at least eventually). By separate, I am not talking about the separation of church and state that is being promoted today

where prayer and dependence on God has been removed from the classroom while godless ideologies are being promoted.¹

Below is an extended portion quoted from the chapter entitled, “The Myth the Church Should Have No Voice in Government” in the book, *Exploding The Myths That Could Destroy America*, by Erwin W. Lutzer:

“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mark 12:17).

This statement of Christ’s was revolutionary. To those believers who were under the Roman yoke He said that we can, under certain conditions, have loyalty both to God and to the state. But Christ also knew that conflict between the two spheres would become inevitable when the secular authority would demand for himself honors that belong only to God. Yet, as far as possible, believers should live with loyalty to both authorities.

Church-state conflict goes back to the early days when Christianity was outlawed and was set in opposition to Roman rule. Early Christians died not because the Romans were intolerant (they would accept whatever god anyone wished to worship). What they abhorred was the *exclusivism* of Christianity. The belief that Jesus Christ was the *only* Lord galled the Romans and led many Christians to the lions.

Early Christianity was a minority religion in a secular state. But all of that changed under Constantine, who wanted to make Christianity coextensive with the state. In other words, everyone who would be born within the boundaries of the Roman Empire would be a Christian.

As a result of this development, the church and state were united. In the eleventh century, Pope Gregory VII struggled with the mightiest king in Western Europe, Henry IV of Germany. The question was, Who would have the authority to appoint bishops? The king insisted that that was his prerogative, but the pope maintained that such a conclusion would place the church subordinate to the state and hence corrupt the faith. When King Henry visited the pope’s castle in Italy, he was required to stand barefoot for three days and ask for mercy before receiving the pope’s pardon. It made sense to the pontiff that the church should have authority over the state so that heretics could be punished and doctrinal purity maintained.

Later when the Anabaptists revolted against the unity of church and state, they were put to death and persecuted with the full approval of the Reformers. Men such as Luther believed that if the church were considered to be a segment of society rather than coextensive with society, the social order would be broken up. The Anabaptists who held the strict separation of church and state were therefore persecuted for their belief.

When the Pilgrims came to what today is called the United States it was to escape the tyranny of a state church. They understood that when church and state were united there was not only a loss of individual freedom but the abuse of using civil power to enforce the whim of the religious elite.

In our Constitution these familiar words appear: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” Clearly the intention was (1) to limit the power of the federal government by ensuring that it would not establish a state church, then (2) it was not to prohibit the free exercise of religion.

Today this amendment is being deliberately misinterpreted to try to separate God from government. Whenever any religious influence is exerted in government agencies, the secularists cry “Foul!” And if a citizen raises his voice against secularism he is told to be silent because of the supposed “wall of separation” between church and state.

The phrase “wall of separation” does not appear in the Constitution, but had its origin in a letter written by Thomas Jefferson in 1802 to a group of Baptists and Congregationalists in Danbury,

¹ For an excellent work on this issue and what our forefathers meant by separation of church and state, see *The Myth of Separation* by David Barton, *Wallbuilders*, P.O. Box 397, Aledo, TX 76008. The *Wallbuilders* is an excellent resource regarding our godly heritage.

Connecticut who had called him an infidel. He then said there should be a “wall of separation between church and state.” Interestingly, the USSR Constitution *does* use the expression “wall of separation between church and state.” This basic tenet is found in most Communist countries. Churches are permitted to operate in all those areas where the political authorities do not have power, but because the state has supreme authority over all matters, religion is literally squeezed out of existence.

The fathers of this nation never dreamed that separation of church and state meant that God should be separated from government. The government buildings in Washington bear ample testimony to the belief that faith in God is the basis for establishing laws and running the affairs of a nation.

For example, the Ten Commandments hang over the head of the chief justice of the Supreme Court (would that they had been read before the infamous *Roe v. Wade* decision of 1973). In the rotunda the words “In God we trust” are engraved, and on the Library of Congress we have “The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork.” The Washington monument and other government buildings contain phrases of Scripture.

The Bible has much to say about the Christian’s responsibility in government.

SUPPLICATION

Most letters that congressmen receive are complaints from their constituents. Seldom are they ever affirmed and told that they are doing a good job. Even more rarely do politicians learn that individual believers have been praying for them. And yet, this is precisely Paul’s command. “First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity” (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

Paul uses four words to stress our intercession for government leaders. We must have *entreaties* (praying for specific needs); *prayers* (a more general word referring to the need for wisdom in daily decisions); *petitions* (a reference to our ability as believers to come before God in behalf of others) and finally *thankfulness* (gratitude to God for what leadership has been provided).

Because our political leaders are often non-Christians it is easy to think there is no use praying for them. But Paul makes it clear the Christian has a duty to pray that the state will protect its citizens and encourage an atmosphere where man can be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. If we are not constantly in prayer for our leaders we really cannot complain when our freedoms are taken away from us.

Think of what it would mean to a politician to receive letters from Christians without complaints, just to say that they are praying. With such power at our disposal we might be surprised at what God would bring about simply because His people are obedient to this command.

SUBMISSION

When Paul wrote the book of Romans, Christianity was not viewed with favor in the Roman Empire. Yet he exalts the role of government in the economy of God, and says, “Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves” (Romans 13:1-2).

Why does Paul urge submission? First, because government is ordained of God. This is difficult to believe, particularly when we see the evil governments in existence today. What about China? The Soviet Union? Iran or Libya?

The Scriptures teach an interesting paradox: On the one hand Satan is actively involved in the political process. In fact, he said to Christ, “I will give you all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomsoever I wish. Therefore if you worship before me it

shall all be yours” (Luke 4:6-7). The book of Daniel teaches that there are wicked spirits who are assigned to various leaders. There is no question that some world leaders are but tools of the devil.

Yet at the same time the Bible clearly teaches that God rules in the affairs of men. “For not from the east, nor from the west, nor from the desert comes exaltation; but God is the judge; He puts down one, and exalts another” (Psalm 75:6-7).

Even more vividly, Nebuchadnezzar was driven to insanity and ate grass like the cattle until he learned that “The Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whomever He wishes” (Daniel 4:25b).

How shall we understand this apparent contradiction? Satan’s authority is *derived*, it is not inherent in his own person. God has given him the rulership of the world, but he exercises his authority within the limitations prescribed by God. God controls the ultimate outcome of whatever decisions Satan may be allowed to make. And, of course, God rules everything according to His own will and to accomplish His own ultimate purpose. Yes, Nero along with Hitler and Stalin were “ordained of God.”

Furthermore, government *represents* God. Paul wrote, “Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.” To resist governmental authority is to resist God. Whether we think a law is fair or not, we have no right to disobey simply because of our own preferences. Government is God-ordained.

But should we always obey the government? No, not always. As we shall see in the final chapter of this book, there is a place for civil disobedience. The history of the Christian church is filled with names of those who believed that they must obey God and not the rules of men.²

Verse 2 continued: “They have been made drunk with the wine of her immorality.” The wine refers to the demonic doctrines, ideologies and concepts produced by this religious/political alliance. In ancient Babylon it involved the mysteries of the mother-child cult and the one-world order of Nimrod and later Nebuchadnezzar. In our day the worship of the queen of heaven is still present (a new face for an old concept) namely, one-world order through social reform and the mysticism of the New Age movement. One idea that has been promoted by liberal Protestantism is we are all God’s children and can come to God in various ways; another is the delusion Satan has promoted from the beginning that we can be like God (Gen. 3:5). This has nothing to do with becoming like the children of God through Christ, but becoming like gods through New Age mysticism. So all racial distinctions, religious distinctions, and social distinctions must be removed. Everyone must learn to get along. Social reform and unification will be promoted as the greatest need of man thereby setting aside the real spiritual needs of men as they are found only in Christ who alone provides the basis for true unity and capacity to love one another.

“Drunkness” in any form is an escape mechanism and the result of negative volition, indifference, apathy, and rejection of God’s revelation to man in Christ and the Bible. Because of the great negative volition that will exist at the time of the Tribulation, the world will be ripe for the wine of the harlot’s system. Lutzer and DeVries give us an excellent overview of the nature of this intoxicating wine of Babylon. In a section entitled, “Where New Meets Old” they write:

Read the Old Testament and you will be impressed with the number of times the name *Babylon* appears. The city began when men rebelled against God and attempted to build a tower—called Babel in Genesis 11:9—that would reach to the heavens (Here man was undoubtedly attempting to be like God under Satan’s delusion [parenthesis mine]). From those occult beginnings, Babylon eventually rose to become a dominant power with its sorcery permeating the ancient world. The prophets of God condemned it because it represented all that was most evil in man’s attempts to dethrone God.

What did the Babylonians believe that was so perverse? Isaiah 47:8-11 summarizes their religion:

² Erwin W. Lutzer, “The Myth the Church Should Have No Voice in Government” *Exploding the Myths That Could Destroy America*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1986, pp. 159-64.

8 Now, then, hear this, you sensual one, Who dwells securely, Who says in your heart, 'I am, and there is no one besides me. I shall not sit as a widow, Nor shall I know loss of children.' 9 But these two things shall come on you suddenly in one day: Loss of children and widowhood. They shall come on you in full measure In spite of your many sorceries, In spite of the great power of your spells. 10 And you felt secure in your wickedness and said, 'No one sees me,' Your wisdom and your knowledge, they have deluded you; For you have said in your heart, 'I am, and there is no one besides me.' 11 But evil will come on you Which you will not know how to charm away; And disaster will fall on you For which you cannot atone, And destruction about which you do not know Will come on you suddenly.

Take a close look at the text. Ancient Babylon had a spiritual religion built upon blasphemous premises:

- (1) The deity of man—"I am. And there is no one besides me."
- (2) A false belief in triumph over death—"I shall not sit as a widow, nor shall I know the loss of children."
- (3) Moral relativism—"Hear this, you sensual one."
- (4) Esotericism, or private enlightenment through mystical spiritual experiences—"Your many sorceries . . . the great power of your spells."

Texe Marrs in his book *Dark Secrets of the New Age* lists nearly 30 rituals and beliefs found in ancient Babylon that are practiced today in the New Age Movement! Everything from reincarnation to occult meditation was commonplace 3,000 years ago.

The New Testament predicts that at the end of this age the religion of ancient Babylon will again stand in opposition to God. A woman clothed in purple and scarlet is described by the apostle John as having the mystery name on her forehead, "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH" (Revelation 17:5).

We may not be certain that the New Age Movement of today is indeed the final Babylon of Revelation. What we do know is that *the final Babylon will practice the same occult religion as that of ancient Babylon*. That is the religion which is now sweeping the Western world and gaining widespread acceptance among all levels of our society.

The *New Age* thus is a revival of the *Old Age*. And the *New Age* may well turn out to be the *Final Age*. For as modern Babylon gains in momentum, it will once again assault the heavens and shake its fist in the face of God...³

Verse 3. "The scarlet beast" refers to the Antichrist. He is scarlet because he is blood-thirsty and will at the right time kill the woman (the religious system). As seen earlier (Rev. 13) he is "filled with names of blasphemy," which refers to his anti-god character and to the blasphemous claims he will later make (2 Thess. 2:4).

In verse 3 we are told John was taken to a "wilderness." Obviously, this refers to a desolate, desert-kind of place, but it is designed to picture the world which the woman and beast will rule. It will be full of cities and peoples, but it will be a spiritual desert. There will be no true spiritual food or water from this empty religious system. The world will be starving and dying. This is what religion does for man, it leaves him in the desert.

However, in the desert, God has provided an "oasis," a place where food and water can be found for those who are seeking. This of course is a picture of Jesus Christ and His plan for feeding the hungry. Today it involves local churches where the Word is taught, but in the Tribulation it will involve the ministry of the 144,000 evangelists of chapters 7 and 14, as well as the two witnesses and others who are saved.

This is our responsibility today, to be an oasis holding forth the Word of life. If we are faithful to do this, individually and corporately, the Lord will give us an open door to those who are thirsty. He will lead us to the hungry and them to us (Rev. 3:7-8).

³ Erwin W. Lutzer and John F. DeVries, *Satan's Evangelistic Strategy For This New Age*, Victor Books: Wheaton, IL, 1989, pp. 23-24.

The woman is described as “clothed in purple and scarlet and adorned with gold, precious stones and pearls.” Purple and scarlet have for centuries been the colors of royalty and of the wealthy. In part they stand for her political power, and in part they point to her religious pomp and trappings. The “gold, precious stones and pearls” refer to her immense wealth. These colors have for centuries been the colors of the Roman Catholic Church, and the wealth of this church is immense. Many believe that Papal Rome will somehow be involved in this last time system, at least in the first half of the Tribulation.

“Having a golden cup” refers to her enticing manner of alluring men and nations. She invites men to drink of her deadly and stupefying wine by offering it in a golden cup, while arrayed in all her splendor.

All of this—the gold and religious trappings—appeals to the sensual, material and religious bent of man’s sinful nature. He admires this, he is awed by it, and it blinds him.

“Abominations and unclean things” may refer to the various forms of idolatry involved in the worship of God through images, statues, and medals, etc. “Unclean things” refers not only to the nature of the doctrines taught, but what they lead to in the life, immorality and impurity. Man’s religion offers no solution to the flesh. It’s the flesh seeking to overcome the flesh and it profits nothing (John 6:63; Col. 2:20-23).

First Timothy 4:1-5 emphasizes that not only are such doctrines demonic and satanic, but gives us one of the primary doctrines of latter day Babylonianism, celibacy among the priests. This has led to horrible atrocities in the Roman Catholic Church. In Chiniquy’s book, *Fifty Years in the Roman Catholic Church*, he says that a young student priest was questioning a superior about this doctrine of Rome and received the following reply: “You have spoken as a true heretic...you speak of the Holy Scriptures just as a Protestant would, do you appeal to them as the only source of Christian truth and knowledge. Have you forgotten that we have the *holy traditions* to guide us, the authority of which is equal to the Scriptures?” Later he said: “You are not required to understand all the reasons for the vow of celibacy; but you are bound to believe in its necessity and holiness.”

This nullified Scripture on the basis of human tradition (Mark 7:13). Such a position refuses to allow people to carry out their responsibility to function as Berean believers (Acts 17:11). The idea of celibacy as a means to holiness is absolutely contrary to Scripture. As is always the case, false doctrine produces false practice. The Scriptures teach celibacy (remaining single) should not be embarked upon unless one has the gift of celibacy (Matt. 19:10-12; 1 Cor. 7:7-8). It teaches that marriage is good, a blessing and one of God’s means to avoid fornication; that it is an aid to happiness and a means of avoiding temptation (1 Cor. 7:2, 5, 8). Marriage is a blessing in those without the gift, and even allowable in those who do not have the gift (1 Cor. 7:2, 8, 28). Spiritual leaders such as Peter were married (2 Cor. 9:5).

“And on her forehead was written...” The practice of harlots in ancient times was to write their names on their foreheads for easy recognition, which showed the shamelessness of their character. It revealed a seared conscience from continual rejection of God’s truth.

“Mystery” here is not a part of the name but a description of the name, a secret. Initiation into the mysteries of the cult was always a part of Babylonianism and links this harlot with the ancient system. This connects the new and final system with the ancient system.

“Babylon the Great” is the secret name. It is telling us that Babylon the Great refers not only to the city of chapter 18, but to a religious system, the Babylonianism of ancient time, which will reach its peak in the Tribulation.

“The mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth.” First, this points to the source. Besides the concept of origin or source of all spiritual idolatry and false religions, the word “mother” indicates the position the harlot will play in the final days. She will gather all the forms of false religions under her wings for the one great world-wide harlot system.

“And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints...” is a reference to the rampant martyrdom of believers during this time. One good way to promote the one-world church will simply be the annihilation of all opposition.

The Description of the Beast

(17:6b-14)

6b And when I saw her, I wondered greatly. 7 And the angel said to me, “Why do you wonder? I shall tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads

and the ten horns. 8 “The beast that you saw was and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and to go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth will wonder, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come. 9 “Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, 10 and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while. 11 “And the beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction. 12 “And the ten horns which you saw are ten kings, who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour. 13 “These have one purpose and they give their power and authority to the beast. 14 “These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful.”

John’s Wonderment and Interest

“And when I saw her (the woman sitting on the beast) I wondered greatly.” “Wondered” is the Greek *thaumazo*, “to be amazed, surprised,” or “to wonder at something with attentive interest.” Should we not see in this the effect that all doctrine or Bible study should have on our hearts? As we open the Word and study and reflect on its marvelous truth, should it not lead to a spirit of wonder, amazement? We should be keenly interested in the details of God’s revelation, its explanation, and application.

When this is true, something always happens. God sees to it that we have an opportunity to learn and to know (John 7:17; Jer. 29:13). He sends along a Philip or one of His servants as here in Revelation 17 (Acts. 8:26f).

The Answer and Promise of the Angel (17:7)

“And the angel said to me ‘Why do you wonder?’” In other words, why do you stand there gawking! Perhaps he was reminding John (and us) of the principle of prayer, “ask and you shall receive...” or “if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God...” Nothing thrills the heart of God more than the hungry, searching heart of a believer seeking to know God’s Word.

So the angel promises to tell John about the mystery, the secret concerning the woman and the beast. I suppose from the world’s twisted perspective, this is the story of beauty (man’s viewpoint) and the beast. But there is more. By the angel’s question and description of the woman, however, he shows we should not marvel at the woman which appears in such pompous and religious attire because she is so satanic and thereby destructive and deceptive. We should never be deceived by outward form or religiosity no matter how outwardly attractive or influential or powerful as is the case with this ecumenical and godless system.

The Description (17:8-14)

This is the same beast as described in Revelation 13. Actually seven things are stated about this beast beginning with verse 8 and continuing down through verse 14.

(1) Verse 8 describes the beast, the antichrist political system in terms of the past, present and future. The beast is the personification of imperial power. “Was” refers to old Rome, the old Roman empire of John’s day; this is her past. “And is not” refers to the fall of Rome. From John’s standpoint and ours, Rome would fall and pass from the scene; this is her present condition. “And is about to come up...” refers to the revived Roman empire in its final form in the days of the Tribulation; this is her future. This future form is related to the abyss, to Satan (it has a demonic source), but also to destruction. This teaches us that we should not look for the mere revival of earthly power in the sphere of what was once great and then died away as with other countries. This verse is stressing that this revival of Rome is no natural phenomenon. Behind its rise is Satan himself. For some thoughts on the Book of life, see the Appendix 6.

(2) We are then told in verse 9 that the seven heads of the beast are mountains which, as we saw in the study on chapter 13, refers to seven successive world kingdoms represented by seven former kings (verse 10) all of whom supported the religious system of the harlot. The statement, “Here is the mind that has wisdom” in verse 9 is a warning. Only those who know this truth and accept it will be prepared to recognize and stand against the deception of

this future system. Understanding God's truth always gives us the capacity, if we will use it, to recognize the enemy as the enemy.

(3) Verse 10 tells us that "five are fallen." As mentioned previously, this refers to the past history of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece. "One is" refers to Rome of John's day, the sixth. "The other is not yet come" refers to the revived Roman empire, or the Ten Nation Confederation of the first half of the Tribulation and will truly be a work of the Devil. This seventh kingdom will continue only for a little while, specifically, 3 1/2 years (the first half of the Tribulation).

(4) Verse 11 then informs us this beast which was, is not, and would come again actually becomes an eighth kingdom; he is one of the seven and will go into destruction. The revived Roman empire will take on the form of an imperial dictatorship and by this change actually become an eighth kingdom, a whole new and vicious form of government, the blasphemous form seen in Revelation 13. This occurs in the last half of the Tribulation and lasts for 3 1/2 years, but then is destroyed by the return of Christ (Rev. 19).

(5) Verse 12 defines the ten horns. The ten horns become the Ten Nation Confederation of nations that will join together under ten kings. These are nations which were once a part of the old Roman empires. Some time before the Tribulation, these European nations will begin seeking a way to confederate together for political, military and commercial reasons. It is a confederation that will take place partly because of pressure from the king of the north and partly because of a world-wide conspiracy led by Satan in preparation for his end time bid to be worshipped by man and to control the world. These ten nations will form the nucleus of the end time kingdom.

Now remember, in prophecy we sometimes have difficulty distinguishing between the kingdom (governmental system) and the king. One verse will speak of the kingdom and the very next verse switches to the king. Such is the case here. The beast is sometimes the empire and sometimes the Satan-controlled man.

"Who have not yet received..." i.e., this is all future and will occur in the Tribulation. "They receive authority...with the beast" means the beast will probably be one of the kings or certainly one who will rise up from one of the ten nations to take control and become the head of this confederation (Dan. 7:23-24).

(6) Verse 13 then tells us of their league with the super-personality, the one called the beast and the white horse rider of Revelation 6. They will give him their authority and power thinking he can solve the world's problems and provide a leadership which the world needs against the Communist threat of the king of the north, his allies, the Orient, and solve the Arab-Israel dispute.

(7) In verse 14 we are told they will wage war with the Lamb, but that the Lamb will overcome them as the King of kings and Lord of Lords. This is the subject of chapter 19.

The Destruction of the Harlot (17:15-18)

15 And he said to me, "The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues. 6 "And the ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire. 17 "For God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God should be fulfilled. 18 "And the woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth."

The Interpretation of the Water (17:15)

By its own interpretation, the text tells us the waters are symbolic. They are symbolic in that they refer to the vast majority of the people of the earth, perhaps with the exception of those countries confederated together with the kings of the north, south, and east. Walvoord writes:

The fact that a symbolic meaning is specifically assigned to it here indicates that this is the exception to the usual rule. The situation described here is one of great political power on the part of the beast but a sharing of rule with the woman who controls the multitudes of the world.⁴

The Desolation of the Harlot (17:16)

For centuries the kings and the harlot have appeared as lovers, but there has been no real love between them. They each simply used the other to further their own ends. But now the religious system will have served its purpose, so the ten kings banish and completely destroy the harlot (the religious system). Her wealth, buildings, property will be confiscated, her leaders killed, and everything else destroyed.

Summary of These Events

(1) The time of this event will be about the halfway mark in the Tribulation or Daniel's seventieth week. It will coincide approximately with the events of Revelation 12 (when Satan is booted out of heaven) and with Ezekiel 38 and 39 (when Russia invades Israel and is destroyed, assuming the king of the north is Russia). This will create the vacuum needed for world control.

(2) During the first half of the seven years, apostate Christendom will flower and establish its power all over the world. Because of the treaty with Israel which allows them to have their temple and peace in Jerusalem, there will undoubtedly be a certain amount of religious freedom during the first three and half years, but not necessarily for true believers in Christ.

(3) There will be wide-spread preaching of the gospel, but genuine believers will be extremely persecuted (17:6). The reason for this is that other religious systems won't pose a threat to the harlot's system, they will all be eventually amalgamated, but true genuine Christianity will not join their ranks and will pose a threat; they will therefore be persecuted. The same is true today and we will face greater and greater pressure.

(4) With the beginning of the second half of the week, the leader of the revived Roman empire will proclaim himself dictator of the world. He therefore destroys the world church, probably just prior to this declaration. He will then be free to take over everywhere.

(5) So in the absence of the apostate world church he substitutes the worship of himself (Rev. 13:8).

(6) Two key parallel passages are Daniel 11:36-39 and 2 Thessalonians 2:4. Here the willful king, the man of sin, puts aside all other deities in favor of worship of himself. This includes Daniel 9:27 and the abomination of desolation.

Fulfillment of God's Purposes (17:17)

The divine judgment inflicted follows a pattern and principle. Ancient Babylon was used to bring affliction upon the people of Israel as were Assyria and Egypt, but eventually these same nations that God used were themselves the objects of judgment because they did not act for God, but for themselves.

Verse 17 states the principle that God uses the blasphemous actions of world religions and governments to fulfill His own purposes. The plan of the ages unfolds majestically and Scripture shows that God permits the increasing increments of wickedness until the cup of iniquity overflows, then judgment comes.

In the declaration "God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose," there is another indication of God's use of the forces of evil as instruments of his own purposes of judgment (Jer 25:9-14; cf. Lk 20:18). Nothing will distract them from their united effort to destroy the prostitute until God's purposes given through the prophets are fulfilled (cf. 10:7; 11:18).⁵

⁴ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1966, p. 255.

⁵ *NIV Bible Commentary*, Zondervan, electronic version.

Final Identification of the Woman (17:18)

The woman can be identified by the great city in which the final form of Babylonianism will reside. At the present time this appears to be Rome, for this is where Babylonianism today has its headquarters though that is not the emphasis here in this chapter.

The city here according to verse 5 is a mystery, not a literal city. The entire context of chapter 17 supports this interpretation, distinguishing as it does between the city identified with the woman and the political power referred to as the beast and the ten horns.⁶

Yet it is the *great* city, the *mother* city, the archetype of the evil Babylonian system that has been opposed to God throughout history.

⁶ Walvoord, p. 257.

Lesson 27: Destruction of Commercial Babylon (18:1-24)

Introduction

The Babylon of this chapter undoubtedly includes an actual city that will be rebuilt on the Euphrates and a politico-commercial system that becomes the means and basis of a new worldwide religious system by which the beast will be worshipped (Rev. 13). If you recall, the beast brings about his own worship by his control of commerce, or buying and selling.

The chief element of Babylon emphasized in this chapter is commerce on a worldwide scale, i.e., international or multinational organizations.

In chapter 17 the beast and his allies in politico-commercial Babylon destroy religious Babylon, or apostate Christendom. Today there are a multitude of worldwide organizations already devoted to the concept of antichrist and are also already speaking of the overthrow of the present religious systems including Judaism, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism. But by contrast in this chapter it is God who overthrows commercial Babylon.

The Announcement of Judgment (18:1-3)

1 After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory. 2 And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! And she has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird. 3 "For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality."

The announcement is made by another angel. Please note four things about this angel. First, he is "another" angel. "Another" is allos meaning another of the same kind as those angels that preceded him. This is not the Lord nor is there any reason to see this as the Lord since angels do have great power and often display great glory. Second, that "he comes down from heaven" points to the fact this judgment comes from God. Third, he has "great authority." "Authority" is exousia which means "liberty, or authority" and then "power to act." As an angel and messenger of God, he comes possessing supernatural authority and power to execute judgment on behalf of God. Fourth, "the earth was illumined with his glory." Literally the Greek says "and the earth was made bright from or out of the source of his glory." Grammatically it may also mean "by his glory." The word "illumined" is the Greek pho,,tizo,, a causative verb meaning to "illuminate or make bright."

Implications

- (1) God is absolute light, perfect holiness or righteousness and justice. In Him there can be no darkness (1 John 1:5).
- (2) The angel's glory and splendor is a derived glory. He comes expressing God's glory and holy wrath against sin.
- (3) The earth is now under Satan and the beast which is the epitome of evil and darkness.
- (4) The coming of the angel from heaven illumined with glory symbolizes what God is doing. In His holiness, God is making the world fit to live in by removing the prime source of evil and darkness, commercial Babylon.

In verse 2 the fall of Babylon is repeated. He says "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great." This is done primarily for emphasis, but as mentioned before, it may also represent the fall of Babylon religiously (chapter 17) and then commercially (chapter 18).

In the second part of verse 2 we are told that Babylon is demonic to the core. This is stressed in three statements: (1) “The dwelling place of demons” (the Greek stresses this as a permanent place). (2) “A prison of every unclean spirit” (cf. Eph. 2:2; 1 John 4:6 where demons are called spirits), (3) “and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird.” This third description is probably an allusion to Matthew 13:31-32 where birds may refer to demonic leaders operating in the apostate church.

Application

In verse 2 we get a clear picture of the demonic source, power, and control of this system as it rises up in the last days. The worldwide movement and conspiracy of the last days will involve a multitude of organizations, the super rich in many countries, but it will not be the product of mere human ingenuity, but of satanic agency.

In verse 3 a specific charge is made against Babylon concerning her spiritual prostitution and intoxicating activity. But note that verse 3 is connected with verse 2 by the word “for” which shows the connection between the demonic activity (the cause) and the charges of verse 3 (the results).

First, we are told all the nations are involved. This is worldwide. Every nation has turned away from God for the almighty dollar and the luxuries it can buy—peace and affluence at any price.

“Have drunk” is a perfect tense which focuses our attention on the abiding results of Babylon’s evil influence, specifically, her spiritual, moral, political and national stupor. The world is already drunk and getting more so every day on materialism and the commercial mania of the times. The Tribulation will be absolutely unbelievable.

“Of the wine of the wrath of her fornication” is a reference to the world ideologies of Babylon, which will prostitute the divine institutions God has establish for man’s protection like: volition, freedom, marriage and the family, and nationalism. Some of these intoxicant agents are humanism, the unisex idea promoted so strongly even today by the ERA movement (strongly represented by the National Organization for Women), the New Age movement, internationalism, commercialism, multinational corporations, demon worship, gross immorality, and idolatry (cf. Rev. 9:20-21; 13:5-6, 16-17).

The last half of the verse speaks of both the kings of the earth and the merchants. “Merchants” is the Greek *emporos*, “trader, merchant.” *Emporia* means “commerce, business, trade.” An *emporos* is a person engaged in commerce. Behind this sell out by the kings are the super rich merchants, the billionaires, and great corporations working for world control. Money is king. It controls kings, people, and nations.

We are told “the merchants...have become rich by the wealth of her (commercial Babylon’s) sensuality.” “Wealth” is the Greek *dunamis*, a noun which means “power, strength, ability.” Here it refers to the power and strength of her sensuality that controls the world of mankind.

“Sensuality” is the Greek *stre,nos*, a word meaning “arrogant or unrestrained luxury.” Here is an important lesson. Commercial Babylon, with its worship of money and power, will promote and push unrestrained luxury, sensuality, and pleasure designed to develop an all-consuming power over the masses via their uncontrolled lust patterns. Babylon will promote the philosophy that happiness, significance, security, and fulfillment are attained by the abundance of the things people possess, in travel and luxury, in comfort and pleasure, etc. Frankly, this sounds exactly like America and much of the world today.

In *The Aquarian Conspiracy* the author says in essence, “folks we are getting ready to take over, but don’t worry, you’ll love it.” The logo on the cover is 666. In other words the beast is going to provide peace, affluence, prosperity, luxury, etc., so everyone is going to love it.

Note the following concerning the commercialism of the world:

(1) It is man made though satanically inspired. Clearly, it is not of God because it has an independent and arrogant spirit that seeks its security and happiness apart from God. It is not because the details of life and its luxuries are wrong, but because they are allowed to usurp God’s place in the hearts of men (Rev. 18:7; 1 Tim. 6:5-11, 17-19; Luke 12:15).

(2) Israel’s kings were warned against multiplying horses, gold, and silver through commerce with Egypt because it resulted in independence and preoccupation with luxury rather than with the Lord (Deut. 17:16-17).

(3) Special judgment was pronounced on Tyre, and one of the reasons was that she was the great commercial center of the day and corrupted other nations through her commercialism as well as herself (Ezek. 26-28, especially 27). Trade with Tyre was the source of Solomon's extravagance and preoccupation with the details of life (apes, peacocks, and stock piles of silver, gold and a six-stepped throne) (1 Kings 10:19f).

(4) Zechariah 14:21 closes his prophecy concerning the millennium and says "in that day there shall be no more a Canaanite." This was a nickname for merchants. There will be business in the millennium which is legitimate but not the spirit of commercialism. International commerce tries to unify humanity through internationalism and promotes a spirit of self-confidence, independence, and rebellion against God as it existed in Babel in the time of Nimrod. Revelation 18:5, "for her sins have piled up as high as heaven" seems to be a clear reference to the tower and the spirit of Babylon. Like the early tower of Babel, Babylon's commercial and political sins of independence and arrogance have reached up into heaven in man's attempt to be like God. Babylon's iniquities will have become full.

(5) The spirit of commercialism causes cities to become swollen with people which increases crime, violence, negative volition, and ironically, poverty.

(6) The spirit of commercialism begets universal covetousness, which is a form of idolatry, and is in contrast to the principle of 1 Timothy 6:5-19. Business, trade, making the almighty dollar, etc., becomes more important than God (Isa. 2:5-7; Hosea 12:1, 7, 8; James 4:13).

(7) The ultimate power and wickedness of commercialism is seen in the mark of the beast of Revelation 13 by which he attempts to control the world through manipulation and slavery.

(8) By its basic aims and nature, the spirit of commercialism blots out the divine institutions of volition or human freedom, marriage, family, country, and the love, adoration and dependence upon God through living in His Word as God's servants and people.

A good illustration of this move against God's divine institutions such as the family is a comment made by a radical feminist who wrote, "Childrearing to the extent to which it is necessary is the responsibility of all. Children are part of society but they should not be possessed by anyone...marriage and the family must be eliminated."¹

The Appeal for Separation (18:4-8)

4 And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "Come out of her, my people, that you may not participate in her sins and that you may not receive of her plagues; 5 for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. 6 "Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back *to her* double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her. 7 "To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, 'I SIT *as A QUEEN AND I AM NOT A WIDOW*, and will never see mourning.' 8 "For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong.

As John was undoubtedly thinking on the announcement of verses 1-3, another voice is heard from heaven calling believers to separation from Babylon both as a city and as a materialistic and godless system of commercialism.

The Appeal (18:4)

"Another" is allos which implies this is another angelic being acting as God's messenger with God's Word to believers. Ryrie points out:

In its primary interpretation this appeal will be addressed to those believers who will be living in the Tribulation days and who like believers in every age will be tempted to compromise. In its application it is a relevant call to believers in every day to avoid compromise with Satan's world sys-

¹ Sheila Cronan, *Radical Feminism*, pp. 375-376.

tem in its every form—religious and commercial. See Genesis 19: 12-14; Numbers 16:23-26; Isaiah 48:20; II Cor. 6:14-17; I John 1:15-17).²

“Come out of her my people.” “Come out” is an aorist imperative of urgency. It means “do it now, do not delay.” Further, it speaks of a decisive act. This is not only a physical separation, but a mental separation from materialism as a way of life and as a source of security, significance, and happiness.

“So that” points to the purpose and reason for separation which is twofold:

(1) “So that you may not participate in her sins.” “Participate” is the verb, *sunkoino*,³ “to fellowship with, partake, be connected with,” or even, “be a partner with.” The simple noun form, *koino*,³ is used in Luke 5:10 of those who were fishing partners with Simon in his fishing business. Rather than becoming partners with the Babylonian world system, we are to be partners with the Lord Jesus in His enterprise on earth. Literally, the Greek says “the sins of her” pointing to particular or specific sins, the sins of commercialism, the things which caused universal covetousness, destruction of the divine institutions, increase in crime, violence, and the search for happiness in luxurious living.

(2) “And that you might not receive of her plagues.” “Plagues” has the article which points to some specific plagues, those of chapter 16 and the seventh bowl judgment. The warning is simply that those who fall in with the system will experience the results of misery and loss in their own lives. Walvoord writes:

Seiss explains the phrase “come out of her,” citing Jeremiah 50:4-9 where the children of Israel are urged to “remove out of the midst of Babylon” (Jer. 50:8), and the command “Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and deliver every man his soul” (Jer. 51:6). (Joseph A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, p. 408). Alford compares the command to come out of Babylon to the warning to Lot to leave Sodom (Gen. 10:15:22) (Henry Alford, *The Greek New Testament*, IV, p. 715). The purpose of leaving Babylon is twofold: first, by separation from her they will not partake of her sin, and second, they will not have her plagues inflicted on them. The reference to plagues refers to the vials of chapter 16, especially the seventh vial which falls upon Babylon itself (16:17-21). This is further evidence that the event of chapter 18 is subsequent to the seventh vial and therefore in contrast to the destruction of the harlot in chapter 17.³

But of course, this has application for us today. We reap what we sow. When we sow to the flesh and pursue the world, we reap of the flesh. But when we sow to the Spirit, we reap of the Spirit, peace, joy, happiness and meaning in life.

The Basis of the Appeal (18:5-8)

This appeal is substantiated upon three spiritual laws or principles:

(1) **The Law of Remembrance** (verse 5). God’s actions in history with Babylon teach us this system cannot escape—judgment must come. The principle is God does not ignore or forget sin. He permits the increment or build up of sin, but eventually judgment must come. The first Babel conspiracy attempted to build a tower into the heavens (Gen. 11:4); this last Babylon conspiracy piles up her sins to heaven in defiance of God and God remembers. Judgment is inevitable and so believers must flee.

(2) **The Law of Retribution** (verse 6). Because of the enormity of her sin and because of the holy character of God—judgment is doubled. The thing judged here is the system. The final judgment of unbelievers does not come until the great white throne of Revelation 20.

(3) **The Law of Retaliation** (verses 7-8). She has assumed the position of queen; she has glorified herself and so to the same degree that she has rebelled against God, He retaliates in holy and righteous indignation to dethrone her.

“I set” is a present tense of a continuous condition. Both she and her leaders think nothing can upset this mighty system.

² Charles C. Ryrie, *Revelation*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1968, p. 106.

³ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1966, p. 260.

“A queen” is one who is very powerful, self sufficient and in need of nothing, i.e., absolutely sovereign.

“And am not a widow and will (thus) see no mourning.” A widow is one who mourns because of a loss. She has illicit love affairs with all the kings so how can she become a widow? They are all madly in love with her, but not really. Why? Because she is only a harlot who sells herself. They love her not for herself but for what they can get out of her.

“For this reason,” i.e., because of her arrogance, her spirit of independence and false security, her judgment comes in one day (i.e., suddenly). This stresses the fallacy of all false security. Remember therefore, the following principles (cf. Luke 12:16-20; 1 Tim. 6:6-19):

- (1) Riches or the details of life can never provide life eternal or the abundant life.
- (2) Riches can be destroyed in a moment.
- (3) Life can be snatched from us in a moment and we have either eternal separation as unbelievers, or loss of rewards as believers.
- (4) Therefore, the appeal of God’s word is for us to acquire happiness and eternal life through faith in the truths of God as revealed in the Word (see Isa. 55:1-13 and note especially vs. 1-2).

The Anguish of the Kings (18:9-10)

9 “And the kings of the earth, who committed acts of immorality and lived sensuously with her, will weep and lament over her when they see the smoke of her burning, 10 standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, ‘Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come.’”

The kings here refer to a wider group of kings than the ten nation confederation of 17:12-16. This reaches out to all the other kings of the earth who are caught up in the web of the commercialism of the day. They all mourn because of the destruction of Babylon. Why? Because her commercialism means the control of the people and luxury in their courts, all of which is now lost.

The acts of immorality refers to their spiritual and political apostasy which rejects the divine standards of God and which accepts instead the materialism of commercial Babylon as well as its humanism.

“Will weep and lament over her.” By word order, this phrase is very emphatic in the Greek. Literally it says “and they shall weep and lament over her, the kings...” “Weep” and “lament” both mean “to cry aloud vocally.” The point is, when they see the object of their trust and the source of their happiness go up in smoke, they come unglued. The details of life just can’t give happiness!

“When they see the smoke of her burning.” The time of this burning is the bowl or vial judgment at the end of the Tribulation, very close to the return of Jesus Christ.

“Standing at a distance because of fear...” It appears they will hear of her destruction and either come to see or view the shouldering remains by TV or perhaps they will be assembled in this area for some international conference when this judgment occurs.

“Woe, Woe.” This word, even in our language, has a mournful sound, but this is especially true in Greek (ouai). Ouai is an onomatopoeic term, the “formation or use of words such as *buzz* or *murmur* that imitate the sounds associated with the objects or actions they refer to.”⁴

The emphatic repetition of ouai portrays the hopeless wailing of a Christ rejecting world. Dr. Walvoord writes: “How sad is the hour of judgment when it is too late for mercy.”⁵ They stand afar in fear because they are afraid of being a part of it, but very shortly there will be no escape, for they will be gathered together with their armies in Palestine against the Lord who will slay them (19:13).

⁴ *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition* copyright © 1992 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Electronic version licensed from InfoSoft International, Inc. All rights reserved.

⁵ Walvoord, p. 263.

“The great city, Babylon, the strong city.” This, as we have seen, refers to the rebuilt city of Babylon on the Euphrates which literally fulfills Old Testament Scripture as well as this passage. The burning of the city is symbolic of the fall of the whole powerful commercial system. Rebuilt Babylon will be its control center. When the kings see its fall, they know it means the fall of the whole system and in this they are amazed because of its great strength, worldwide rule, and mighty accomplishments.

But there is only one who is Mighty and Great, and that is the Lord!!! This warns us to never put our trust in what man can build, for no matter how great, God can destroy it in *less than an hour* (vs. 10b, cf. vss. 8 and 17).

The Anguish of the Merchants and Mariners of the Earth (18:11-19)

11 “And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, because no one buys their cargoes any more; 12 cargoes of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls and fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet, and every kind of citron wood and every article of ivory and every article made from very costly wood and bronze and iron and marble, 13 and cinnamon and spice and incense and perfume and frankincense and wine and olive oil and fine flour and wheat and cattle and sheep, and cargoes of horses and chariots and slaves and human lives. 14 “And the fruit you long for has gone from you, and all things that were luxurious and splendid have passed away from you and men will no longer find them. 15 “The merchants of these things, who became rich from her, will stand at a distance because of the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning, 16 saying, ‘Woe, woe, the great city, she who was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls; 17 for in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste!’ And every shipmaster and every passenger and sailor, and as many as make their living by the sea, stood at a distance, 18 and were crying out as they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, ‘What city is like the great city?’ 19 “And they threw dust on their heads and were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying, ‘Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth, for in one hour she has been laid waste!’

The economic character and commercialism of Babylon with its materialistic emphasis on consumerism is clearly seen from this passage by the reference to “merchants who weep” and by the reference to the luxury items that are mentioned. Their grief is occasioned by the loss of their trade and from the luxury items that their trade provided, but not by their love for Babylon. The extreme luxury of their merchandise is itemized in verses 12-13. Nearly 30 items are listed and it is a story of luxury, indulgence, and extravagance.

(1) *Jewelry items*—precious stones and costly metals.

(2) *Apparel*—fine fabrics used in their clothing composed of linen and silk in luxurious colors of purple and scarlet. (In ancient times these were the colors and fabrics of the extremely wealthy.)

(3) *Luxurious furnishings*—furniture made of “citron” (thuinus) a costly and fragrant scented wood comparable to cyprus or cedar and used only in expensive furniture. Other expensive materials were ivory, brass, iron, and marble.

(4) *Perfumes and Spices*—Cinnamon, spice, incense, perfume and frankincense. Again these were things which could only be afforded by the ultra-wealthy.

(5) *Food stuffs*—Wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle, sheep.

(6) *Transportation items*—horses, chariots (comparable to our planes, autos, boats, motorcycles, etc.).

(7) *Slaves*—“slaves and human lives,” literally the Greek has, “body and souls of men,” an idiom for a person who was owned body and soul.

Verse 14 gives us a striking spiritual description of these details of life: they are described as “the fruit of the desires or lusts of the soul.” The soul here may well refer to the sinful nature within the soul which always seeks to dominate the life. In other words, this heaping up of the details of life is from the sin nature which seeks its happiness apart from God.

Verse 14b emphasizes the fleeting and temporary nature of these details. “Will no longer find them” is somewhat emphatic by the word order used here. Literally the text reads, “no longer by any means, them (the details listed) will they find.”

Verses 15-19 calls our attention to the great unhappiness that comes when men put their trust in things or seek their happiness in the details of life.

As mentioned, the merchants mourn not because they love the city, but because their wealth which is derived from the city and its system is now lost. This is a commentary on the world today. When the people of this nation fail to live by faith and the principles of God’s Word, they will also fail to love their nation and the biblical principles upon which this nation was founded. When that happens, they will love America only for what they can get out of it; truly, this is a commentary on the America today. So we are seeing the decay of a nation.

The Lord warned against such coveting of wealth in Matthew 6:19-21 where the transitory wealth and glory of this world is set in contrast to the true riches of faith and blessings that men have in Christ (cf. 1 Tim. 6:11, 19)

The Acclaim of Heaven Over the Fall of Babylon (18:20-24)

20 “Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her.” 21 And a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, “Thus will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer. 22 “And the sound of harpists and musicians and flute-players and trumpeters will not be heard in you any longer; and no craftsman of any craft will be found in you any longer; and the sound of a mill will not be heard in you any longer; 23 and the light of a lamp will not shine in you any longer; and the voice of the bridegroom and bride will not be heard in you any longer; for your merchants were the great men of the earth, because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery. 24 “And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth.”

In these verses we see a tremendous contrast and one that should strike a note of warning and alarm as we conduct our lives in a world that is already so dominated by the mental attitude of commercial Babylon. This mental attitude and control is going to increase, its enticements and pulls will get worse. We definitely need the perspective of these verses (20-24) along with obedience to verse 4.

The world weeps over the destruction of Babylon and the loss of its material luxuries. For the worldling, this is all he has; he thinks of life as consisting not only in the abundance of the details of life but also in possessing the luxuries of those details. By contrast, the believer must come out of the system, that is, he must not be controlled by Satan’s system, or by his own lust patterns. We can use the world, enjoy the blessings God gives, but God forbid that such things become our source of security and happiness. Further, the believer must rejoice over the prospect of the fall of commercial Babylon because of what this means to God and to all mankind in the coming kingdom with God’s rule on earth.

So the kings, the merchants, and the mariners wail over the passing of Babylon, but heaven and its people rejoice and find strength over the prospect of its fall.

Verses 20-24 divide up into four sections:

- (1) The command to rejoice (vs. 20, the divine viewpoint).
- (2) The portrayal of Babylon’s fall (vs. 21).
- (3) The extent and nature of Babylon’s fall (vss. 22-23a).
- (4) The reason or justification for Babylon’s fall (vss. 23b-24).

The Command to Rejoice Over Babylon's Fall (18:20)

“Rejoice” is a command. God’s people are to find joy in the prospects of Babylon’s overthrow and in the actual occurrence when it is brought to pass at the end of the Tribulation. The verb is *euphraino*, and means “to cheer, gladden,” but in the passive voice as it is here, it means “be happy, rejoice, make merry.” The passive voice means “allow yourself to receive happiness, joy, from the truth of God’s Word about Babylon and its destruction.” This is what God’s Word should do for the believer when it is known and believed.

“O heaven” represents the broad address to the occupants in heaven—both angels and men. “You saints and apostles and prophets” narrows the address. “Saints,” literally “set apart ones,” refers to all believers who, as those set apart positionally and experientially, are to have such a response to Babylon’s fall. The “apostles and prophets” refer to those of the early church period, many of whom lost their lives to the Babylonian system.

But God’s commands are never without reason. So we read next “because God has pronounced judgment for you.” The idea is that God has judged your case against her and executed from her a just penalty. Babylon has been the cause of much misery and pain for the people of God, but they can rejoice because God has not forgotten His people nor Babylon’s evil.

The Portrayal of Babylon's Fall (18:21)

In his vision, John sees a mighty angel throw a stone, one like a great millstone, into the sea. This picture is designed to portray the downfall of the great city and its system as:

(1) Sudden. It will be sudden as when a stone falls into the sea, suddenly, with a splash.

(2) Violent, Catastrophic. Such a great stone (like a meteor) would cause tidal waves which move across land destroying everything in their path. The destruction of Babylon leads to the destruction of the rest of its system.

(3) Complete, Total. Like a stone which is cast into the sea and sinks out of sight, so the destruction of Babylon will be so complete that it will be found no more, never to rise again (Jer. 51:61-64). This is the primary emphasis. Babylon will be found no more, not in any form. This is stressed seven times in chapter 18. Remember that seven is used over and over to stress the concept of completeness. Note this emphasis in the following verses: verse 14 (once), verse 21 (once), verse 22 (three times), and verse 23 (twice). Further, in each case the negative “no” or “not” in the Greek text is the very emphatic *ou me*,, a double negative that means “by no means.”

The Extent and Nature of Babylon's Fall (18:22-23a)

Verses 22 and 23a enlarge on the extent of the cessation of Babylon and her activity which characterizes her life and luxurious living.

(1) No more music and entertainers (vs. 22a). The commercial and business world often seeks escape in the jive and jazz, the rock and roll of its music world in the various places of night entertainment. Consider the hotels, motels, bars, lounges, and other establishments in every city where music is provided for the commercial world and its participants.

(2) No more craftsmen. The tools of the craftsmen who furnished the items of luxury will suddenly be as silent as a tomb. This means that the wheels of industry and the pens which write the orders for merchandise will come to a halt.

(3) No more grinding of grain. The millstones which grind the grain for flour will also stop. The food supply, which at that point is already in short supply, will now disappear altogether.

(4) The lights will go out. The lamp which lights the home and business will be put permanently out. Darkness, symbolizing the spiritual state of the world and the system of the beast, will now engulf everything. How awesome this experience will be—total blackness.

(5) The merry voices of bride and bridegroom and their wedding parties will cease. From this reference it appears that Babylon will become a virtual Riviera or Niagara Falls, famous for weddings and honeymooners, gambling, and gay times. But it will also be much like Reno, Nevada. Marriage will mean little more than a license for prostitution, a temporary contract. As Christ prophesied, men and women will be marrying and remarrying without

any real concern for marriage as a divine institution of God. When marriage is entered into it will be a mere convenience if they bother to marry at all (Matt. 24:38). Life during the Tribulation will go on as usual in spite of its judgments, which shows just how callused man will become and how much he will be enslaved in the luxuries and pleasures of the world. But then, suddenly it is all over (2 Pet. 3:3-11).

The Reason or Justification for Babylon's Fall (18:23b-24)

Three reasons are now given for Babylon's fall, and the reasons (especially the first) are both instructive and exhortative. They provide a commentary on the world today.

"For your (the commercial system of Babylon) merchants were the great men of the earth." Wow! How this viewpoint has infiltrated the church of Jesus Christ (James 2:1-9). The expression "great men" is the Greek word *megistanes* (plural), which means "the chief, noble, the magnates of society." These are the men who are looked up to, worshipped, honored, adored, and presented to everyone as the ultimate. They have power in society; they control the destinies of men, and live in the super luxury which everyone is supposed to want and that people think will give them happiness.

Note that it is because of this viewpoint that judgment comes. This viewpoint is a perversion and a prostitution of divine values and priorities (1 Cor. 1:26-29). People worship and long for wealth and luxury and thereby compromise principles and priorities to play the harlot with the merchants of Babylon, the corporation heads of the system of Babylon. Money and luxury is god, and people with money are the one's who become the chief men of society. Character, righteousness, integrity mean nothing.

"Because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery." The word "sorcery" is singular and looks at a whole program of sorcery or deception, a world conspiracy by the merchants or super rich magnates in control of the commercial system of Babylon, the multinational corporation heads.

The Greek word for sorcery is *pharmakeia*, "the use of medicine, drugs or potions as in casting spells," and metaphorically, "to deceive and disorient." The word was used of poisoning and witchcraft, or trafficking in the demonic. This states in effect that the Babylonian system will use whatever method it can to poison the minds of men and to deceive them—demonism, drugs, and various forms of propaganda will be the norm.

"And in her was found the blood of the prophets..." The third and final reason is the murder and martyrdom of the people of God over the centuries of time. "Blood" is plural which stresses the many deaths and the magnitude of Babylon's crimes against the people of God.

In the first reason we have a perversion of values portraying the moral degeneracy of the world. In the second reason we have the cause—sorcery, the demonic. In the third reason we have what amounts to a further effect of poisoned minds—the murder of the saints.

Joyless, dark, and silent, Babylon stands out as a monument to the utmost vengeance of God. Wickedness had sat enthroned in the midst of *that* professedly bearing the Name of Christ; but at last, when she had filled to the full her cup of iniquity, God rises in His fierce anger, His indignation burns, and Babylon falls to rise no more. Her destruction is irremediable. The chapter closes with a reiteration of the bloody character of the system.⁶

There is an obvious parallel in the rise and fall of Babylon in its varied forms in Scripture. As introduced in Genesis 11:1-9, Babylon, historically symbolized by the tower reaching to heaven, proposed to maintain the union of the world through a common worship and a common tongue. God defeated this purpose by confusing the language and scattering the people. Babylon, ecclesiastically symbolized by the woman in Revelation 17, proposes a common worship and a common religion through uniting in a world church. This is destroyed by the beast in Revelation 17:16 who thus fulfills the will of God (Rev. 17:17). Babylon, politically symbolized by the great city of Revelation 18, attempts to achieve its domination of the world by a world common market and a world government. These are destroyed by Christ at His second coming (Rev. 19:11-12). The triumph of God is therefore witnessed historically in the scattering of the people and the unfinished

⁶ Walter Scott, *Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Fleming H. Revel: Westwood, NJ, p. 373.

tower of Genesis 11 and prophetically in the destruction of the world church by the killing of the harlot of Revelation 17 and in the destruction of the city of Revelation 18. With the graphic description of the fall of Babylon contained in chapter 17 and 18, the way is cleared for the presentation of the major theme of the book of Revelation, the second coming of Christ and the establishment of His glorious kingdom.⁷

⁷ Walvoord, p. 267.

Lesson 28: The Second Coming of Christ (19:1-21)

Introduction

Following the parenthetical sections of chapters 17-18 which described the great harlot system of Babylon, chapter 19 gives us heaven's perspective of the fall of Babylon. Heaven's perspective stands in stark contrast to the mourning of Babylon's lovers, and it resumes the progress and narrative of the future events of the Tribulation. With chapters 17-18 as a background, John receives new revelation concerning the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the first ten verses the emphasis is on what he heard in special announcements in preparation for the return of Christ. In verses 11-21, however, the stress falls on what John sees concerning the actual return of the Lord (cf. vs. 1, 2, 5, 6 with 11, 17, 19). The return of the Lord brings to a close the Tribulation events and the wrath of God.

Let's not miss the striking change that is seen here in contrast to the preceding chapters. We are taken from somber weeping and lamenting to joyful worship and praise, from darkness and doom to light and deliverance, from a series of woes to a series of jubilant announcements. Chapter 19 is easily divided into four sections:

- (1) The Hallelujah Choruses (19:1-6)
- (2) The Announcement of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (19:7-10)
- (3) The Announcement of the Advent of Christ (19:11-16)
- (4) The Announcement of Armageddon (19:17-21)

The Hallelujah Choruses (19:1-6)

1 After these things I heard, as it were, a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God; 2 BECAUSE HIS JUDGMENTS ARE TRUE AND RIGHTEOUS; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and HE HAS AVENGED THE BLOOD OF HIS BOND-SERVANTS ON HER." 3 And a second time they said, "Hallelujah! HER SMOKE RISES UP FOREVER AND EVER." 4 And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!" 5 And a voice came from the throne, saying, "Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great."

6 And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude and as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns."

The Hallelujah of a Great Multitude in Heaven (19:1-3)

The Time sequence

"And after these things" refers to the visions of chapters 17 and 18 and especially the fall of Babylon. In 18:20 there was the call to rejoice over Babylon's destruction. Now there is heaven's response to that call.

What John heard is described as "a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven." This is undoubtedly the multitude of saints described in 7:9-12. It does not include the 24 elders and the four living creatures who subsequently respond antiphonally in verse 4. It may also include a multitude of angelic beings.

The Nature of Their Saying

This is seen in the word “hallelujah.” This word comes from two Hebrew words. The first is hallelu, an intensive verb in the imperative meaning “give praise.” The second is the Hebrew name of God in the shortened form, *Yah*. It means “praise Yahweh,” or “praise the Lord.”

This transliteration occurs only here in the NT (vv. 1, 3, 4, 6), but in the LXX it is a frequent title for certain of the psalms (Pss 111:1; 112:1; 113:1; et al.). This phenomenon clearly illustrates the connection of the early church’s liturgical worship with the synagogue and temple worship of the first century. These praise psalms formed an important part of Jewish festival celebrations.

The Hallel is the name especially applied to Pss 113-118 (also called “The Hallel of Egypt” because of the references in them to the Exodus). They had a special role in the Feast of Passover. Most Jewish sources associate the Hallel with the destruction of the wicked, exactly as this passage in Revelation does. These psalms were what Jesus and the disciples sang after the Passover-Eucharist celebration, before going out to the Mount of Olives the night before his death (Mt 26:30). This close connection between the Hallel, Passover Lamb, and the death of Jesus no doubt explains why all the early church liturgies incorporated the Hallel into the Easter and Easter Week liturgies, which celebrate the gospel of redemption from sin, Satan, and death in the victorious triumph of Christ, our Passover. Two texts in the great Hallel (Pss 113:1; 115:13) are unmistakably cited in 19:5.¹

The Content of Their Praise

The first aspect of praise consists of the declaration that “salvation and glory and power belong to our God.” Note the “our” in “our God.” Those giving praise had rejected the god of this world and his false messiah, and by faith had accepted the Lord as their God and Savior. For this many had died a martyr’s death, but to their God, who is our God through Jesus Christ, belongs all true deliverance, glory, and power. The apparent successes and victories of the enemies of God over His people are purely temporal.

Why do they make such a statement? This is given in verse 2, “Because His judgments are true and righteous.” God’s perfect and holy character, His perfect righteousness and justice, cannot act unfairly or unjustly. He has perfect knowledge (omniscience) and, therefore, He has all the facts so that all His judgments are in accord with the truth. There is no hearsay evidence in the court of God. In this case, the ground of God’s judgment demonstrated in the fall of Babylon was the immorality by which the great harlot seduced and corrupted the earth.

A further reason for the righteousness of God’s judgments is that He does not allow His people who suffered unjustly under the harlot to go unavenged. He will avenge the wrong that was done to them. Sometimes in this age there appears to be no justice, but this cannot and will not always be the case because of the character of God. The word “avenged” is the Greek *ekdikeo*, an intensive compound verb and may suggest a complete rendering of justice to avenge His people.

In verse 3 a second “hallelujah” is given in connection with the statement, “Her smoke rises up forever and ever.” The smoke may refer to “the smoke of her burning” in 18:9 and 18, the results of her destruction, or to her eternal punishment (14:11). Whatever, this guarantees that her punishment is permanent.

The Hallelujah of the 24 Elders and the Four Living Creatures (19:4)

Upon hearing the hallelujahs of the great multitude, the 24 elders and the four living creatures respond with their own hallelujah and worship of God. Please note the clause “and worshipped God who sits on the throne.” The Greek says, “and they worshipped the God, the One who sits continually upon the throne.” Oh, how we need to capture this picture of our God who sits on the throne. This strongly emphasizes the permanent sovereignty of God. There is no act of man, nor of the nations, nor problem which comes up in our lives which overrules the sovereignty of God. “The LORD has established His throne in the heavens; And His sovereignty rules over all (Psa. 103:19).

¹ *NIV Bible Commentary*, Electronic Version.

God, with His great power and steadfast love for us, sits permanently on the throne. And, as the One who sits on the throne in heaven, we ought to humbly submit to Him and give Him the throne of our hearts. But too often we are like the world, we want to usurp God's right to rule, but when we do, it is always our own loss.

The Final Hallelujah of the Great Multitude (19:5-6)

Immediately, in response to this picture of God enthroned, the hallelujahs, and the worship of these creatures of God, a voice comes from the throne. This voice is not the Father or the Son, but only an angel because of the phrase "our God" in the next line.

The voice says, "give praise to our God." In other words, "sing hallelujahs." Who is to respond? All His bondservants, "you who fear Him, the small and the great." Note that in this statement, all social and economic distinctions are transcended and removed in the worship of God by His people. Before God and in Christ, all believers, as the blood-bought possession of the Lord Jesus, are His bondservants. We are those who should have a true reverence for God through our illumination in Christ and by our equality together in Him.

In order to express the majesty of this praise verse 6 describes this voice as "the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty peals of thunder." It is a majestic expression of praise from the hearts and mouths of the saints of God. Then the last hallelujah states, "for the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns." In other words, truly, He is still on the throne; He always has been, and always will be. But the primary emphasis in this context is that God is now dramatically establishing His reign upon earth by the previous judgments and especially by the return of the Lord, which is to be announced shortly (vss. 11f).

The Announcement of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (19:7-10)

7 "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." 8 And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. 9 And he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God." 10 And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

The Historical Background of the Marriage Custom

To truly grasp the significance and meaning of this passages, it would be helpful to explain the marriage custom of John's day which was in three phases: (1) betrothal, (2) presentation, and (3) the marriage feast.

Phase 1: The Betrothal

Marriage was by a contract drawn up between the fathers, often while the parties involved were still children. In other words, this was the negotiating phase. Though the marriage was not consummated at this point, they were considered legally married (cf. Matt. 1:19 and the word "husband," and also 2 Cor. 11:2, "I betrothed you to one husband"). Whenever a believer receives Jesus Christ as Savior he becomes a part of the bride of Christ. The church age is the betrothal phase, the time when God is calling out a bride for His Son.

The payment of a suitable dowry was also often a part of the procedure (cf. Eph. 5:25). Thus, Christ gave His own life for us as a dowry. Today all believers are legally married to Jesus Christ and through living faithfully in the Word, we are kept as pure virgins, kept from Satanic apostasy or fornication (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-26 with Jam. 4:4).

Phase 2: The Presentation

When the couple reached a suitable age the wedding took place. The father of the bridegroom would present the contract to the father of the bride. The bridegroom would then go to the house of the bride in the company of his friends and escort her to his home. This is the background for the parable of the virgins in Matthew 25:1-13. During the betrothal phase the groom would prepare an apartment, a place to live in his father's house. Homes, especially for the wealthy, were often very large complexes. Only the portions which were needed, however, were finished and furnished. When a son was to be married, another portion was completed to make ready for the new bride (John 14:2-3). The rapture, or resurrection and transformation of the church, is the event which brings the groom to the bride and which takes the bride back into heaven.

The groom and his friends would then escort the bride to their new home. The ceremony which followed was the "presentation" or actual marriage. The hand of the bride was placed into the hand of the groom's father. He would then place it into the groom's hand. This was considered the marriage ceremony. Ephesians 5:27 speaks of this presentation, but also of Christ's present work of keeping the church pure and productive by loving her through the Word.

Phase 3: The Marriage Feast (The Reception)

The groom would invite many guests and gather all his friends to come to the marriage feast and view his bride. The length and lavishness of the feast would of course depend on the wealth and status of the bridegroom. It might last a day or a week or even longer. The millennium represents the marriage feast where Christ displays His bride, the church.

In the parable of Matthew 22:1-14 we have an illustration of this custom. The parable, however, pictures the rejection of Israel and Christ's gracious extension of the invitation to all nations. Christ had prepared a great feast of spiritual blessings, but Israel was too busy to be bothered so the offer was extended to the nations or the Gentile world (cf. Rom. 11:1-32).

In Matthew 25:1-13 we have another reference to the wedding feast only this time it refers to the millennium and the invitation is to come as guests to this great feast. The invitation is to Jews and Gentiles of the Tribulation to come to the marriage feast of Christ and His bride, the church. Of course, they can only come by faith in the groom. Personal faith in Jesus Christ is the wedding invitation; this provides the righteous garment necessary to get into the feast.

Explanation of 19:7-10 in the Light of this Custom

In verse 7 great rejoicing and glory is given to God because "the marriage of the Lamb has come." The word for "marriage" here is *gamos*. This may refer to a marriage or to a wedding feast (Matt. 22:8-12; 25:10; John 2:1-3; Rev. 19:9). This is not the announcement of the marriage, which has already occurred in heaven with the presentation of the bride, the church, to the groom, the Lord Jesus Christ. This occurred following the rapture. What we have here, as verse 9 makes clear, is an announcement of the wedding feast or the millennial reign of Christ.

This can now be announced and anticipated because Christ is about to return to remove all the enemies of God and unbelievers from the earth in preparing the earth for this great celebration of 1,000 years. However, for such an event the bride must be properly clothed and prepared so the groom may show off his new bride. Thus, we read, "and His bride has made herself ready."

The bride refers to the church of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:22f). Second, we are told, "His bride makes herself ready." This brings out the aspect of personal responsibility of individuals. There is first the responsibility in relation to salvation. To be a part of the bride, one must have believed in Christ as his or her personal Savior from sin. But the primary emphasis here relates to the issue of true spirituality which results in rewards or preparation for eternity. Men must personally and responsibly believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior, and then, as believers and as part of the bride of Christ, they must choose to walk by the Spirit of God according to the Word, by faith, so they can bear fruit or reproduce good works. This is what is meant by the statement, "makes herself ready."

But this is not the whole picture; there is also the divine side. This is brought out in the next statement of verse 8, "and it was given to her to clothe herself..."

The words “was given to her” focuses our attention on God’s grace and refers, I believe, to two phases of His grace to all believers who make up the bride of Christ.

First, it refers to those gifts Christ has given to the church which enable believers to produce good works for God and to glorify Him. Our Lord declared that, “... apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5-6). So He also said, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit.” As a branch has no capacity for fruit bearing in itself, but must abide in the vine, so men have no spiritual capacity apart from Jesus Christ and a life of abiding in Him. For this abiding life, our Lord has given us many spiritual assets; we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph. 1:3). Fruitfulness, then, is dependent upon using, by faith, these spiritual blessings which our Lord has given us to make ourselves ready (cf. John 15:7-8; Phil. 1:12-13; Eph. 6:10-13).

Second, “was given to her” also refers to the reward the Lord will give for faithful service or the righteous deeds done in the power of the Holy Spirit. The reward is a beautiful wedding garment to be worn at the wedding feast. This is clearly spelled out in the next words of our text, “... to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.”

In Scripture, a garment or clothing often stands for righteousness. It is a symbol of righteousness and declares the character and spiritual condition of a person’s life. Biblically speaking, the garment of righteousness is portrayed in three specific ways as brought out by two specific Greek words.

(1) There is the self righteousness of man which falls short of the perfect righteousness (glory) of God. This is the best that moral or religious man can do under the law, and this God must reject (cf. Isa. 64:6; John 6:63; Rom. 3:9-28; 8:2-4; Phil. 3:6-8 with Rom. 10:1-3).

(2) Then, there is the garment of salvation, the imputed righteousness of God given to all believers which gives them a righteous standing before God. The result is they are clothed in the righteousness of Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 5:19, 21; Phil. 3:9). Numbers one and two are both represented by the Greek word *dikaioisune*,.

(3) But, there is also a third, the beautiful wedding garment described here as white, bright, and clean. This symbolizes the righteous deeds, the works of godliness and goodness, produced by the Holy Spirit as believers reckon the flesh dead and walk by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit (Rom. 6:4f; Gal. 5:5, 16, 22-23). This is represented by the Greek word used in 19:8; the word is *dikaio,ma*. Words ending in *ma* usually look at the result of action. This word, therefore, refers to a concrete expression of righteousness, the expression and result of abiding in Jesus Christ; this is the result of using the divine operating assets the Lord Jesus gives us in preparation for the wedding feast, as well as for all eternity.

In essence then, the church age is not only the betrothal stage, but a time where the bride is preparing her trousseau for the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Verse 9 has reference to the custom of inviting guests to the wedding feast as seen in Matthew 22 and 25. Verse 9 is a beatitude, a pronouncement of blessing upon those invited. John was first told, “Write, blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” First, this is the pronouncement of blessing and happiness to those who are invited because the millennium will be the most blessed time in the history of the earth. It will be an unprecedented time of blessing just as the Tribulation was an unprecedented time of misery. It will be a time worth waiting for and worth suffering for.

Second, all men are invited, both Jews and Gentiles, but to enter and be a part one must accept the invitation and come with the right wedding garment, the *dikaioisune*,, clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. This means one must first accept the invitation to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:12; 3:3, 16; Rom. 3:21-22; 4:5; Matt. 22:8-13). Not only will the bride have her trousseau, but every guest must have on a wedding robe, a garment of righteousness, in order to be a part of the marriage feast or the millennial reign of the Savior. These guests are friends of the bridegroom (John 3:29).

Next, in verse 9 John is told, “these are true words of God.” In the Greek text, the word “true” is emphatic, further stressing the element of the veracity of this event. This underscores the absolute certainty of this beatitude.

In verse 10 we see that John is virtually overawed by this revelation of the marriage supper of the Lamb and falls at the feet of the messenger, but he is immediately rebuked by the messenger’s words. There is a very important mes-

sage in this verse for all believers as it pertains to the giving and receiving of the Word of God. John had received revelation from angels before, but this revelation was so wonderful and awesome to John, so beautiful, that he fell before the angel to worship him, perhaps in appreciation for this good word from God. In the process, however, he forgot or ignored some very important principles that must always be kept in mind regarding the messengers of God's Word, whether angelic beings or human beings. When sitting under the ministry of someone who really gives out the Word, whether in a church setting, by tape, or by radio, people often become so thrilled with the message, they become enchanted with the messenger. In this regard, may I encourage you to consider the following:

(1) When we get our eyes on the messenger, we have forgotten that it is God's message—assuming that the messenger is truly giving out the truth. The message of the Bible is anything but the wisdom of man for “the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Cor. 1:25).

(2) We forget the person giving the message is nothing more than God's instrument and messenger using the abilities God gave him along with the results or blessings God gives. To the carnal Corinthians who had their eyes on personalities Paul asked this provocative question, “What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave *opportunity* to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth” (1 Cor. 3:4-7).

When we forget these principles and lose this grace perspective, we become guilty of comparing personalities (a practice Paul defined as carnal in 1 Corinthians 3), of helping to inflate the egos of the messengers, of helping to promote personality fan clubs in the church, and maybe even of causing division in the body of Christ. Christians become arrogant (pride in their own opinions) in behalf of one against the other” (1 Cor. 4:6).

In view of this, John was told, “do not do that.” Literally the Greek carries the idea of, “see to it, or take care that you stop that, or never ever be doing that.” This is something we are not to do as receivers of the Word, nor, as messengers of the Word are we to allow it. It dishonors God, and causes serious disorientation among God's people. The word here for “see to it” is an imperative from of the verb *horao*,, “to see with discernment,” with the negative, “not.” Out of mental discernment and understanding of the facts and issues involved, we (John as well as you and me) are to get our eyes off the messenger and on the truth of the message, specifically, the Lord Jesus, who is the very spirit of prophecy.

As we might expect from the idea of the verb *horao*,, (used of mental or spiritual perception), this is followed up by the reasons, that which makes mental discernment necessary. First, the angel explained, “I am a fellow servant.” The Greek word here is *sundoulos*, a fellow bondsman. This reminds us that: (a) men and angels are together obligated to explicit obedience to God, and (b) they are only God's servants or instruments sent to do His work under His authority and in His power or ability. We are all just creatures, and as men, mere mortals.

Second, the angel explained, “a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren.” Here is a careful application of angelology and a wonderful illustration of how biblical truth should control and direct our behavior. The angel knew who he was and operated accordingly, and so should we. Here he was bringing out two concepts: (a) angels minister to believers on behalf of God (Heb. 1:14), and (b) one day, the saints will be over angels and judge them, having greater power and authority (1 Cor. 6:3). Remember, it was Satan who, in his pride, forgot who he was. Compare the warning in 1 Timothy 3:6 against choosing new converts for places of leadership.

Third, the angel then explained that he was simply one who, along with the brethren, held “the testimony of Jesus.” This points out the fact that believers and the godly angels are together responsible to bear testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ and to preserve that testimony as it is found in the Word. The principle is that when men get their eyes on the messenger, it always does harm to the message—the testimony about the Lord Jesus Himself.

Fourth, the angel, following this explanation, gave another command as a further part of his reasons. He said, “worship God.” In the Greek this is an aorist imperative which suggests urgency. It carries the idea of, “do not delay, do it now.” The point is only God should be worshipped. Infatuation with a messenger hinders the proper worship or recognition of God and His worth to us. Again, the point here is that it is God's message and the messenger is using only that which God gave him (1 Cor. 4:6-7).

Fifth and finally, the angel said, “for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” This is given as a further reason and explanation for the above as indicated by the word “for.” The point is simple and clear. The purpose of prophecy, all prophecy, is essentially to bear testimony to Jesus Christ and to glorify Him. Prophecy, by its very de-

sign in the plan of God, is to unfold the beauty of the person and work of Jesus Christ as God's perfect solution to the evils of the universe in both His first and second advents. All Scripture ultimately points to the person and work of Christ in His preincarnate glory, His incarnation and ministry on earth, His death, resurrection, ascension, session, and return. The Lord made this perfectly clear to the two disciples on the Emmaus road in Luke 24.

25 And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

So, may we never, ever become distracted by the messenger of the Word, either negatively (I don't like his personality), or positively (infatuated with a person, "I just love the way he says 'Mesopotamia'!"), because it distracts from the theme of Scripture which is Jesus Christ, it causes us to worship men, not God, and it can cause serious problems within the body of Christ.

This is serious business, and a lot more important than many are willing to admit. The problem and the temptation here is two-directional. First, obviously, the audience can become preoccupied with the messenger, and secondly, the messenger can become preoccupied with the praise of the audience. The answer—worship God. Respect the messenger and thank God for him (cf. 1 Thess. 5:12), or love the audience and serve them as a servant (cf. 1 Thess. 2:1-12), but above all, let us worship God, never man or angels.

The Announcement of the Advent of Christ (19:11-16)

11 And I saw heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and He who sat upon it *is* called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He judges and wages war. 12 And His eyes *are* a flame of fire, and upon His head *are* many diadems; and He has a name written *upon Him* which no one knows except Himself. 13 And *He is* clothed with a robe dipped in blood; and His name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white *and* clean, were following Him on white horses. 15 And from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations; and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. 16 And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."

At this point we come to a climactic place in the book of Revelation as it reveals the person of Jesus Christ, for now our Lord is presented as the victorious White Horse Rider who comes out of heaven and who is also King of kings and Lord of lords.

If you recall, in Revelation 1:1 "the revelation of Jesus Christ" is the subject of this book. And, as 19:10 teaches us, "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." All that precedes 19:11 is somewhat introductory; it is setting the stage for the coming of the Lord as portrayed in these verses. But it is equally true that all that follows is, in some sense, an epilogue because the great event pictured here is the climax and the heart cry of Scripture (cf. Rev. 1:7; Acts 1:11; Matt. 24:27).

Note this contrast: In the gospels, which deal primarily with Christ's first advent, He is seen in His humiliation, rejection, suffering, death, resurrection and ascension. But here His return is one of triumph, glory, power, sovereignty and dominion. Here is the high point in history for here is the manifestation of the Son of God in glory and the end of all angelic and human rebellion. After the 1,000 year reign another brief rebellion will occur, but it is short-lived because Christ is present as King of kings.

This is where God's kingdom comes to be on earth as it is in heaven. Here God's program is climaxed; God exalts His Son and puts all creation under His feet, a symbol of His victory and control (Psalm 2; Eph. 1:22; Heb. 1:13; Psalm 110:1).

His Aim (19:11)

"And I saw heaven opened." What a dramatic moment in history! The heavens are opened to allow this procession to take place. This may refer to the thick darkness and the cloud cover which will be characteristic of the Tribu-

lation (Zeph. 1:15; Joel 2:2). The Savior will be there on a white horse followed by His armies (believers and angels) (2 Thess. 1:7, 10; and Rev. 19:14). The armies of the world will be gathered in battle array on the hill of Megiddo and the mountains of Palestine. The oriental bloc will be set against the western confederacy under the authority of the beast, but when this event transpires, they join forces against the Lord (vs. 19).

With the words, “And in righteousness He judges and wages war” we see the Savior’s aim. “In righteousness” means “in the sphere of” or “by means of.” Either way it emphasizes that what follows is a product of the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. All evil and the enemies of God are about to be executed and removed.

“Judges” and “wages war!” are both in the present tense to describe the process. Once it starts, it will not stop until every enemy that has stood in rebellion against God is judged and removed.

But what a stark contrast to Christ’s first advent. Then He came full of grace and truth, not to judge but to bear the penalty of sin, to be judged for our sin. But in this scene He comes as Judge. At Christ’s first advent He defeated Satan on the cross and established Satan’s potential defeat. Here it will be carried out in fact.

“And behold, a white horse...” (vs. 11) and “the armies that were in heaven (the church and the angels) followed Him on white horses...” (vs. 14). The mention here of the white horse rider and riders that follow Him portrays a scene that is an allusion to the ancient Roman Triumph.

The Roman Triumph was the highest honor that could be bestowed on a victorious Roman general. It came from a Greek word that referred to a public and triumphal procession. The procession was a parade up the Via Sacra, the main street of Rome, that led from the Forum to the temple of Jupiter which lay on the Capitoline Hill. The General was mounted on a white horse which was the symbol of a victorious triumph in the field over the enemies of the nation. First came the spoils of war which were eventually given to the general’s army and friends. Next came the captives who had been defeated and captured in battle, disarmed and in chains. Then came the General on his white horse followed by his family, friends, and his army. Later the prisoners were often executed by the soldiers, often one on one until they were all executed.

Now compare the following Scriptures: in Colossians 2:15 we have a reference to Christ’s victory in battle via the cross. Here Christ is proclaimed as the triumphant General in the field of battle. Ephesians 4:7f speaks of Christ giving gifts to men as spoils of war following the victory over the Satanic hosts. (The first phase of the triumph.) Finally, Revelation 19:11 speaks of the removal of all enemies. (The final phase of the procession resulting in the execution of all enemies.)

His Appellatives

In this section, a number of different names are used of the Savior because together they describe the many features of the Lord Jesus Christ as to His person and work.

Faithful and True (19:11)

“Faithful” is *pistos* and refers to “one you can rely and count on” always. This characteristic of the King of kings flows out of His divine essence and perfect, glorified manhood. Other rulers, because of ignorance or lack of the facts, have often been untrustworthy and have failed their people. But this one possesses all wisdom and knowledge. His knowledge cannot change, nor be mistaken, nor be in the least inadequate, so men can count on Him. He is reliable. He never judges by appearance.

Further, because He is omnipotent and because His power is always guided by His holiness and wisdom, He can always perfectly fulfill His promises and purposes. But history is filled with the many leaders of the world who have come with promises of peace and prosperity or of good government, but have failed because of their lack of wisdom and power and character to carry out their plans.

Also, because He is immutable and because He is perfect holiness, wisdom, love and grace, His plans and purposes are always best for us and cannot be changed by caprice, greed, or expediency. We can always count on Him.

Because He is perfect holiness, man can count on His plans and purposes knowing they are always right and just. He is one who pours out mercy on those who seek Him and justice and judgment on those who turn away (Isa. 11:1-5).

“True” is ale, things and there are two concepts to be gleaned from this word. First, it means “real, genuine” versus “spurious, false.” History has constantly been plagued by world leaders who promoted themselves as man’s answer or as a nation’s answer. They have promised peace and solutions to the ills of society, but over and over again they have been revealed as spurious. Hitler made such promises but proved hideously false. In Revelation 6 the white horse rider also promises peace, but as one who is not true, he goes forth to conquer (i.e., to subjugate in tyranny).

Second, it also means the “ideal” versus the “imperfect.” Man has long looked for the perfect ruler, one who had the power, wisdom, love, grace, holiness, and unchangeableness to rule in perfect righteousness. Of course, nations are sometimes blessed with good rulers, but they are always temporary. They either die by natural causes or get removed by political intrigue or assassination. They are then too often replaced by someone far less qualified (cf. 2 Kings 18:3-6 with 21:1-2 and Isa. 6:1f). But this white horse rider will remain by reason of His eternality. Thus, He will be the perfect Ruler, the Ideal.

A name written which no one knows (19:12)

This is precisely that, a name that is not revealed; it is not simply a name no one knows the significance of, but one no one knows period.

The Word of God (19:13)

“Word” is logos, “a word, saying, message.” It denotes the expression of thought, a collection of ideas in the mind, and the words by which they are expressed. It signifies the outer form by which thought is expressed as well as the inward thought or collection of ideas themselves.

He is called ho Logos “the Logos.” The article is important to this title of the Lord Jesus. The purpose of the article is to distinguish the subject from the mass, to mark out an individual’s identity by way of contrast to all others. “Of God” is literally “the one of God.” This defines more precisely and emphatically just what He is, the revelation and manifestation of God himself. As “the Word of God” (ho Logos tou Theos), Jesus Christ is the complete personal manifestation of God, not just a part of God’s essence and plan, but the whole. He is the complete revelation, the collection and expression, and the outward manifestation of all that is God. The classic passage on Christ as “the Logos” is John 1:1-18.

In His first advent, Jesus Christ came as *ho Logos* revealing God in His plan of salvation (love, grace, power and perfect holiness). But, in His second advent, He will come revealing God in His plan of wrath and judgment (compare vs. 13a, the blood dipped garments, and vs. 14, the armies, with John 1:4, 17). Compare also John 12:46-48 where Jesus declared that He would not judge then, but He would later and by the index of God’s Word.

KING OF KINGS and LORD OF LORDS (19:16)

There is no article with either of these titles which emphasizes the character and quality of His rule. It emphasizes the qualities of kingliness and lordship. “Of kings” and “of lords” means over all others, and like no others. This declares both His authority and quality. He is the epitome of a King and a Lord.

“And on His robe and on...” This means partly on His robe and partly on His thigh—written at length—extending from His robe down to and on His thigh. “Has written,” because of the perfect tense, means it is a permanent title; once He assumes His rule, it will never end. There will be no one who can dethrone Him as Satan dethroned Adam and Eve.

His Appearance (19:12-13, 15)

“His eyes...a flame of fire.” Some manuscripts have “as a flame of fire.” This symbolizes the searching and penetrating judgment of the white horse rider upon mankind. Like fire, His eyes penetrate and search out every person. No one can escape his vision and judgment. Men can hide behind every conceivable mask, but only those who stand in His righteousness will escape this judgment. Even these will be examined and rewarded for production by the same eyes (cf. Rev. 2:23 with 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Cor. 5:10).

“And upon His head are many diadems” (KJV has “crowns”). This is not the victor’s crown (stephanos), but the diadem, the crown of absolute sovereignty, the crown of kings. Believers receive the stephanos, the victor’s crown for bearing fruit in the Christian life (Rev. 3:11). The diadems of 19:12 are set in contrast to the ten diadems of the beast (Rev. 13:1, i.e., ten diadems verses many diadems). Christ’s universal sovereignty (King of kings) is the point being made by the many diadems.

“And He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood.” The robe refers to Christ’s royal robe, an outer garment with which He is clothed. “Clothed” is a perfect tense which calls attention to the abiding condition, permanently clothed in royal splendor and authority. “Dipped” is also a perfect and calls attention to the permanence of what He is about to do—defeat His enemies. “Dipped in blood” is symbolic of the blood which is about to be shed (cf. Isa. 63:1-6; Rev. 14:20) and also stresses that it is His power which accomplishes the judgment and removal of the enemies. It may be the church will take part in this, but only by our association and identification with Him (Isa. 63:2-6). In Revelation 19:14 no blood is mentioned in connection with clothing of the armies (the saints) that follow Him. The armies follow and are a part of this victory, but as in the Christian life, it is His power which accomplishes the defeat of the enemy. When Christ is portrayed as the slain Lamb, it speaks of redemption by means of His blood, i.e., His death on the cross (Rev. 1:5), but here the blood represents not Christ’s blood or death, but the blood or death of the wicked caused by this judgment of Christ.

“And from His mouth comes a sharp sword...” The fact that the sword proceeds from His mouth shows this is His Word. His Word is called “a sharp sword” because it cuts the enemy asunder (it is effective). “Sword” is *rhomphaia*, the long Thracian sword. This word was also used of a javelin-like sword which was light and slender enough to be thrown as a spear. It is a symbol of judgment and suggests that Christ will simply speak and by His Word thousands will fall. The basis of His judgment will be the words which He spoke in His first advent (John 12:48). In His first advent He came speaking words of reconciliation, seeking to save that which was lost. But at His second advent, because of rejection of these words, He will come speaking words of retribution which will slay the wicked (Isa. 11:4).

His Armies (19:14)

This undoubtedly involves two groups. First, it includes the angels, the hosts of the Lord, as they are so often called in the Old Testament Scripture (Joshua 5:14-15; 1 Kings 22:19; 2 Chron. 18:18; Neh. 9:6). The Hebrew word for “hosts” is *tsaba*, “armies.” But due to the description used here, His army will also include church age saints. Why? Well, note the description. They are clothed in fine linen, white and clean. In verse 8 this same expression is explained as “the righteous acts of the saints,” the *dikaio,ma*.

“Clothed” is a perfect tense which again looks at a permanent state of being so clothed. “Clothed” is the Greek *enduo*, which means “to clothe in, hide or cover in.” The voice is best taken as passive which stresses this as a work of God who clothes us in these garments, white and clean; even as the results of faithfulness to the Lord, they are the work of God.

A note of contrast and comparison is in order here. In Ephesians 6:11 we are told to “put on the full armor of God.” “Put on” is again the verb *enduo*, only in Ephesians 6:11 the Greek means, “you yourself put on,” or “you clothe yourself.” While in this age we are commanded to put on, or to clothe ourselves in the full armor of God as a protection against the schemes of the devil in our battle against Satan and his forces. This armor gives capacity to stand against his many strategies. But in this case we may fail to do so and be sorely trampled on by the devil. In the future when we come with the Lord, however, He will have permanently clothed us which both qualifies and protects us in the battle.

His Authority (19:15-16)

His authority is seen in a number of things in these two verses. First it is seen in His Name, “KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (vs. 16). In verse 12 the “diadems,” are the royal crowns He will wear, which, as pointed out previously, likewise demonstrate His authority over the whole earth. He has “many crowns” versus the ten of the beast, and He is King above all kings, and the epitome of kings.

However, some interpreters simply take this to refer to Christ's sovereignty over the hearts of men, and of the kingdom of God within man. But verse 15 shows clearly that John is referring to God's rule on earth through the very person of Christ.

His authority is also seen in the sharp sword with which he smites the nations in judgment, slaying and removing the enemies. This is preparatory to the millennial reign of Christ.

His authority and the nature of His rule is also seen in, "He will rule them with a rod of iron" (cf. Psalm 2:9; Rev. 2:27). This represents the unyielding and absolute governmental authority of Jesus Christ in His kingdom reign under which men are required to conform to the righteous and just standards. No lawlessness or injustices will be tolerated. Men today can get away with murder, deceit, fraud, lying—but not then.

"Rule" is the Greek word *poimaino*, which means "to shepherd." In this we see the nature of His rule. It will be like a shepherd who cares for his sheep. It will involve love, provision for all needs (spiritually and physically), as well as discipline and swift and effective justice.

"Rod of iron" further describes the nature of His rule. Shepherds normally used a staff made of wood with which they protected, cared for, and disciplined the sheep. This rod, however, is made of iron which symbolizes the strength, absolute authority, and *unbreakable* nature of His authority and rule.

His authority is further shown by the phrase "and He treads the wine press..." This figure returns to what He must do in order to take up His rule on earth. It is a striking figure of the judgment that will occur at Christ's return (14:20). The picture is that of treading a wine press full of grapes. The press runs red with the juice of the grapes which have been pulverized by the treading. So when Christ returns with His armies and lands on the Mount of Olives, He will literally destroy hundreds of thousands and their blood will flow through Palestine (cf. Rev. 14:19-20).

"Treads" is present tense of continual or progressive action. This means He continues the judgment until all the enemies are defeated, either slain or gathered for judgment. The armies of the beast will be wiped out while the rest of mankind will be gathered for judgment. They will either be cast directly into the lake of fire or allowed, if believers, to go into the millennial reign of Christ. Compare Matthew 24 and 25 for this sequence.

- (1) The Tribulation judgments will wipe out many via the seals, trumpets, and bowls (Rev. 6-18).
- (2) Christ returns for the final battle of Armageddon with all armies gathered to do battle (Rev. 19:11-19).
- (3) The beast and false prophet are removed (Rev. 19:20).
- (4) The armies of the world are destroyed (the treading of the wine press) (Rev. 19:15, 17, 19, 21).
- (5) This is followed by the judgment of the rest of the living Jews and Gentiles (Matt. 25:1ff).
- (6) Then comes the millennial reign of Jesus Christ (Rev. 20).

"Of the fierce wrath" is literally, "of the rage, the one of His settled anger." The Greek word translated "rage" is *thumos* which means "exploding, volatile wrath, anger in action." But the next word, *orge*, refers to the more settled anger of God against sin which proceeds from His unalterable holiness and divine essence. The text is showing us that this wine press proceeds from the divine holiness of God. Remember that Revelation 14:10 declares God's wrath will be poured out, at this point, in full strength, undiluted, and without mercy and grace. It will be too late for mercy and too late for repentance. Up to this point, unless people received the mark of the beast, they could repent and accept Jesus Christ. But not after Christ appears in heaven. God's forbearance with man, at long last, comes to an end—as in the days of Noah.

Another important contrast to consider at this point is that of Christ's return to earth and the Great White Throne Judgment:

- (1) It is separated in time from the last judgment by 1,000 years (Rev. 19:11-21 compare with 20:1-8, 9, 11).
- (2) Its purpose and object is entirely different. The Great White Throne Judgment is to pronounce final doom and to appoint men to their eternal destiny. The books are opened out of which men are judged. But the day of wrath at Christ's return is to prepare the earth for the millennial reign. It is a purging out, a removal of all rebels.

(3) The Great White Throne Judgment comes only after the present heavens and earth have passed away, but the second coming is an event on this earth—specifically in Palestine. It will involve changes in the earth, but not a new earth (Isa. 11:6f).

(4) The Great White Throne judgment deals with the dead; those who have come from the sea and the grave (their bodies), and from Hades or torments (their souls) (Rev. 20:12). The second coming of Christ is dealing with living men who have never died and many of whom are marshaled together into one great army.

The Armageddon Conflict (19:17-21)

17 And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, "Come, assemble for the great supper of God; 18 in order that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great."

19 And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies, assembled to make war against Him who sat upon the horse, and against His army. 20 And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. 21 And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat upon the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.

Right away a great contrast occurs with this section of Revelation 19. Above, in verse 9, saints are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. "Supper" is *deipnon*, the primary meal of the day, and there it refers to the blessings and fellowship of the millennial reign of Christ with His bride, the church. But here, birds (vulture types) are invited to another supper (*deipnon*), only now it is to eat the flesh of those killed in this battle. Either one accepts God's supper of grace, or he must face the one of God's judgment.

Now following the vision of Christ with His armies, John is given another striking vision which may be divided up as follows:

- (1) The carnage for the birds (vss. 17-18)
- (2) The conflict with all the armies of the earth (vs. 19)
- (3) The captives thrown into the lake of fire (vs. 20)
- (4) The conquest of the remaining ones (vs. 21)

While this was discussed in chapter 16, it might be helpful to review the Armageddon conflict. The events discussed here describe the final phase or battle of Armageddon which actually began with the invasion of the king of the north and her allies around the middle of the Tribulation (Ezek. 38-39). At that time, the king of the north will be destroyed on the mountains of Palestine by God. This leaves a vacuum of power and the beast of the western confederacy, seeing this as an opportunity to strengthen his power, will move into Palestine, break his peace treaty with Israel, and begin to conquer greater portions of the earth (cf. Dan. 11:40-43).

But at the end of the Tribulation he hears tidings out of the East, i.e., the kings of the East are marching to Palestine to do battle with the beast and his armies (Dan. 11:44-45). Here all the remaining armies of the earth will gather to do battle with one another to gain control the world and especially Palestine (see Joel 3:9-14).

Then suddenly, the heavens are opened, and there, appearing for all the world to see, is the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings with His armies. But in hardened rebellion and in spite of the awesome wonder of the Lord in heaven, the armies of the world ban together in what will be the first truly successful United Nations action to do battle with Christ. Verses 17 and following portray the results and the victory of our Lord.

The Carnage for the Birds (19:17-18)

“And I saw an angel (singular) standing in the sun.” Just how the angel stands in the sun is not explained. Whether he stands in the sun itself or merely in its light is not specifically stated. As a supernatural spiritual being this would be no problem for an angel, but probably the idea is that he will stand in the direct path of sun light, but possessing even greater brilliance so that he can be seen. The image is one of great brilliance and light which again manifests and emphasizes this whole scene as an act of God’s glory, especially His holiness, righteousness and justice.

The fact the angel “cried out with a loud voice” signifies that something very important is impending (6:10; 7:2, 10; 10:3; 14:15; 18:2).

“Saying to all the birds which fly in mid heaven.” The angel does not speak to man, but to birds—a special kind of bird. Literally it says, “to all the birds, to those which fly in mid heaven.” He is not just talking about birds which fly, but about those that are noted for soaring high in the sky and noted for eating flesh, i.e., vultures, buzzards, and perhaps even hawks and eagles (cf. Matt. 24:28 the Greek word used there means “eagle, vulture,” cf. Job 39:26-30).

The birds are then commanded to assemble for a very special meal. “Come” is an adverb of command or exhortation. “Assemble” is an aorist passive imperative suggesting urgency, “be assembled.” “For the great supper of God,” i.e., for the slaughter of the armies of the world.

Verse 18 shows the purpose of this assembly of the birds—operation cleanup. They are assembled to eat the flesh of those slain by the King of kings. Note that the men are divided into classes: (a) kings, (b) commanders (literally “commanders of thousands), (c) mighty men, (d) cavalry troops, and (e) men both free and slave, small and great. But why the various classes? To emphasize a timeless principle of Scripture: God’s judgment upon man is no respecter of persons (Rom. 2:6-11). His judgment is a great equalizer of all.

There are two other passages that seem to parallel 19:17 because of the reference to the vulture-like birds (Ezek. 39:17-20 and Matt 24:28). If Ezekiel 39 occurs before the millennium (some take it to be equivalent to Revelation 20:8 which occurs after the millennium), it is only an apparent parallel for it refers to an earlier battle of the Armageddon campaign, i.e., phase one and the destruction of Gog and his allies on the mountains of Israel. But in 19:17 the great supper of God involves all the armies of the earth. Matthew 24:28 is an actual parallel, and refers to the carcasses which fall in battle when Christ returns, and the gathering of the birds to eat them.

Care must be exercised when interpreting passages which are similar. The rule is, similarities do not necessarily prove identity. Other factors must be considered. Birds of prey are always in evidence where there is death, and the presence of the birds does not mean we have the same event, only the same kind of event.

The Conflict with all the Armies of the Earth (19:19)

“And I saw the beast.” This includes the seven remaining kings of the ten nation confederation who will give their power and authority to the beast. Later three will rebel and will be destroyed, so only these seven will be left (Rev. 17:12-17; Dan. 7:18). But “kings” in 19:19 also refers to all the remaining kings of the earth, primarily the kings of the East who now band together in this final United Nations against Christ.

“Assembled to make war.” Literally “having been assembled in order to make war.” Remember that, as John saw this vision of the future, they were originally assembled there by demonic activity because of their greed for the wealth and the resources of Palestine (cf. Rev. 16:12-16). But now they see the sign of the Son of Man, and they join together against the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 17:14 with 19:19).

The Captives Thrown Into the Lake of Fire (19:20)

Verse 20 tells us the beast and the false prophet will literally be seized (paizo,, “seize, arrest” and was used of a violent seizure) at the beginning of the conflict and cast directly into the lake of fire. The false prophet is clearly identified as the one of chapter 13.

The most dramatic part of the verse is the last part where it tells us these two were “thrown alive” into the lake of fire. Literally it says, “Alive, they were thrown, these two, into the lake of fire.” The reason for the emphasis is that this is not the ordinary sequence of the doom of unbelievers. The normal sequence is death (Luke 16:22), tor-

ments in hades (Luke 16:23), the second resurrection that leads to the second death (Rev. 20:11, 13a), the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11-12), and then the lake of fire or the second death (Rev. 20:14-15). The armies of the beast, for instance, will be killed, and will go to torments and follow the above sequence. "The beast and his false prophet will be the first occupants of the lake of fire; other unbelievers, now in hades, will join them at the end of the Millennium."²

There seems to be one other exception to this sequence which is the judgment of the living Jews and Gentiles. This takes place after this battle is over. In these two judgments, believers and unbelievers are separated. The believers remain (25:34) to inherit the kingdom, and unbelievers seem to go directly to the lake of fire (Matt. 25:41). This judgment on earth appears to take the place of the Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20 for living, unbelieving Jews and Gentiles after Christ returns to earth.

The Conquest of the Remaining (19:21)

Those not killed in the first stage of the conflict, i.e., in that which takes place when the beast and false prophet are taken, are then killed. The point is that the whole army of the beast is wiped out. The only ones left are those who were not a part of these armies, i.e., believers hidden in the hills and unbelievers in other places around the earth.

The present age reveals the grace of God and suspended judgment. The age to come, while continuing to reveal grace, will bring an end to this suspension of God's wrath and finally of even God's grace. Christ's victory is total and complete.

The Word of God makes plain that God so loved the world that He gave His Son, and that all who avail themselves of the grace of God are immeasurably blessed in time and eternity. On the other hand, the same Word of God states plainly that those who spurn God's mercy must experience His judgment without mercy. How foolish it is to rest in the portions of the Word of God that speak of the love of God and reject the portions that deal with His righteous judgment. The present age reveals the grace of God and suspended judgment. The age to come, while continuing to be a revelation of the grace of God, will give conclusive evidence that God brings every evil work into judgment and that those who spurn His grace must experience His wrath.³

² Charles C. Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible, Expanded Edition*, NASB, Moody Press: Chicago, 1995, p. 2041.

³ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1966, p. 281.

Lesson 29:
The Reign of Christ
and the Great White Throne
(20:1-15)

The Millennial Reign of Christ
(20:1-10)

1 And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. 2 And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, 3 and threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he should not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.

4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. 5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

7 And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, 8 and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. 9 And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. 10 And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Like the calm after a storm, chapter 20, which catapults us into the millennial reign of Christ, brings a great sigh of relief with the binding of Satan and the resurrection and reward of the Tribulation martyrs. In the overall outline, this chapter is the second part of the third main section of Revelation (cf. Rev. 1:19). Remember that this third section, chapters 4-22, is all futuristic. The first part of the third section described the Tribulation (4-19). The second part describes the Millennium and great white throne judgment (20), and the third part takes us into the eternal state (21-22).

This is one of the greatest and most important chapters of the Bible. It presents in summary the tremendous series of events that encompass the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. Many Bible expositors believe that it is in this future period that many Old and New Testament prophecies will find their ultimate fulfillment like Isaiah 2:1-4; 4:2-6; 11:1-10; Jeremiah 23:5-6; portions of Matthew 24 and 25; 2 Thessalonians 2:10; and 2 Peter 3:10-12.

However, the view that Revelation 20 is speaking of a literal thousand-year reign of Christ is also one of the most controversial and a bewildering array of diverse interpretations may be found in regard to this passage.

Introductory Matters

Various Views of the Millennium

The term millennium, a Latin word meaning one thousand years, is the term that has come to be used of the thousand-year period spoken of in this passage. The term “millennium” is found six times in verses 2-7.

Premillennial View

This is the view that Christ will personally return and reign on earth for one thousand years. The prefix “pre” expresses the view that Christ returns first, then literally reigns on earth. It also views Christ as fulfilling all the Old Testament prophecies literally in a kingdom on earth. The premillennial view is the result of a literal interpretation of Revelation 20, a view held by even the very early church fathers of the second century as Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian.

The ancient church down to the time of Augustine (354-430) (though not without minor exceptions) unquestionably held to the teaching of an earthly, historical reign of peace that was to follow the defeat of Antichrist and the physical resurrection of the saints but precede both the judgment and the new creation. To be sure, there were various positions as to the material nature of the Millennium (see comments on v. 4), but the true conception of the thousand years was a balance between the worldly aspects of the kingdom and its spiritual aspects as a reign with Christ.¹

Postmillennial View

This view holds the whole world will be Christianized and brought to submission to the gospel before the return of Christ. The prefix “post” expresses the view that Christ returns after the Millennium. The world wars and continuation of global strife demonstrate the error of this view along with such passages as Matthew 24:4f; 2 Timothy 3:1, 13; 4:3; and 2 Thessalonians 2:2-3. This view originated in the writings of a Unitarian by the name of Daniel Whitby (1628-1725).

Amillennial View

This is the most popular modern view, but it goes back only as far as Origin and Augustine in the third and fourth centuries. This view denies the literal reign of Christ on earth. Satan is conceived as bound at the first coming of Christ and the present age between the first and second comings of Christ is seen as the fulfillment of the Millennium. Its adherents are divided. Some believe the Millennium is being fulfilled now on earth, and is equivalent to the kingdom of God in you. Others believe it is being fulfilled by the saints in heaven. It may be summed up in the idea that there will be no more Millennium than there is now, and that Christ’s second coming is immediately followed by the eternal state. The prefix “A” simply means a denial of the Millennium.

This Amillennial view has a great impact on a vast amount of Scripture. For instance, all the kingdom prophecies to Israel are spiritualized. Either they are spiritualized to apply to the church today, or they have been abrogated entirely and have no fulfillment at all, or they must be spiritualized to apply to the future or eternal state. As an illustration, rather than pointing to a literal reign of Christ on earth, Isaiah 11:4-10 refers to the peace and tranquillity of mind of the believer, or it speaks in a spiritual way of heaven or eternity. The key factor here is one’s method of interpretation. In the postmillennial and amillennial positions one must spiritualize a large amount of Scripture. In the premillennial view Scripture is taken literally, i.e., according to its normal, more obvious meaning. Figures are taken figuratively, but they are not spiritualized.

Reasons for the Literal Interpretation

(1) Definition of the “literal” method: This is the method that gives to each word the same exact basic meaning it would have in normal, ordinary, customary usage whether in writing or speaking or thinking. This method is called the grammatical-historical method because it is based on contextual, grammatical, lexical, and historical considerations.

(2) Definition of “allegorical” or “spiritual” method: It is that method of interpreting a text or passage of Scripture that regards the literal sense as merely the vehicle for a secondary, more spiritual, and more profound sense. “In this method the historical import is either denied or ignored and the emphasis is placed entirely on a secondary sense so that the original words or events have little or no significance.”² Pentecost quotes Charles T. Fritsch who says, “According to this method the literal and historical sense of Scripture is completely ignored, and every

¹ *NIV Bible Commentary*, Electronic version.

² J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, Dunham Publishing Company: Findlay, OH, 1958, p. 4.

word and event is made an allegory of some kind either to escape theological difficulties or to maintain certain peculiar views...”³

Paul teaches us that the Old Testament Scripture and God’s dealing with Israel do have spiritual analogies for the Christian life (1 Cor. 10:6, 11-12). Scripture is full of such analogies and types, but their significance is based on the literal historicity of the event whether past or future. It is never a means to deny its literal meaning or fulfillment.

(3) The danger of the allegorical or spiritual method: Pentecost cogently points to three great dangers:

First, he warns, that “it does not really interpret Scripture.” In other words, it goes beyond all well-defined principles and laws of interpretation and leaves one open to the unlimited scope of one’s own fancy. It yields no true interpretation, though it may possibly illustrate certain valuable truths.

A second danger is that in the allegorical method “the basic authority in interpretation ceases to be the Scriptures, but the mind of the interpreter. The interpretation may then be twisted by the interpreter’s doctrinal positions, the authority of the church to which the interpreter adheres, his social or educational background, or a host of other factors.”⁴

Finally Pentecost says, “a third great danger in the allegorical method is that one is left without any means by which the conclusions of the interpreter may be tested.”⁵

The point is simply this. Scripture abounds in allegories, whether in the form of types, symbols, or parables. Paul explains such an allegory in Galatians 4:21-23. These are accepted and legitimate ways to teach and communicate spiritual truth. However, there is a great deal of difference between such use of allegories and allegorical interpretation. In one you have the illustration and application of spiritual truth based on literal interpretation and historical fact. In the other, you have disregard for the literal meaning and historical fact based on the literal method of interpretation and in its place an allegory is set up based on the interpreter’s own fancy.

(4) Evidences for the literal interpretation. In defense of the literal approach it may be argued:

a. The literal method of interpretation is the usual practice in interpretation of literature.

When we read a book, essay, or poem we presume the sense is literal. This is the only conceivable method of communication.

b. All secondary meanings of documents depend upon the previous meaning of these documents, namely, upon their literal interpretation. Parables, types, allegories, symbols, and figures of speech (metaphors, similes, hyperboles) presume that the words have a more primitive reference than the sense in which they are used.

c. A large part of the Bible makes adequate and significant sense when literally interpreted.

Of course the literal interpretation of Scripture does not blindly rule out figures of speech, symbols, allegories, and types. The *literal* meaning of a figure of speech is its *proper* meaning. “Ephraim is a cake not turned” (Hosea 7:8) means that Ephraim is “half-baked.”

d. The literal method is the necessary check upon the imagination of men. To rest one’s theology on the secondary stratum of the possible meanings of Scripture is not interpretation but imagination....The only sure way to know God’s word is to anchor interpretation in literal exegesis.⁶

In the earlier 1950 edition of Ramm’s book he wrote in defense of the literal approach:

... this method is the only one consonant with the nature of inspiration. The plenary inspiration of the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit guided men into truth and away from error. In this process the Spirit of God used language, and the units of language (as meaning, not as sound) are words and thoughts. The thought is the thread that strings the words together. Therefore, our very exege-

³ Pentecost.

⁴ Pentecost.

⁵ Pentecost, pp. 5-6.

⁶ Adapted from: Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, W. A. Wilde Company: Boston, 1956, pp. 93-95.

sis must commence with a study of words and grammar, the two fundamentals of all meaningful speech.⁷

(5) Advantages of the literal method of interpretation: These are summarized by Ramm as follows.

a. It grounds interpretation in *fact*. It seeks to rest its case in any given passage on such objective considerations as grammar, logic, etymology, history, geography, archaeology or theology...

b. It exercises a *control over interpretation* attempting to match the control which experimentation exercises over hypotheses in science.

c. This methodology has proved itself in practice. The enduring and valuable contributions to Biblical exegesis are the result of grammatical and historical exegesis.⁸

Pentecost adds the following:

In addition to the above advantages it may be added that (d) it gives us a basic authority by which interpretations may be tested. The allegorical method, which depends on the rationalistic approach of the interpreter, or conformity to a predetermined theological system, leaves one without a basic authoritative test. In the literal method Scripture may be compared with Scripture, which, as the inspired Word of God, is authoritative and the standard by which all truth is to be tested. Related to this we may observe that (e) it delivers us from both reason and mysticism as the requisites to interpretation. One does not have to depend upon intellectual training or abilities, nor upon the development of mystical perception, but rather upon the understanding of what is written in its generally accepted sense. Only on such a basis can the average individual understand or interpret the Scriptures for himself.⁹

(6) Some specific reasons for interpreting Revelation 20 by the literal method:

- Expositors usually understand Revelation 20:10-12 literally. Why not verses 1-9?
- The passage lends itself naturally to solid literal exegesis. There is no reason to spiritualize it other than because of a bias against the thousand-year reign.
- Those who take it otherwise cannot agree on what it means.
- If the Millennium refers to our inter-advent period, i.e., to today, then the passage teaches Satan is bound today and this in no way fits with Scripture. There are few theories of Scripture which are less warranted than the idea that Satan was bound at the first coming of Christ. Amillennialists often refer to Luke 10:18 (as did Augustine) as proof that Satan has been bound, but Luke 10:18 is a prophecy of Revelation 12:7f, which takes place in the middle of the Tribulation. Opposed to this is the constant revelation of the New Testament which shows that Satan is very active in the present age, in fact, that he is even more active and will become more and more active as time goes along (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1-4:3; 2 Thess. 1:8-10). Other Scriptures showing the activity of Satan in this present age are: Acts 5:3; 2 Cor. 4:3-4; 11-14; Eph. 2:2; 1 Thess. 2:18; 2 Tim. 2:26; and 1 Pet. 5:8.
- Some maintain Revelation is full of symbolic visions that cannot be pressed for literal meaning. However, throughout the book of Revelation it interprets itself. Specific explanations are given to John that explain the visions and give their meaning. Expositors are not free to inject their own preconceived ideas.
- In his vision of chapter 20 John could not see one thousand years, he had to be told this. Further, the thousand years are mentioned in verses 1-4 which describe the vision, but verses 5-7 give the divine interpretation of these verses and the thousand years are mentioned in all of these verses. Thus, we are not left to conjecture. The point is, just because we have a vision in a passage we are not free to resort to symbolic or spiritualized interpretation.

⁷ Ramm, pp. 55.

⁸ Ramm, pp. 103-104.

⁹ Pentecost, pp. 11-12.

Satan and the Abyss (20:1-3)

Scripture describes this present time in which we live as an evil age and Satan is called “the god of this world,” (literally “age”; compare Eph. 5:16; 2 Cor. 4:4). Today Satan is free and walks about as a roaring lion seeking someone to devour (1 Pet. 5:8), but because of Christ’s victory on the cross, Satan and his forces are even now a defeated lot. Consequently, during the Millennium and Christ’s reign on earth, Satan (and this includes his demon hosts) will be bound and put out of action until the very end of the thousand-year reign of our Lord (cf. John 12:31; Col. 2:15; with this passage).

“An angel coming down from heaven” (vs. 1a). Because of the power displayed over Satan some have understood this to refer to the Lord. But this is unwarranted and without evidence from the passage. This is a holy angel who is given authority from heaven and who operates at the command of God.

“Having the key of the abyss” (vs. 1b). The fact he has the key and the chain shows he has been given authority and power from heaven to carry out this assignment. The word “abyss,” the Greek *abussos*, means “boundless or bottomless.” This is the bondage place of fallen angels (demons or unclean spirits). It is the same place called “tartaros” in 2 Peter 2:4. Literally, 2 Peter 2:4 reads, “and to pits of darkness (gloom), he committed them by casting them into tartaros” (the verb here is *tartarao*,, “to cast into tartaros”). This and other verses tell us: (1) that tartaros is an abyss of gloom or darkness, (2) that it is a prison of fallen angels, and (3) that the fallen angels that were bound there were those who sinned in the days of Noah in Genesis 6 (2 Pet. 2:5; Jude 6-7; Luke 8:31).

“And he laid hold of...” (vs. 2a). The word “laid hold of” is the Greek *krateo*,, and carries several ideas. It means (1) *to be strong, mighty*, and hence, *to be master over, rule over, prevail*, (2) *to get possession of, obtain, take hold of*, (3) *to hold fast and firmly*.¹⁰ These ideas have a certain application here, but the main idea is that this angel, operating under God’s authority and with His power, will possess the strength necessary to seize, hold firmly, and restrain the devil and bind him in the abyss with no possibility of escape.

“The dragon, the serpent of old...” (vs. 2b). Here again we have a reiteration of some of the various names applied to Satan. See the study on Revelation 12:9. Each name has significance and describes him in terms of his nefarious and adversarial activity in the world in his warfare against God and the people of God. These names are also warnings to us.

“And threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him” (vs. 3a). This is designed to stress the fact that Satan will definitely be put out of commission and will absolutely not be a problem to man in the Millennium, at least for the thousand years.

“So that he should not deceive the nations any longer...” (vs. 3b). This states the purpose—to stop the deceptions of Satan, the master of deceit. Deceit or deception is one of the keys, if not *the* key characterization given to us in the Bible of Satan. Satan cannot operate in the realm of truth, but he operates in the realm of a lie. He is a liar and the father of lies. Why does he lie? To deceive and lead astray (John 8:44; 2 Cor. 11:3; 2 Thess. 2:10; Rev. 12:9).

It is important to know that Satan’s key deceptions concern the Word of God, which of course is the Word of truth. His greatest attack and deceptions concern the integrity of God, both the living Word (Jesus Christ and His person and work) and the written Word (the Holy Bible). It is in this way that he deceives the world (cf. 2 Thess. 2:10-12).

The Millennium will be a time when the whole “earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:9). For this to take place fully and completely, Satan will be removed so that the earth may be prepared for the kingdom of God, a time of truth and the knowledge of God.

“After these things (i.e., the one thousand years) he must be released for a short time” (vs. 3c). It is significant to note that Satan “*must* be released” (italics mine). “Must” is the Greek verb *dei* which points to a logical as well as a moral necessity. It looks at a constraint arising from the divine appointment or purpose of something. Why is he not permanently bound or cast directly into the lake of fire? Why is it necessary for him to once again be released? This is an important question, but since verses 7-9 are devoted to his release, we will save the answer and discuss it then. But let’s not miss the fact that his release is for a short time only.

¹⁰ G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, T. & T. Clark: Edinburgh, 1937, p. 256.

Saints and the Kingdom (20:4-6)

As mentioned, the binding of Satan will occur as a preparation for God's kingdom on earth. We now come to a passage which deals with a portion of the inhabitants of this kingdom on earth.

Looking at Scripture as a whole, the kingdom will be inhabited in the beginning by two categories of saints. First, there will be resurrected saints in glorified bodies like that of our Lord (Phil. 3:21). This will include Old Testament saints, church age saints (the bride of Christ), and Tribulation martyrs. Second, there will be those Tribulation saints who escaped death and were preserved through the Tribulation to go into the kingdom of our Lord (Matt. 24:13; 25:10, 30, 32-34; Rev. 14:1). These believers will have mortal bodies like ours today and during the course of the Millennium they will beget children. These children will also, regardless of the personal and glorious presence of Christ, need to receive Jesus Christ as their Savior by faith. This fact will provide the potential for a third category of people in the Millennium, unbelievers in mortal bodies, men and women susceptible to the deceptions of Satan. These will form the constituency for the last-time revolt under Satan's final deception.

"And I saw thrones and they that sat upon them..." (vs. 4a). These verses are complicated by a lack of specifics respecting just who is included here. Who are these sitting upon the thrones with judgment given to them? Also are there two groups here or three? Some see three groups: (1) those sitting upon the thrones with judgment given to them, (2) those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and (3) those who had not worshipped the beast. Most likely, however, we have only two groups with the so-called third being only a further description and reason why the second group was beheaded. We could translate, "... and because of the Word of God, even those who had not worshipped the beast or his image,..." In the first description we are told of the method of their death along with the ultimate cause of their death—their witness for Jesus and the Word. In the next description we see the more immediate cause and the effect of their faith in Christ and the Word—their refusal to worship the beast.

The first group undoubtedly refers to church saints because of the many specific promises given to the church regarding judgment and ruling with Christ (cf. Luke 22:29-30 [the apostles were members of the church and represent the church], 1 Cor. 6:2-3; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21).

In verse 5, with reference to the group of verse 4 who "came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years," we are told that "this is the first resurrection." In Revelation 20, as Christ also intimates in John 5:29, two resurrection programs are seen. There is the first resurrection; this is the resurrection of the just (believers). But there is also the second resurrection, the resurrection of the unjust and those who experience the second death (unbelievers). Here in Revelation 20 we can clearly see that these two resurrections are separated by one thousand years (cf. vs. 5a).

But it is also important to note that in the first resurrection there is sequence and several phases, i.e., all the saints are not resurrected at the same time. This is evident from 1 Corinthians 15:20-24 and by the doctrine of the pre-tribulation rapture, a doctrine founded on an abundance of scriptural evidences and facts.

First Corinthians 15:20-23 clearly teaches us that there is a time lapse or sequence, and a definite order to the resurrection program. Paul says "but each in his own order." The word "order" is the Greek *tagma* which means "a company, a troop, a battalion, or rank." This was a military term used of ranks or troops of soldiers marching in sequence, with one order or troop following another. This word suggests sequence in the resurrection program of God. "His own" is the Greek *idios* which means "private, personal," and shows we all have a personal place or order in the resurrection according to the group to which we belong.

Then we read, "those who are Christ's at His coming." This directs us to the time of the next phase or phases of resurrection and the type of resurrection. It is the resurrection of the just, those who belong to Christ (believers). This includes all saints of all time. But there are also two phases here because there is the coming of our Lord *for* the church which is silent and unseen by the world. This is the rapture (1 Thess. 2:19; 4:15; 5:23). But then there is also the coming of the Lord at the end of the Tribulation which is seen by the whole world (Rev. 19; 2 Thess. 2:8). The term used of Christ's coming in 1 Corinthians 15:23, 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 4:15; 5:23, and 2 Thessalonians 2:8 is the Greek *parousia* which has both a technical and a non-technical use that has no eschatological implications whatsoever. But it is used technically of the return of Christ. Some have concluded that the use of *parousia* for the return of Christ proves that there is no distinction between the rapture (the return of Christ *for* His saints) and the second coming (the return of Christ *with* His saints). The same argument is applied to other Greek terms used of the return

of Christ like epiphaneia, “manifestation” or “appearance” (2 Tim. 1:10; 2 Thess. 2:8), and apokalupsis, “unveiling” or “revelation” (Luke 3:32; 2 Thess. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:7, 13). But this is an unwarranted conclusion.

Concerning the error of this viewpoint and writing on “The Imminent Return of the Lord,” Earl Radmacher writes:

But before one hastens to the conclusion that all of the references are to a single event, which seems so obvious on the surface, one should probe deeper into Scripture.

First, there is no reason to conclude that the Rapture and the Second Coming must be one single event because the word *parousia* is used of both of them. This is a major flaw in the reasoning of Marvin Rosenthal, who asserts that the use of *parousia* demonstrates the fact of the Rapture’s inclusion in the Second Coming. Noting that *parousia* can mean “arrival” and “presence” (which is certainly clear in Scripture), he concludes that because it is used of both the Rapture and the Second Advent the two are a single event. (Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture*, 215-30). With respect to Rosenthal’s reasoning, Paul Karleen states,

“The author has committed the linguistic error of *illegitimate totality transfer*, in which meanings of a word in various occurrences and contexts are all poured into one particular occurrence. An example of this would be saying that *horn* means “a projection from an animal’s head,” “the end of a crescent,” “a brass or other wind instrument,” “a noise-making device on a vehicle,” “one of the alternatives in a dilemma” and “a telephone” all at the same time and in all occurrences. (Paul S. Karleen, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church: Is it Biblical?*, B F Press, p. 83).”

... In the second place, when the contexts of the Greek words are studied, a number of distinctions between the Rapture and the Second Coming become very apparent. John F. Walvoord has listed a number of these distinctions in his book, *The Rapture Question*, but one of the most obvious distinctions is that which is the theme of this paper. Passages demanding imminency would refer to the Rapture, whereas passages demanding signs would refer to Christ’s Second Coming. Failure to recognize this distinction and trying to see the Rapture and the Second Coming as a single event has forced certain writers into the dilemma of having a second coming that is imminent in some passages and not imminent in other passages.

... Finally, it should be noted with respect to the Greek words used that it is not necessary to understand them as *categorizing* words but rather as *characterizing* words. It will only lead to confusion to try to make a distinction between the Rapture and the Second Advent on the basis of the words alone; rather, they should be seen in their respective contexts as words that characterize both of the events... The vocabulary is not categorizing (cf. *parousia* used of both comings), but is characterizing. When one investigates all the contexts of these words in the New Testament, however, it appears that two specific events are in view, namely the coming of Christ in the air *for* His saints and the coming of Christ *with* His saints to earth. In the latter case there will be specific signs such as are outlined in Matthew 24 and 2 Thessalonians 2.¹¹

But there is another possibility with regard to the use of these Greek words used of the return of the Lord, or at least something to give some thought to. According to ancient usage, and especially as used of important persons like kings, *parousia* described a coming and a presence, or a coming which included the presence of the king after his arrival. The teaching of the Scripture is that our Lord comes for His bride (the church), and takes her up into the heavens (1 Thess. 4:13-17); a throne is set in the heavens, hidden for the most part from the world (but cf. Rev. 4:2; Dan. 7:9 with Rev. 6:14-16 where we are told that the sky will split apart and the world will have a view of this heavenly throne). It is from this throne that the Lord pours out the Tribulation judgments upon the earth and also probably rewards His bride. But the point is this: could this not constitute Christ’s *presence*? He has come and is in the more immediate heavens pouring out judgment (Rev. 6:16). For the most part, however, this is hidden from the world. Then at the end of the Tribulation (Rev. 19), He manifests His presence by coming to earth. Second Thessalonians 2:8 may be translated “... and then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the manifestation (epiphaneia) of His presence (*parousia*).”

¹¹ Earl D. Radmacher, *Issues in Dispensationalism*, Wesley R. Willis, John R. Master, general editors, Charles C. Ryrie, Consulting Editor, Moody Press: Chicago, 1994, pp. 253-255.

So in this portion of the resurrection program (the first resurrection) there is sequence; first the resurrection of the church before the Tribulation, and then after the Tribulation the resurrection of Old Testament and Tribulation saints (Rev. 20:4-6; Dan. 12:1-2).

“The rest of the dead...” (vs. 5a) refers to all unbelieving dead of all time, from Cain through the end of the Tribulation. This does not refer just to the spiritually dead, but to all the unbelieving dead in the grave (the body) and in torments (the temporary abode of souls of all unbelieving dead) until the second resurrection of the unjust to the great white throne judgment. The exceptions are the beast and the false prophet (Rev. 19:20), and perhaps those judged by the Lord in the judgment of the Jews and Gentiles at His return to earth (Matt. 25).

“Did not come to life” (vs. 5b) simply means the rest of the dead were not resurrected at this time, not until the end of the thousand years (Rev. 20:11f).

“Until the thousand years were completed” (vs. 5c). The Greek word for “completed” is the passive form of *teleo*, which may not only mean “completed” in the sense that a period of time has run its course, but it may also imply accomplishment. The passive voice and the verb bring out God’s hand and operation in fulfilling His purposes in this thousand-year period. At this point God will have accomplished His purposes and the rest of the dead will be raised. More will be said on God’s purposes for the Millennium below.

“Blessed and holy is the one who has a part...” (vs. 6a). “Blessed” means “happy” as well as blessed, the recipient of God’s blessings. “Holy” means “set apart.” This is both positional and experiential. The believer is set apart in Christ and is the recipient of the blessings of salvation—Christ’s righteousness, forgiveness, eternal life, reconciliation to God, etc. (1 Cor. 1:30). As a result he will experience the ultimate rewards or fruits of this, experientially, in the thousand-year reign. All believers as resurrected saints will share and experience all the blessings of the Millennium, politically, spiritually, morally, and in every possible way. It will be a time of unprecedented joy.

“Over these the second death has no power (or authority)” (vs. 6b). The “second death” refers to eternal consignment to the lake of fire following the second resurrection, the resurrection of the unjustified (vs. 14). This comes from having no part in the first resurrection of the just, those who stand justified by faith in Christ (Rom. 1:16-17). Or, to put it another way, the second death comes from having only one birth.

Man is born (physical birth) spiritually dead. He needs a second birth (spiritual birth) by faith in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:1-8; John 3:3-6, 16). If only *one birth*, then because man is spiritually dead, he must face *two deaths* (physical death and the second death—eternal separation from God). If man has *two births*, (physical and spiritual), then because he has been made spiritually alive in Jesus Christ, he may face physical death (if he dies before the rapture), but he can never face the second death by virtue of the first resurrection. The second death can have no power over believers because the Lord Jesus has “rendered powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14).

“And will be priests of God...and will reign” (vs. 6c). Believers will be given responsibilities of service and worship in the Millennium. The Millennium, as well as eternity, will be a time of joyous activity and service.

Nothing is mentioned here or elsewhere about the resurrection of Millennium saints, that is those who go into the Millennium with mortal bodies or who are born during this time. Some have taught that: because there is no mention of this resurrection, because of the lifting of the curse (Isa. 11:6-9; 35:1-2, 9), and because of the healing and lack of sickness in the Millennium (Isa. 35:5-6; 29:17-19; 33:24; Ezek. 34:16), there will be no death in the Millennial age.

But Isaiah 65:20 appears to teach otherwise. This verse indicates: (1) The normal life span will be over 100 years, but death will evidently occur. (2) Evidently there will be no shortened life span because of sickness or old age, but (3) there will be a shortened life span through divine discipline for sin and rebellion (cf. Isa. 11:4; 65:20b). (4) Otherwise people will live out a long life span and then death will take them. Except for those who die by divine discipline, it will undoubtedly be very peaceful and without fear—perhaps even with immediate resurrection. (5) It also appears that when men do die, they will die, not from old age, but as a youth, young of body and mind (Isa. 65:20b).

Satan, Sinners, and the Last Revolt (20:7-10)

“And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison” (20:7). Previously, in verse 3, this release of Satan was anticipated and presented as a must, a moral necessity in the fulfillment of the plan and purposes of God for human history. This was followed by a brief mention of the reign of Christ and the reward of saints who will reign with Him for the thousand years. But nothing of the character and nature of the Millennium is given in Revelation 20. However, the nature of the Millennium is the subject of much Old Testament prophecy as in Isaiah 2:2-4; 11:7-9; and Psalm 72. Here in chapter 20 it is assumed that the reader knows and understands this so that aspect is not covered. Remember that it is a time of unprecedented peace, prosperity, justice, righteousness and holiness-politically, physically, spiritually and morally. This is due to two important facts of the Millennium, i.e., (1) the removal of Satan and his demon hosts, and (2) to the presence and perfect reign of the Lord Jesus Christ as the glorified Son of God in all His perfect wisdom and power.

“Are completed.” Again as in verse 5 we have the aorist passive of the verb *teleo*.,. The passive voice brings out God’s activity and involvement in the outworking and accomplishment of this age of a thousand years. The aorist tense is a culminative aorist and looks at the results, i.e., what this period will prove or demonstrate. The verb *teleo*., means not simply “completed,” but “brought to its goal and purpose.”

There are several doctrinal principles which can be gleaned here: (a) God has special purposes in the outworking of each dispensation (or economy) and the culmination of each does not simply end them, but accomplishes and demonstrates certain goals and purposes that God has for history during that administration of His plan. (b) Each dispensation provides new conditions and opportunities to test man from every conceivable angle as well as new opportunities to reveal the character and nature of Satan and man under those different conditions. (c) It also provides new ways to demonstrate God’s glory, character, mercy and grace, and divine provision for man. The Millennium is the seventh and final test which accomplishes this effect. We will look at the purpose of the Millennium followed by the release of Satan below.

“And he will come out to deceive the nations” (vs. 8a) declares the immediate purpose for Satan’s release. As a fallen angel who is confirmed in his rebellion, this prison term will have no effect on Satan. He will still be *ho satanas*, the adversary, the arch enemy of God and confirmed in his rebellion and perversity. Thus, immediately upon release he will engage in his age-old schemes of deception, disruption, and war.

“The nations which are in the four corners of the earth” (vs. 8b) shows his deceptions will reach out to the entire earth. But who will he be able to deceive? Walvoord says:

These who are tempted are the descendants of the Tribulation saints who survive the Tribulation and enter the millennium in their natural bodies....The children of those entering the millennium far outnumber the parents, and undoubtedly the earth is teeming with inhabitants at the conclusion of the thousand year reign of Christ. Outwardly they have been required to conform to the rule of the king and make a profession of obedience to Christ. In many cases, however, this was mere outward conformity without inward reality, and in their experience of real temptation they are easy victims of Satan’s wiles.¹²

Walvoord quotes William Hoste in his book, *The Visions of John the Divine*:

The golden age of the kingdom will last a thousand years, during which righteousness will reign, and peace, prosperity, and the knowledge of God will be universally enjoyed. But this will not entail universal conversion, and all profession must be tested....Will not a thousand years under the beneficent sway of Christ and the manifested glory of God suffice to render men immune to his [Satan’s] temptations, will they not have radically changed for the better, and become by the altered conditions of life and the absence of Satanic temptations, children of God and lovers of His will? Alas! It will be proved once more that man whatever his advantages and environment, apart from the grace of God and the new birth, remains at heart only evil and at enmity with God.¹³

¹² Walvoord, p. 302.

¹³ Walvoord, p. 302, quoting William Hoste, *The Visions of John the Divine*, pages 160-161.

“Gog and Magog...” (vs. 8). These names are used appositionally to describe the nations though they are used without any explanation; they are simply introduced as a description of the nations from the four corners of the earth. Though expositors disagree in their understanding of Gog and Magog, this is not the same as Ezekiel 38 and 39. This is evident from several things: (a) The invasion in Ezekiel comes from the north, but this one comes from all directions; (b) Ezekiel’s battle seems to occur about the middle of the Tribulation when the people of Israel are trusting in the treaty with the beast, but this battle occurs over a thousand years later, after Christ comes to earth; (c) In Ezekiel, Gog and Magog are the names given the ruler from the north and his land, a territory now occupied by Russia, but according to Ezekiel these will be decisively wiped out in the Tribulation.

So why use this term here? Because, from its use in the Ezekiel passage, these names stand symbolically for a rebellious and war-like people and for the nations in rebellion against God and His people (Psalm 2) who will be crushed. As Walvoord suggests, it may be used like we use “waterloo” to express a disastrous battle, but one not directly related to the historic situation. The ties are the nature of the people, rebellious, and their defeat, complete disaster!

“And they came to the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints...” (vs. 9a). The word “camp,” the Greek *parebole*, refers to those in battle, an army in battle array, hence a “fortified camp, fortress,” or “citadel.”

Walvoord suggest that,

... here the term seems to refer to the city of Jerusalem itself which is described as ‘the beloved city’ (cf. Psalm 78:68; 87:2). Apparently Christ permits the army to assemble and encircle the capital city. No sooner has the army of Satan been assembled, however, than fire comes down from God out of heaven, and the besiegers are destroyed, like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. This shatters the last vain attempt of Satan to claim a place of prominence and worship in attempted usurpation of the prerogatives of God.¹⁴

But please note something else: here also ends the vain idea of man that if he just had a perfect environment, the world would be a wonderful place without war and conquest. If man just had a perfect environment he would willingly serve others and the God who created and redeemed him. But this is false because it fails to take into account the fallen nature of man and his desperate need of the redemptive work of Christ. So even in the perfect situation of the millennial reign of Christ, countless numbers immediately respond to the first temptation to rebel. However, they are quickly destroyed and this brings an end to the rebellion of the nations and to Satan’s career.

Throughout the history of mankind, but especially in the last days of apostasy, man in his human viewpoint and satanic viewpoint has tried to believe that man is basically good, that within man is a divine spark which only needs fanning, i.e., good opportunities, the perfect environment, the great society, etc. In other words, take away all the inequalities, give everyone a fair shake, and we will have a wonderful world. Today we hear a great deal about reforming the criminal element, they only went bad because of a bad environment, etc., which of course cannot change as long as Satan is around and Jesus Christ is absent. Man has also believed, especially today, that what we need is a one-world state with an international police force and that this would bring world peace and an end of wars. But as we have seen in our study of Revelation, this will only pave the way for the beast and his godless system of tyranny and murder.

Remember that God’s purpose with the various economies is to give new opportunities and tests from every conceivable angle. In the Millennium, therefore, God gives man his great society, one which exceeds anything man could ever dream of, a society and world order with a perfect environment. Then at the end he releases Satan. Again we ask WHY? To the above reasons let me add the following for further reiteration:

(1) To show the frightfully and totally bankrupt condition of man and that what he needs is not a great society with all evils removed (a perfect environment), but that any effective and lasting change must come from within through God’s grace plan of salvation which regenerates and gives new life and spiritual capacity. Nothing else can permanently change man.

(2) To further substantiate God’s case against Satan, that Satan is the liar, the slanderer, and the deceiver, and a large degree the cause of man’s misery.

¹⁴ Walvoord, p. 304.

(3) To show that God is absolutely just in His sentence of Satan to the lake of fire (vs. 10—his permanent, eternal prison); and that God is perfect holiness and His actions are always consistent with His character.

“Into the lake of fire...” (vs. 10). The lake of fire is literal. It is not just a figurative expression for hell on earth or for separation from God. It is a real, literal place. It is also everlasting. The Scripture does not teach that there will one day be a universal salvation of all mankind after they have suffered a while. This teaches the opposite idea—there will be no annihilation of the wicked. The lake of fire is not symbolic for annihilation. The word expressly teaches that there is a literal place in which there will be everlasting and constant torment.

Revelation 20:10 says “for ever and ever.” This is very strong and literally means “unto the ages of the ages.” The beast and the false prophet are still there after a thousand years; they are not annihilated. Mark 9:43-48 shows that it does not end. Matthew 13:41-42; 8:12; 22:13; and 25:30 speak of weeping, etc. This shows there is not annihilation, but continual torment. Matthew 25:46 states the punishment is everlasting punishment and looks at what the person suffers. In Matthew 10:28 the reference to the destruction of the soul does not refer to its annihilation, but to the loss of its meaning and purpose of existence.

The Great White Throne Judgment (20:11-15)

11 And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one *of them* according to their deeds. 14 And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

The Description of the Great White Throne (20:11)

Here is the last and final judgment of history following the close of the Millennium. It is an awesome and solemn scene and one which should cause deep concern to our hearts for many of our friends and even relatives will be here, those who have never received Jesus Christ as their Savior. All who have scoffed at God, denied His being, rebelled at His rule, or rejected His sovereignty, and in the process, have also rejected His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, must at this time stand before this throne to be condemned to eternal judgment. May the study of these verses make us more concerned and more committed to reaching the lost for Christ.

The Time

This judgment follows the Millennium and the doom of Satan (20:1-10). It is followed by the creation of the new heaven and earth and the eternal state of the redeemed (21:1f).

The Character of this Throne of Judgment

First it is called “great.” The Greek word is *meegas* which connotes: (a) the size of something, the extent, (b) the intensity or degree of something, and (c) rank, dignity, or standing. In essence, all of these ideas have application here. It is great because of the awesome intensity and the degree of its importance. Here each unbeliever's eternal destiny is determined and declared with ample proof and reason. It is great because it is the final judgment putting an end to all judgment for all time. Finally, it is great because all the **unbelievers** of all time, from Cain to the final revolt at the end of the Millennium, will be here assembled to face the bar of God's perfect justice. The only exceptions will be the beast and false prophet and perhaps those of the judgment of the Jews and Gentiles at the end of the Tribulation who have already been consigned to the lake of fire.

Second, it is called “white” because it will be the supreme, undimmed display of the perfect righteousness and justice of God. Throughout history God has taught man that he must have God's kind of righteousness, that God is of purer eyes than to approve evil, or to accept or look upon wickedness (Hab. 1:13), that all have sinned and come

short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23), and that the penalty of sin is eternal death, separation from God (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:2). Now these facts will become evident to each individual and proven without question.

Third, it is called a "throne" because here the Lord Jesus Christ will sit in absolute majesty and sovereign authority to consign these eternally to the lake of fire. In Revelation 4:2 John beheld a throne set in heaven from which the Tribulation judgments proceeded. The word "throne" is used more than 30 times in the book, but this throne, the great white one, is to be distinguished from all others because it is the most significant of all.

The Place

Heaven and earth are seen fleeing from the face of Him who sits on this throne. In other words, they are destroyed, dissolved (2 Pet. 3:7, 10-12). The point is the great white throne judgment does not occur on earth or in heaven as we know it, but somewhere beyond, perhaps in extreme outer space. The indication is also clear that it does not occur in the new heaven and earth which is not created until after this event.

In other words, God has removed Satan and demons, the false prophet, and the beast, etc., and He is about to judge the rest of the unbelieving dead. It is only fitting then, that He also judges the earth and heaven which has been the scene of the struggle with Satan, sin, and sinners. This evidently takes place after the resurrection of the unbelieving dead from the grave and Hades. They are resurrected, gathered before the throne and behold this destruction as heaven and earth are dissolved before their eyes. Then the judgment will proceed.

"And no place was found for them," i.e., for heaven and earth. In the eternal state there will be no place for that which reminds men of the rebellions of Satan and man with all their wickedness and sorrow (cf. 21:4; 22:3).

The Participants of the Great White Throne (20:11b, 12a, 13a)

The Judge

"The one sitting on the throne" (20:11b). This is the Lord Jesus Christ (John 5:22). All judgment has been put into His hands as the perfect Son of man, Son of God, the one qualified to judge by virtue of his sinless humanity and His defeat of Satan and sin on the cross (Rev. 5).

The Judged

The ones judged are "the dead, great and small," those who had no part in the first resurrection (20:5-6). This of course refers to the unbelieving dead of the second resurrection (John 5:29).

"The dead, great and small" emphasizes that no one is exempt; all who have died without Jesus Christ, regardless of their status in human history, religiously, politically, economically, or morally, must stand before this throne to face the judgment of Jesus Christ. This excludes the beast and the false prophet (19:20), and perhaps those unbelievers judged at the judgment of the Gentiles and Jews (Matt. 25:41) because they are seen to be sent directly to the eternal lake of fire.

The Source of their Resurrection

They come from: (a) "the sea," i.e., those who died at sea and were not buried in the earth, (b) "death," those who were buried in graves in the ground, cremated, or destroyed in any other way on earth, and (c) "Hades," a reference to the place of torments, the compartment which contains the souls of unbelievers (Luke 16:23). The sea and death (i.e., the ground) contain the bodies and Hades contains the souls. At this second resurrection, the soul and body are reunited and the person is brought up before the throne.

It appears that the lake of fire will contain spirit beings in spirit bodies (Satan and his demons) and even unbelieving people will have some kind of imperishable resurrection body as well (cf. Rev. 19:20).

The Basis of the Judgment (20:12b, 13b, 15a)

The basis of the judgment is what is found in the two sets of books: the books which were opened, and the other book, the book of life. Note that the text says “and the books (plural) were opened, and another book (singular) was opened, which is the book of life.” So we have two sets, the books, and the book which is mentioned also in verse 15a.

The Books

The identity of the books is not specifically revealed. We can only speculate from a comparison of other Scriptures and from the nature of these verses.

The first book opened will probably be the Scriptures, the Word of God which contains the revelation of God’s holy character, the moral law, the declaration of the sinfulness of man and God’s plan of salvation by faith in the Savior. This book also reveals that even when men do not have the written Word, they have the law of God written in their hearts (Rom. 2:14-16) and the revelation of God consciousness in creation (Rom. 1:19-20). Because of this they are without excuse (Rom. 1:20; 2:12). All men are responsible for the revelation they have and stand at this judgment because of their own negative volition to God’s grace (Rom. 1:18; 2:4, 14; John 7:17). So then, Scripture will be used to demonstrate the clearness of the plan of God and that man is without excuse (cf. also John 12:48-50; and 1 John 3:23).

The second book will be the book of works (deeds). Verses 13 and 14 state that the unbelieving dead will be judged according to their deeds (works). Undoubtedly, one book is the book of works which contains a record of their deeds as a witness of the true nature of their spiritual condition.

“Deeds” is the Greek *ergon* which refers to anything that is done, a deed, action, or work. It is used of good deeds (Matt. 26:10; Mark 14:6; Rom. 2:7), of evil deeds (Col. 1:21; 2 John 11), of dead works (Heb. 6:1; 9:14), of unfruitful deeds (Eph. 5:11), of ungodly deeds (Jude 15), of deeds of darkness (Rom. 13:12; Eph. 5:11), and of works of the Law (Rom. 2:15).

The principle here is that Jesus Christ died for their sins, for their evil deeds, to forgive them and to provide them with a righteousness from God so that they might have a perfect standing before Him. But when men reject the knowledge of God and His plan of salvation, they determine to stand on their own merit or in their own righteousness. So, the book of works will contain a record of all their deeds, good and bad, to demonstrate Romans 3:23, that they fall short of God’s righteousness and have therefore no basis upon which to stand accepted (justified) before God. This judgment proves them sinners and in need of Christ’s righteousness by faith.

The Book of Life

This book contains the names of believers, all who have put their faith in Christ and His plan of salvation through the suffering Savior. To put it another way, it is a record of those who have not rejected God’s plan of salvation and who have responded to Him in faith; for these their faith is reckoned for righteousness (Rom. 4:22).

At the great white throne the book of life is produced to show that their name, because of their rejection of Jesus Christ, was not found written in the book of life. They, therefore, have no righteousness and cannot be accepted before God, but must be cast into the eternal lake of fire. The book of life contains the names of believers who have been justified by faith and who have a righteousness from God imputed to their account. These are accepted by God and will spend all eternity with Him (Rom. 3:20-26; Phil. 3:9).

The Judgment or Punishment (20:14-15)

“And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.” “Death” refers to the body now resurrected, and “Hades” refers to the soul, the immaterial part of man. Both the body and soul are eternally separated from God in the eternal lake of fire, a very real and literal place. It is important to note that the emphasis here (the real issue) is on whether their name is in the book of life and not on their deeds. Salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ and the loss of salvation is brought about by the one sin which separates man from God—failure to trust in Him (John 3:16, 36; 16:8-11).

Lesson 30: The Eternal State (21:1-22:5)

Throughout the book the words “and I saw” have been John’s characteristic designation for new details of revelation given to him. In this chapter these words appear three times for three major elements of revelation which the Lord wants to call to our attention through the visions given to John.

(1) In 21:1 John saw the new heaven and the new earth. This clearly indicates that what follows is of the eternal state and bliss of the redeemed.

(2) Then in 21:2 John saw the descent of the New Jerusalem. This is followed by revelation of new conditions with a description of the new Jerusalem. This too is related to the eternal state, though it will also be in existence in the Millennium and the home of the church of Jesus Christ and of Old Testament saints like Abraham.

(3) Finally, in 21:22 John again wrote, “I saw.” What follows still deals with the new Jerusalem, only now the revelation deals with some special delights regarding the spiritual and physical conditions of the new Jerusalem.

Throughout Revelation 21:1-22:5 the discussion concerns the new Jerusalem and the eternal state. This seems quite clear from two main factors: (a) The close association apparent between 21:1 and 2, the new Jerusalem is seen following the vision of the new heaven and earth; and (b) the natural chronology of the book. Most consider this entire section as prophetic of the eternal state.

Some, however, think 21:9-22:5 refers to the Millennium. They think this because the nature of some of the things mentioned seem to be out of character with the eternal state, such as: (a) the mention of the nations and kings of the earth (21:24), and (b) the mention of healing (22:2). These have explanations, however, and can be easily applied to the eternal state as we shall see in the exposition that follows.

Ryrie has an important comment on these verses and this problem. He says,

Perhaps the best way to understand this entire section is to regard the new Jerusalem as the abode of the redeemed of all ages. Conditions within the new Jerusalem are conditions of eternity. Of course the redeemed will be inhabiting the city during the Millennium as well as during eternity. Always the conditions within the city are eternal, even when the city is related to the Millennium. This is no different from the present, for loved ones in heaven are enjoying eternal conditions as is God even though these eternal conditions impinge on time (as, for instance, on the Mount of Transfiguration or this entire vision given to John in the revelation). In other words, the new Jerusalem is the abode of the redeemed during the Millennium and during eternity.¹

The Declaration of the New Heaven and Earth (21:1)

1 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 *any* sea.

There is very little revealed about the character of the new heaven and earth in Scripture (cf. Isa. 65:17; 66:22). The main emphasis is its uniqueness; it is quite different from the old. The new heaven and earth is not simply the old renovated but an act of new creation (cf. Rev. 20:1f with 20:11 and 2 Pet. 3:10, which describes the dissolving of the old heaven and earth). The word “new” here is *kainos* which means fresh, new in quality and character. Further, in the Greek text the words “heaven” and “earth” are without the article stressing the aspect of quality rather than identity. Literally, it is “heaven, new, and an earth, new” not “the new heaven...” The use of the adjective *kainos* plus this anarthrous construction (absence of the article) serves to further emphasize the qualitative difference even though we aren’t told a great deal about this difference.

¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Revelation*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1968, p. 118-119.

One striking statement is made, “there was no longer any sea.” “Sea” refers to a lake, sea, or body of water. Most of the earth is now covered with water which is vital to man’s survival, but apparently in the new earth there will be no bodies of water except for the one river mentioned in 22:1-2. Man in the eternal state and in his glorified body evidently will not need water as he does today to sustain him physically. There will be water, but it will speak of power, purity, and eternal life in the eternal city which has its constant source of life in God.

Unfortunately it appears (or fortunately depending on your outlook) there will be no fishing. Man will be able to eat and drink, but it will not be necessary for survival as it is today, at least not in the same way. It also indicates a completely different type of climate. Only a few passages in the Word deal with the new heaven and new earth and these are often in a context dealing with both the Millennium and eternal state which causes some confusion due to our limited understanding (cf. Isa. 65:17f; 66:22; 2 Pet. 3:13).

This kind of thing is not uncommon in prophetic literature and should not cause confusion. A prophetic passage will often mention two events together which, chronologically in their fulfillment, are separated by a large interval of time. Some illustrations of this are: (a) Isaiah 61:1-2a describes the ministry of Messiah at His first coming and verses 2b-3 describe His second coming. So in Luke 4:18-19 Christ quoted Isaiah 61:1-2a and then said “today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). But He stopped in the middle of Isaiah 61:2 since, as Ryrie points out, “at His first coming He preached only ‘the favorable year of the Lord’ (vs. 19). The ‘day of vengeance of our God’ (Isa. 61:2b) was reserved for His second coming.”² (b) The resurrection of the just and the unjust are both spoken of in John 5:29 as though they are one event, yet Revelation 20 clearly reveals they are separated by an interval of a thousand years (cf. also Dan. 12:2). (c) 2 Peter 3:10-13 speaks of the Day of the Lord, the Tribulation, and of the destruction of the heavens and the earth as though they were one and the same or close together, yet Revelation shows they are separated by a thousand years. The mention of two prophetic events together does not mean that they are one and the same or that they occur together or should be confused. We must consider all of Scripture together and when all the passages dealing with certain events are considered, then the sequence and chronology become evident.

The Descent of the New Jerusalem (21:2)

2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.

Regarding this new city, the Greek literally says, “and the city, the holy one, new Jerusalem, I saw descending out of heaven from God.” The emphasis by the word order is on the character of the city. It is the holy city, new Jerusalem and this is seen in striking contrast to the Jerusalem of the Tribulation which is called “Sodom and Egypt” (Rev. 11:8). Revelation 21:2b-22:5 will develop and describe the special holiness of this new Jerusalem.

The second point of emphasis according to the word order of the Greek is the word “prepared” which stands first in the attached descriptive clause. In John 14:2 our Lord said “... I go to prepare a place for you.” The verb there and here is the same, it is the verb *hetoimazo*,, “to prepare, make ready.” The indication in John 14:3 is that when Christ would come for His bride, the church, this place would at that time be prepared as her dwelling place. This teaches us that the new Jerusalem is prepared during the church age as a place for the bride and will be in existence at the rapture, during the Tribulation, and the Millennium. It will be the home of the church and our eternal abode there begins right after Christ comes for His bride. The author of Hebrews speaks of the heavenly Jerusalem as the abode and hope of the saints (Heb. 12:22-24).

Note that the city comes down out of heaven from God and is in some way related to the earth. But it is nevertheless a heavenly city, not an earthly city. Because of its heavenly nature it may be like a satellite city which will orbit or hover above the earth and will finally settle upon it during the Millennium (cf. 20:9). This idea of Jerusalem as a satellite during the Millennium is of course only by implication and not by definite statement. If this is so, then this heavenly city will be withdrawn at the end of the Millennium in connection with the destruction of the old heaven and earth.

² Charles C. Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible, Expanded Edition*, NASB, Moody Press: Chicago, 1995, p. 1627.

“Made ready as a bride adorned for her husband” compares the city to a bride, but this does not limit the city to the church. All saints will ultimately live in this city (cf. Heb. 11:10, 16). The figure of the bride simply emphasizes the following: (a) as marriage is designed to be permanent, so this will be our permanent or eternal abode, (b) as a bride is beautifully adorned for her wedding, so this stresses the beauty of this city as it is adorned for the saints, and (c) as the bride is to be pure, it portrays the purity of the holy city.

The Conditions of the New Jerusalem (21:3-8)

3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, 4 and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.” 5 And He who sits on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” And He said, “Write, for these words are faithful and true.” 6 And He said to me, “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. 7 “He who overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. 8 “But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

The Personal Dwelling of God Among Men (21:3)

While John is beholding the descending city, his attention is diverted by a loud voice—the last time of 21 times that either a “great” or a “loud” voice is mentioned. This is always an indication of an important piece of revelation that is about to be unfolded. It is significant that the last loud voice announces the dwelling of God among men. Though God is the independent God of the universe, He, in His love, longs to dwell among us in order to have fellowship with us and to bless us with His personal care. This ought to touch our hearts and cause us to draw near to Him.

“The tabernacle of God is among men...” “Tabernacle” stands for “dwelling place, a place of abode,” or of one’s “personal presence.” And where is that? “Among men.” The word “among” used here and in the next clause is the Greek preposition *meta*, which is used of association or companionship or fellowship. Note that the verse goes on to emphasize “God Himself shall be among them,” and “they shall be His people,” a result of the other. This verse denotes the most intimate and close fellowship with God in a perfect and unbroken way and on a face-to-face basis. This will be far beyond the knowledge of His presence and indwelling which believers can know today. Today we speak to Him in prayer and He speaks to us in His Word, but then He will be openly and visibly in our midst, personally ministering to our needs. The full scope of this is far beyond our comprehension today. What follows is a result of this personal presence of God in the most personal way among men.

Old Experiences will be Excluded (21:4)

In this life certain sorrows and perplexities are always with us. And from the nature of this life we may wonder how they could ever be removed, that they must follow us into eternity. It’s perhaps hard to imagine life without our sorrows and pain. Take for instance the sorrow and regret that one might have over sin and failures. What about the loved one who never trusted in Jesus Christ, say a father or sister or son or daughter? How can the pain of their eternal separation ever be removed? These verses give us God’s assurance that our present perplexities and sorrows, and indeed even their remembrance, will be wiped away, which undoubtedly includes answers with understanding. Note that “tear” is singular, every single tear.

Verse 4 promises us no more tears, mourning, crying, or pain. This means perfect, uninterrupted happiness and peace. It appears that with God visibly and personally in our midst, there will be absolutely no possibility of unhappiness. Today we all experience pain, sorrow, and misery to some degree. Even with believers who are walking intimately with the Lord and know the joy of His care there are still many times of pain and sorrow. That is life as we know it today. Of course, the more we walk with the Lord and rest in His goodness and care, the greater our peace and joy even in extreme pressure, but even then, there will still be pain.

The emphasis of these verses is that it is God's visible and personal presence that gives this perfect happiness and blessing and not simply the removal of the sources of our problems. Oh, how this should be a reminder and an exhortation to us now to put fellowship with the living Christ as our number one priority. We need to practice awareness of and faith in the personal presence and care of our Lord (Heb. 13:4-5; Matt. 28:20; Phil. 4:5b-7; Josh. 1:51).

"The first things have passed away" refers to all the conditions of this present world—Satan, sin, a sinful nature, and death, etc. Everything associated with Satan and his rebellion and man, his fall and rebellion, everything except believers themselves, will be removed, put away. In fact, "the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind" (see Isa. 65:17b).

New Things will be Experienced (21:5-7)

With the passing away of the old something new must take its place, so we are now presented with the new things which God will create for His people. Interestingly, however, these verses begin with the words "the One sitting on the throne." Why mention this? To stress God's permanent sovereignty, especially in a context dealing with creation. Creation has always been a mighty display of God's sovereign power, but man one way or another, under the delusions of the evil one, has sought to remove God from His throne and tried to enthrone himself as a god. In one system after another—mysticism, communism, atheism, scientism, and humanism, etc.—man has sought to ignore and reject the God of creation.

The foundation to all of this is man's viewpoint of origins. Was man created by a personal God or did he just evolve? Is man the product of some impersonal force of which he is a part? The Word of God teaches us that God can be known by things which he has made; this gives God-consciousness (Rom. 1:18-20; Psalm 19:1-6), and that he can be intimately known through the Scriptures, God's personal revelation of Himself and of His Son (1 Tim. 3:16; Psalm 19:7-9). But mankind as a whole rejects the knowledge of God or the light of nature and Scripture because his deeds are evil (John 3:19-21). Because of his ungodliness (negative volition) and unrighteousness (immoral twist) he suppresses the knowledge of God and in its place he inserts his own idea of origins; he deifies himself or sees himself as evolving and becoming god-like in the vanity of his own darkened imaginations and satanic delusions (Gen. 3:3; Rom. 1:18, 21; 2 Thess. 2:10-12).

Through the moral twist by which man rejects the light, he looks at the created universe and comes up with such ideas as the doctrine of uniformitarianism (the theory that all geologic phenomena may be explained as the result of existing forces having operated uniformly from the origin of the earth to the present time), and based on that, evolution. This becomes man's escape (he thinks) from responsibility to a sovereign God. His claim is that evolution shows us there is no need of God or of the supernatural, i.e., of God who sits on the throne. This is one of man's ways to stifle (sear) his conscience and deny God His sovereign rights.

It is very important to note that the original exponents and writers of the various "isms" nearly always begin from evolutionary presuppositions. This was true with the militarism of Hitler, with Marx and Engels, and with the mystical religions of the East. Julian Huxley, one of the world's most famous evolutionary biologists, said, "Darwinism removed the whole idea of God as the creator of organisms from the sphere of rational discussion. Darwin pointed out that no supernatural designer was needed."³

So what does all this have to do with this passage? Everything. This whole passage, verses 1 and following, is dealing with God's sovereignty in creation. Further, it is the belief of modern man and the new age movement that man can make all things new in his brave new world, a world of peace and prosperity.

But what does our passage promise? "Behold, I am making all things new." "Behold" is an aorist imperative of the verb *horao*, used as a demonstrative particle to arrest the attention. Literally it connotes the ideas of "discern immediately, pay attention, note this carefully and now." The principle that should be noted is, only God, the One sitting on the throne, can make all things new.

Then we have "I am making." This is the present tense used as a future present of absolute certainty. This is so certain that it is viewed as even now in the process. And for God who is the eternal I AM, the Alpha and Omega (verse 6), this is so. "Making," the verb *poieo*, "to do, make, execute," is used here in the sense of "create" (cf. Acts 4:24 where the same word is used). "New" is the Greek *kainos* which stresses new in quality.

³ Julian Huxley, *Essays of the Humanist*, p. 78.

So John is told “write, for these words are faithful and true.” “Write” is an aorist imperative in the Greek which means “do it now,” suggesting urgency and importance, i.e., “put it down,” it is to become part of revelation and God’s special promise for His people. As man can believe the words of Scripture regarding the original creation, so he can believe the words of Scripture regarding the new creation.

In verse 6 John was told “it is done. I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.” “It is done” is the perfect tense (*gegonen*) of the verb *ginomai*, “to come into being, happen, become.” Depending on the context, it may mean, “be made, done, performed, etc.” The perfect may be used to emphasize the accomplishment of something from which a present state emerges (consummative perfect) or it may stress the results, the present state accomplished by the past action (resultative perfect). The question is to what does this refer? Does it refer to the new creation or, as Walvoord suggests, to “the work accomplished throughout the whole drama of human history prior to the eternal state.”⁴ It would seem that the context better supports the new creation. This is the view of the NIV Bible Commentary which says, “Using the same word that declared the judgment of the world finished, God proclaims that He has completed His new creation: ‘It is done’” (cf. 16:17).⁵ Though the new creation is still in the future, these words solidly affirm the creation of all things new as though already accomplished. And what’s the basis of this? The sovereign independence and eternity of God as the Alpha and Omega, the first and last word on all things.

Now we see some of the *new* things enumerated (vss. 6b-7).

First, there will be the water of life for all who thirst. Here is the offer of salvation that comes as a free gift, “without cost.” “All who thirst” refers to all who recognize their need, the spiritually parched condition of their soul, and come to Christ as the source of the water of life” (cf. John 4:10; 7:37-39; Isa. 55:1). “Without cost” means of course, by grace, as God’s gift to those who come to Christ by faith (John 7:38). In this context, “the spring of the water of life” ultimately refers to the complete satisfaction of life that will come to the child of God in the eternal state (cf. Rev. 17:17).

Second, there is the promise of a full inheritance to the one who overcomes (vs. 7a). Contextually, the overcomer promises of chapters 2 and 3 suggest added blessings and delights, like reigning with Christ for those who faithfully overcome the particular temptations and testings they face. Here the context is different (vss. 6b, 7b) and views the overcomer as one who quenches his thirst by simple faith in Christ and, as a result, becomes God’s son (cf. 1 John 5:4-5 and Gal. 3:26). All of God’s people, Old and New Testament saints alike, will inherit the blessings of the eternal state, nothing will be lacking.

Finally, another special promise is made to the overcomer. He will have complete and unbroken fellowship with God (vs. 7b), “and I will be his God and he will be My son.”

The Exclusion of Certain Ones from the Eternal State (21:8)

This verse stands as a point of contrast. Heaven will be everything that this life cannot be because of the presence of sin, darkness, sinful behavior, and Satan’s ever present activity. Today, one of the great sources of pain and misery is the very presence of those who are characterized by the things listed in verse 8. By contrast to the believer who inherits these new things, including a glorified resurrected body without the presence of a sinful nature, is the unbeliever who is permanently excluded by the second death, the eternal lake of fire. In contrast to those who will die in their sins and who must, therefore, continue in their evil character, are believers who, in their glorified state, can never be guilty of such sins. This is clearly the point of this passage where the blessed conditions of our eternal future are being described. Just as Satan will not be there to cause misery and pain, so neither will those who commit such sin. The point of this entire section is the perfect purity and absence of anything impure or evil, not even is there the absence of light (cf. vs. 23-25). Nothing unclean can be there (cf. vs. 27).

Revelation 21:8 is often presented as describing the kind of character that disqualifies one from the new Jerusalem and the eternal state. If anyone is characterized by any of the sins listed, then he can’t be in the New Jerusalem, etc. But this suggests salvation by works and the immediate context has just emphasized receiving the water of life “without cost.” To escape this works mentality, it is sometimes argued that verse 8 is viewed as giving a general picture of the type of things that characterize the unbeliever and demonstrate his lack of faith in Christ and so also his

⁴ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1966, p. 316.

⁵ *NIV Bible Commentary*, electronic version.

lack of new life. Because the unbeliever has rejected God and is operating on human viewpoint foundations, these things will often overcome him and characterize his life. Further, it is sometimes pointed out that the terms used here are adjectives and describe a habitual pattern versus an occasional sin. It is then argued that such people are not lost because they habitually do such things, but that they habitually act as they do because they are lost. This is the argument of those who promote the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.

But I personally think this approach misses the point of the passage. In the first place, many unbelievers are not characterized by most of the things listed here. Apart from being “unbelieving,” many unbelievers are moral and characterized by integrity, yet they too will be excluded because of their unbelief. Verse 8 is not describing what qualifies or disqualifies people from the standpoint of their behavior while here on earth, but showing what kind of people cannot be a part of the eternal kingdom in the future.

Bob Wilkin of Grace Evangelical Society has a perspective on this passage that better fits the context and thrust of 21:8. He writes:

It is a mistake to think that this verse is describing the way the unsaved behave *here and now*. The verse says nothing about *the current* behavior of believers or unbelievers. Rather, it concerns *the eternal* sinfulness of unbelievers.

A parallel passage is John 8:24: “If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.” Unbelievers die in a state of sinfulness. Forever they remain sinners. Believers, however, do not remain in a state of sinfulness because they are justified by faith: “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin” (Rom 4:8; see also vv 1-7 and Rom 8:33-34).

Revelation 21:8 says nothing about whether believers actually sin prior to death or not. Of course we know that they do. However, that is not in view in Rev 21:8. What is actually in view is the continued unregenerate and unjustified state of the lost. Because unbelievers upon death are sealed permanently as those who are unjustified, they remain sinners in God’s sight forever.

There will be no sinners and no sin in the new heavens and the new earth. According to 1 John 3:2, “when He is revealed, we shall be like Him.”

It is interesting to note that this basic message is found three times in Revelation 21-22 (Rev 21:8, 27; and 22:15), the section of the book dealing with the eternal kingdom. A comparison of these three passages, and particularly the first and last, supports the conclusion that the sinful state of those in hell is what is in view...

Conclusion

If the kingdom contained those still in a sinful state, it would not be as glorious as God intends. That would put an eternal damper on the joy the Lord Himself and we, His subjects, could experience.

Revelation 21:8 should be a joyous verse for us. Those who interpret it to mean that we need to examine our behavior to see if we are saved (or if we are still saved) have robbed it of its joy and replaced it with works-salvation gloom.

The kingdom will be truly joyful because everyone in it will be holy and sinless.⁶

The Description of the New Jerusalem (21:9-21)

9 And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, came and spoke with me, saying, “Come here, I shall show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”

10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, 11 having the glory of God. Her brilliance

⁶ “Grace In Focus,” September 1993. This is from the newsletter published by Grace Evangelical Society. Check out their web site at www.faithalone.org.

was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper. 12 It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are those of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. 13 There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west. 14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. 15 And the one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gates and its wall. 16 And the city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal. 17 And he measured its wall, seventy-two yards, according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements. 18 And the material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. 19 The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; 20 the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoptase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst. 21 And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

John has given us a brief look at some of the glories of eternity in verses 1-8. One such glory is the new Jerusalem adorned like a bride. So now in 21:9-22:5 more details are given about this glorious city, the eternal home of the redeemed. Revelation 21:9-21 will be a general description of the construction of the city. Then in 21:22-22:5 we are given a look at some of the special spiritual and physical delights of our eternal home.

The General, Overall Description (21:9-11)

As a Bride, the Wife of the Lamb (21:9-10)

“And one of the seven angels...” (vs. 9). As this verse shows, this angel’s ministry was one of severe judgment, a judgment which from our standpoint is still future, but here his ministry is one revealing doctrinal truth to John, a much more enjoyable task.

“The bride, the wife of the Lamb” is a description, as verse 10 shows us, of the new Jerusalem which is again seen coming down out of heaven from God. Why is the new Jerusalem called the bride, the wife of the Lamb? In verse 2 we are told the city was “made ready as a bride adorned for her husband,” but here new Jerusalem is called the bride. There are at least two reasons for this: the first is seen, as suggested in verse 2, in the beautiful analogy of the figure of a bride. Though dealing with the church and her responsibility in witnessing Joseph Aldrich has nicely captured the picture. He says:

Ideally, a bride is the epitome of all that is right and beautiful. She is a symbol of purity, hope, purpose, trust, love, beauty, and wholeness in a world pock-marked with ugliness. The bride motif, found in both testaments, is used by God to illustrate His strategy for attracting mankind to the availability of his life changing grace.⁷

So God calls new Jerusalem the bride, the wife of the Lamb, because as (a) the Lord is making his bride, the church, spotless and pure (Eph. 5:26-27), so he will make beautiful the new Jerusalem, (b) as marriage is permanent, so will be the new city, and (c) as a bride is beautiful and gloriously adorned, so will be the new city.

Second, though the new Jerusalem will eventually be the home of all the redeemed, it will first be the home of the church, the bride of Christ, who will also be on display during the Millennium, the marriage feast. Remember, this is the home that He is preparing for us (John 14:2-3).

“And he carried me away in the spirit” (vs. 10) refers to a special spiritual state, a trance-like condition into which John was often taken in order to receive special revelation from God for this book (cf. 1:10; 4:2; 17:3). This goes beyond the general filling or control of the Spirit.

⁷ Joseph C. Aldrich, *Life Style Evangelism*, Multnomah Press: Portland, 1978, p. 25.

Then again John sees the “holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven.” Some think that because of the second mention of the city coming down out of heaven “this section describes the city’s relation to the millennial state. In other words there seems to be two descents of the city, 21:1-8 being the one in relation to eternity, and 21:9-22:5 the one in relation to the Millennium.”⁸ Walvoord on the other hand says, “A preferred interpretation, however, is that the passage continues to describe the new Jerusalem as it will be in the eternal state. Obviously the city would be much the same in either case...”⁹ As mentioned earlier, the city will exist in the Millennium and will probably hover over the earth, perhaps above the earthly Jerusalem rather than descending to settle upon the earth as suggested earlier.

As a Costly Stone...Gloriously Beautiful (21:11)

The glory which the new city displays is God’s glory, it is, as with all creation, a derived beauty. The new city perfectly reflects and manifests the glory of God in all His holy perfection and essence.

“Having” is a present of a continual state or condition. This city will constantly have and manifest the perfection’s of God’s being. It can and will remain beautiful because (a) all the enemies of God will have been permanently removed, and (b) because all the saints, unlike Adam and Eve, will have perfect, absolute, eternal holiness and life.

“Her brilliance was like...” “Brilliance” is the Greek *phos*, “a luminary, a light, that which shines.” Here the word is used of a dazzling and brilliant light which is like the light and brilliance given off from an exquisite and costly stone.

“Jasper” is the Greek *iaspis* which was a light sky blue or green stone, primarily light green. “Crystal clear” is from a verb that means “to shine like crystal.” There are two points of truth we might note here:

(1) This city, the eternal abode of the saints, will give out a dazzling display of the glory of God. It will be more beautiful and exquisite than words can describe. This teaches us that everything in eternity will redound to the glory of God and will demonstrate God’s eternal love and care for His saints. Oh, what a Savior!

(2) Precious jewels are reflectors. By themselves they give off no light. When a jeweler wants to properly display the true brilliance of a precious gem he will often display it on a piece of black velvet cloth in order to more efficiently reflect the light shining upon the gem. The city, as it should be with believers today, will be but a reflection of the glory of God Himself who inhabits the city (cf. 21:23 with Eph. 5:8f; and Phil. 2:15).

The More Detailed Description (21:12-21)

The Wall and the Gates of the City (21:12-14)

Literally the Greek text has, “it had a wall, great and high.” The fact of a wall with its emphatic description “great and high” emphasizes the city and that all those within will be absolutely secure. Here, unlike the Garden of Eden, there can be no invasion or temptation. The wall, great and high, would also bring out the total exclusion of all unbelievers (cf. vs. 8).

Then we see that the city has 12 gates and at the gates 12 angels. The gates are named after the 12 tribes of Israel, with three gates at each side of the city, east, north, south, and west. The angels are perhaps honor guards which would again stress the security of the city as well as its glory. Ezekiel 48:31-34 may give the pattern for naming the gates. The Jerusalem described in Ezekiel 48 is the millennial Jerusalem and is probably different from this one. It will be the earthly Jerusalem into which any millennial resident can come, but into this Jerusalem, only glorified saints can come. The fact of the gates also indicates there will be free travel in and out of the city.

Notice that the number 12 is very predominant in this city; it has 12 gates named after the 12 tribes, 12 angels, 12 foundation stones inscribed with the names of the 12 apostles, 12 pearls, 12 kinds of fruit, a wall 144 cubits (12x12), and the height, width, and length is 12,000 stadia, about 15,000 miles.

⁸ Ryrie, *Revelation*, p. 120.

⁹ John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, “Revelation,” Scripture Press: Wheaton, IL, 1983, 1985, p. 985.

The fact that the gates are named after the 12 tribes of Israel and that the foundation stones are inscribed with the names of the 12 apostles of the church should clearly show that both Israel (Old Testament saints), and the church will be a part of this city, yet note that they still remain distinct groups within the people of God.

The Dimensions of the City (21:15-17)

“A gold measuring rod...” Everything about the city is beautiful and valuable, even the rule with which it is measured. A measuring rod was normally ten feet long. But why is it measured and why these measurements? God is infinite and without limits or measurements, but man, even with his glorified body, is still but a creature, absolutely not God, and therefore limited. As such, this demonstrates the glory and holiness of God (cf. Ezek. 43:12).

The city is in the shape of a square and is either a cube or a pyramid. The description of verse 16 can fit either. Regardless, the balance of the shape implies perfection and reminds us of the vastness of God’s love for us in Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 3:16b-19 And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Regarding verse 17 Walvoord says, “The reference to man’s measurement simply means that though an angel is using the rod, he is using human dimensions.”¹⁰

When one compares the size of the city with its wall, the wall seems extremely small. Why? Probably because the wall is symbolic. There are really no enemies to keep out. It will never again be possible for a fall or rebellion to occur because every enemy will have been defeated.

No matter what the shape, a city of this size would be necessary to hold the redeemed of all ages. In fact some have said that even a city of this size could not hold that many people. But remember the city is as high as it is wide and long, and it is not necessary to hold that all will at all times be living in the city. Many will be perhaps in various parts of the new universe carrying out responsibilities for the Lord.

The Materials of the City (21:18-21)

“Jasper” usually refers to green quartz. “Pure gold like clear glass” is solid gold yet transparent like crystal with a gold cast to it (vs. 21). This constant reference to the transparency of the city shows us it is designed to transmit the glory of God to every nook and cranny.

Again compare Ephesians 3:16-18. As the believer grows in the fourfold knowledge of God’s love in all categories of truth, Christ becomes more and more at home in our lives, filling every area.

“Every kind of precious stones” (vs. 19). This serves to stress the absolute and infinite beauty of this city. “Adorned” is a perfect participle of kosmeo,, “to adorn, be well arranged.” “Jasper” is primarily green, “sapphire” blue, “chalcedony” green, “emerald” green, “sardonyx” brown and white, “sardius” red, “chrysolite” yellow, “beryl” green, “togas” yellow, “chrysoprasus” (or chrysophrase) apple green, “jacinth” blue, “amethyst” purple, “pearls” white.

The emphasis of the passage is on the priceless value and beauty of our eternal home and on the immeasurable grace of God. Our inheritance is beyond our comprehension. Truly, with such a future inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled, and that will not fade away, reserved and kept by the power of God, certainly we should live now as sojourners with a view to our eternal home (cf. 1 Pet. 1:3-5, 7-18; and 2:11).

¹⁰ Walvoord/Zuck, p. 986.

Special Delights of the New City (21:22-22:5)

22 And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple. 23 And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. 24 And the nations shall walk by its light, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it. 25 And in the daytime (for there shall be no night there) its gates shall never be closed; 26 and they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; 27 and nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

22:1 And he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, 2 in the middle of its street. And on either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 3 And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond-servants shall serve Him; 4 and they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. 5 And there shall no longer be any night; and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever.

The Temple of the City (21:22)

John now turns from the description of the city to life within the city. Johnson points out:

... in antiquity every notable city had at least one central temple. The New Jerusalem not only differs in this respect from ancient cities, but also from all Jewish speculation about the age to come. Illuminated by the overflowing radiance of the presence of the glory of God, the holy city no longer needs a temple (naos). Yet paradoxically, it has a temple, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple (vs. 22).¹¹

This verse stands in stark contrast to the rest of Scripture. In the Old Testament there was the need of the tabernacle and the temple and their shadows of things eternal—things which spoke not only of the Lamb as the access into God's presence, but of the eternal holy dwelling place of God. In the Old Testament the tabernacle and temple, that which spoke of the very dwelling place of God, was the Holy of Holies (the naos). In the church age the believer himself becomes the temple, the "naos" of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). But this indwelling of the Spirit is only an arrabon, a down payment, a partial experience of things to come (Eph. 1:14).

The word "temple" here in Revelation 21 is naos. In the eternal state there will be no need of some special temple, some special sanctuary, because believers, the saved of all ages, will be in the absolute, undiminished and intimate presence of the Almighty Sovereign God and the Lamb. The Father and Son themselves are the temple in that men will be living in the midst of the unveiled glory of God. "Lamb" is used of Jesus Christ to stress the fact that we are there because of his work as the Lamb of God. "Almighty" is used to stress that our being there is a result of His all powerful and sovereign plan of grace which has perfectly provided for our salvation.

The Light of the City (21:23-24)

Again we have a contrast. In fact everything about the eternal state can be nothing but a glorious contrast to what we know today on this earth. The contrast consists in part in the things which are missing. Walvoord points out that "there will be no temple, no sacrifice, no sun, no moon, no darkness, no gates to shut, no abomination."¹² We might also add that there will be nothing hidden (everything will be transparent), no shadows, no sin, no sorrows, no pain, no sickness, no disappointments.

¹¹ *NIV Bible Commentary*, electronic version, quoting Alan Johnson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12, Frank E. Gaebelin, general editor, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1981, p. 597.

¹² Walvoord, *The Revelation* p. 326.

Actually the passage does not say that there will be no sun or moon, only that there will be no need of the sun and moon because the glory of God will illuminate the city. The sun and moon in comparison with the light of the glory of God will be like turning on an outdoor light in the broad light of the sun in our world today.

The word “has” in the phrase “has no need” is a present tense of continual action. The implication is that our eternal state will never have need of either because it will be always illumined by the unveiled radiance of the glory of God’s personal presence. God’s manifested glory will be the source of light. That God Himself would be the Light of the city is entirely fitting with the rest of Scripture (John 1:7-9; 3:19; 8:12; 12:35; 1 John 1:5; Rom. 13:12; Heb. 1:3). This refers to both physical and spiritual light.

Remember that *in* the earthly tabernacle and temple there was artificial lighting in the holy place, the seven-branched lampstand which spoke of Christ as the Light of the world. Yet, even in the Holy of Holies, there was no such lighting because the Shekinah glory of God gave it its light, the light of God’s own presence. In the eternal city, the entire city will be the temple, the dwelling place of God with the radiance of God’s glory radiating throughout the city in all its transparent beauty.

Scripture repeatedly makes application of this contrast, and you know, it is important that we remember this. Today is a time of darkness, a time of night because of the presence of sin, Satan, sorrow, death and man’s viewpoint. But all believers are positionally lights in the Lord, and by our new spiritual capacity and position we are of the day (1 Thess. 5:4-8; Phil. 2:15; Rom. 13:12 with Eph. 5:8f, Rom. 13:13-14). So we are exhorted and commanded to walk in the light, to manifest light now because of our glorious future in the city of light. Let us live now in a manner consistent with our future, that we might see others brought out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of light, the kingdom of God’s beloved Son (Col. 1:12-13).

The great principle which should be determinative and dominating in our behavior, goals, priorities and values is that the quality of our future life in the eternal city is such that it makes even the best of this life seem as only darkness. What a motivation this should be to us to live as sojourners, to persevere through the many trials of this life, and to be totally committed to our Lord. Our life in the eternal state will be everything this life cannot be. It will be a life untouched by death, unstained by evil, and unimpaired by time.

1 Peter 1:4 to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

The Nations and the City (21:24)

First, “the nations will walk by its light.” Light undoubtedly has both a physical and a spiritual meaning and application here. For the first time in history men will walk totally by the physical and spiritual light of God’s direction. The light of God’s divine essence, His wisdom, love, power, etc., will direct our every step, thought, deed and action. There will be no stumbling, only walking steadfastly in the righteousness and joy of God.

Second, Alan Johnson reminds us:

Elsewhere in Revelation, the nations (ethne,) are pagan, rebellious peoples of the world who trample the holy city...and who have become drunk with the wine of Babylon... The same description applies to the kings of the earth. But there is another use of these terms in Revelation. They stand for the peoples of the earth who are the servants of Christ, the redeemed nations who follow the Lamb and have resisted the beast and Babylon (1:5; 15:3; 19:16; 2:26; 5:9; 7:9; 12:5).¹³

John is looking at the second group here. Ethnos, the word for nations, is the Greek word for non-Jewish races, the Gentiles. John could also simply be saying that believers of non-Jewish races will also be living in the new city. In the eternal city there will be saved Israelites, the church, the bride of Christ, and multitudes of Gentiles from Old Testament and Tribulation times.

Third, the kings of the earth will bring their glory into the city. This most likely means: (a) that there will be those among the eternally saved who will have special places of honor and responsibility, like kings, as a part of their reward for service on earth, and (b) that they will bring their glory into the city, that is, like the 24 elders who cast

¹³ Alan Johnson, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12, Frank E. Gaebelin, general editor, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1981, p. 598.

their crowns before the throne, they will recognize that their glory and honor came from the Lord. They will attach no glory to themselves, but bring it into the city in recognition of God and His glory as the source of theirs. Here is the perspective of grace. He must increase, I must decrease, and I am what I am by the grace of God.

Access to the City (21:25-27)

As a precaution to a surprise enemy attack, in ancient times all gates to the city were closed. But due to the permanent light, the fact there will be no night or darkness but only light, these gates will never be closed and movement in and out of the city never be stopped. Here is a picture of the social life of the city, bustling with activity. This also points to the fact of constant and unbroken fellowship with the Lord. No one will ever walk in darkness again. One final fact here about no night; in our glorified body we will need no rest, so our lives will be full of continuous activity in the service of God. No one will ever be bored and no one will ever become tired. Can you imagine?

Finally, the emphasis of verse 27 as it pertains to nothing unclean is simply a reiteration of the promise of 21:8. It will be a place inhabited only by those who have been justified and transformed by the grace of God, sinless and in glorified bodies.

The Physical Provisions of the New Jerusalem (22:1-3)

1 And he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, 2 in the middle of its street. And on either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 3 And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond-servants shall serve Him;

The River of the Water of Life (22:1)

Here is paradise regained. What man lost in Genesis is regained by the Lamb. In the Garden of Eden there was a river which flowed through the garden and a tree of life. So here in paradise regained we see both a river of the waters of life and a tree of life. One thing is noticeably different however. Here there is no tree of the knowledge of good and evil for here there is no possibility of invasion and rebellion again. God alone will be man's life and his source of the knowledge of good. Man will never again try to become God.

Verse 1 begins with "and he showed me." This is the Greek verb *deiknumi* which means "to show, exhibit, or make known." This word is used eight times in this book of the disclosure of truth to John or to the bondservants of the Lord (Rev. 1:1; 4:1; 17:1; 21:9, 10; 22:1, 6, 8). As you can see the verb occurs three times in this concluding chapter. This again serves to remind us of how, as finite and sinful man we are totally in need of God's supernatural revelation, the Bible, in order to know about the things of God, "things which eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him." (1 Cor. 2:9). Please note that 1 Corinthians 2:9 indicates that the quality of life of our future as seen in Revelation 21 is only a small part of the picture, much more awaits us!

The words "the river of the water of life" are literally "a river of water, of life." This entire phrase is anarthrous, without any articles. As such it stresses the quality and character of this river above all other bodies of water. "Of life" points out what kind of river it is, a life-giving river. This symbolically portrays the abundance of life which God and the Lamb will provide in the eternal city.

Notice that the river is "clear as crystal." The word "clear" is the Greek *lampros* meaning "bright, shining" and stresses the beauty and purity of the river in keeping with the character of God and of the new Jerusalem. The water will literally sparkle like beautiful crystal glass. The present indwelling of the Holy Spirit whom our Lord likened to rivers of living water from within our beings anticipates the river of life and our then limitless experience of abundance of life (John 8:37-39). Do you think you know joy, happiness and peace in the Lord now? Well, as the expression goes, "you ain't seen nothin' yet!"

“Coming down from the throne of God and of the Lamb” points us to the source of the river and the ever constant abundance of life which the river portrays. This portrays the doctrine of procession, which is an attempt to explain the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the other two persons of the trinity. The Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit to indwell our lives and to constantly provide God’s special blessing of abundance of life (cf. John 14:16, 17; 15:26; 16:7; Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:9).

This picture of the river from the throne of God and the Lamb also teaches us the following: (a) the throne speaks of God’s sovereignty and reminds us that our salvation stems from God’s sovereign power, wisdom and grace (Eph. 1:3-11), and (b) by that the throne belongs to both God the Father and the Lamb. This shows the Lamb is still on the throne in the eternal state though in a different way than in the millennial kingdom (cf. 1 Cor. 15:24-28).

Perhaps we can illustrate it as follows. There is a partnership of three in a corporation. A problem develops and the three partners devise a plan to which all agree. One partner goes off and executes the plan (i.e., the Lord Jesus Christ). A second partner reveals the plan to the employees (i.e., the Holy Spirit). After the plan is resolved, the partner who executed the plan returns and turns everything back over to the partnership in which all three are equal partners so that the partners together might be all in all.

The Tree of Life (22:2)

We have had reference to a river of life and now to a tree of life which bears fruit and leaves for health. This poses a question. Does man have to drink and eat to live? Is it necessary for life? Jesus Christ ate and drank with His disciples after His resurrection in His glorified body. He could eat and did, but it wasn’t necessary to sustain the life of His glorified body. At least there is no indication of that from Scripture. If so, He would have to eat to sustain His physical body or humanity at the right hand of the Father. This does not seem to fit with Scripture. Believers will have a glorified body just like His after the resurrection (cf. Phil. 3:21; 1 Cor. 15:42, 43, 52-54; 1 John 3:2). The impact of these Scriptures is that we will have an imperishable, glorified body that will not need food for sustenance after resurrection. However, the literal tree and river will be there as symbols of the abundant life that will exist in the eternal state. All men will drink of these waters and eat of this fruit evidently as an act of testimony and faith in the perpetuity or eternity of this abundant life. In Revelation 2:7 eating of the tree of life is a promise to those who overcome. In the context of all the overcomer passages of chapters 2 and 3, it may refer to some kind of superlative experience and blessing as a reward for faithfulness. Perhaps that promise is made as a reminder and a motivation to overcome the testings of this life because they simply cannot compare to the blessings to come.

In essence, the fact the tree of life is there means to be in eternity and to possess eternal life. In Genesis 3:22-24 access is forbidden because this would have perpetuated man’s mortal body with an old sin nature. So in grace, Adam and his progeny were prevented from eating of the tree. But it was different for Adam because he had a mortal, perishable body. Perhaps for us it will be much like the Lord’s Supper, a memorial of our eternal life in Christ.

When you first read the description of the tree of life in verse 2, it appears to say that the tree is in the middle of the street and on either side of the river. A better translation is “in between the broad street and the river, on each side a tree of life” (i.e., the river on one side and the street on the other). Tree singular could be collective for trees plural (cf. Ezek. 47:12). Also “on either side” could possibly mean extending, or hanging over one side and then the other.

The point is that this tree is a special attraction and has very special meaning. Why? Because of its 12 kinds of fruit produced every month. It will stand as a special memorial and symbol of the continuousness of our eternal and abundant life and of the various aspects of our eternal life in all its wonderful blessings.

The word “tree” is *xulon*. It means a piece of wood or an object fashioned out of wood and was used of the cross (Acts 5:30; 10:39; 13:29; Gal. 3:13; 1 Pet. 2:24). The tree, its fruit and leaves, may also be a perpetual reminder of the cost of our spiritual blessing and eternal health. The same thing is true with the Lord’s Supper.

Finally we read “and the leaves for the healing of nations.” “Healing” is the Greek *therapeia* from which we get our word *therapeutic*. It means literally “service, care.” The idea here is health-giving. Again men will not need to use the leaves medicinally to stay healthy, as they have throughout history. Rather they will be used in some way as a memorial of the fact that the cross—Christ being cursed on the tree for us—is the means of our eternal health (physically and spiritually).

Note the words in verse 3, “no more curse. “ The tree will stand for the removal of our spiritual sickness by the Lord Jesus Christ, being made a curse for us (cf. 1 Pet. 2:24 for the scriptural picture).

The Throne of God and the Service of the Servants (22:3)

“No more curse” is literally “and all the curse shall no longer be.” This is designed to stress again the absolute blessedness of this city and our eternal state in which there is absolutely no trace left of the curse of Adam’s sin, Satan’s rebellion, and our failures.

The throne with the servants serving points to an important principle. We stand in relation to God as sons, but we are also bondslaves who serve Him. The principle here is that eternity will not be a time of eternal idleness and uselessness, but a time when every person will be involved in a special vocation of service and activity for the Trinity. “Serve” is in a present tense and stresses the continuousness of our ministry. The Greek word here is *latreuo*, which is used primarily of divine service and worship. This teaches us that we will be totally engaged in the service of the sovereign of the universe, never to be side-tracked by personal weaknesses or needs. As His bondslaves all our needs will be perfectly provided.

Thus, the word “Him” as the object of the word “serve” is a dative of advantage in the Greek. Contextually, it means we shall serve for Him and always for His glory. Today our service and activity for the Lord is often distracted and often not for His advantage. We fail and we foul up again and again. But then it will always be for the glory and advantage of God.

The Perfect Fellowship of the New City (22:4-5)

Perfect Sight Via Face-to-Face Fellowship (22:4a)

Right after the mention of service to the Lord we read, “and they shall see His face.” Isn’t this often what we lack today in our service for the Savior? Even though our Lord promises us, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20b), and “... He Himself said, ‘I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you’” (Heb. 13:5b), in the pressures of service and the everyday trials of this life, our problem is often precisely in this very area; we fail to see the face of our Lord or to count on His presence, comfort, and support. We become occupied with our problems and fail to see Jesus and look unto Him (cf. Heb. 2:9; 12:1-2 with Psalm 16:7-11).

The face of our Lord in His ministry among men must have been a face which spoke volumes because of His character, control, love, sympathy, and understanding. Remember that the third time Peter denied the Lord during His trials, Luke tells us that “the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord...and he went out and wept bitterly” (Luke 22:61-62). The Lord only looked at Peter, but His face and those eyes said it all. One of the most important elements of communication and fellowship is not only what we say, but the way we say them, our tone of voice, and especially facial expressions. The telephone and written notes or letters are wonderful mediums of expression and communication, but nothing compares with face-to-face fellowship to communicate love, sympathy and support, or encouragement.

The word “see” in this clause is a future indicative which in Greek grammar points to a real future experience for every believer, no ifs, buts, or maybes. Today in time, seeing the Lord through our fellowship with Him in His Word, staying occupied with His divine essence and work in our lives through the promises of the Word is full of ‘ifs’ because of our own failures. Today, focusing our hearts and minds on the Lord is a wonderful potential through eyes of faith and confidence in the promises of the Word, but it is still full of the ‘ifs’ of whether or not we will look unto Jesus, keep our eyes on Him. But not in eternity. With our service then, there will always be the smiling and loving face of the Savior.

The word “see” is the Greek *horao*, which is used of both physical and spiritual (or mental) vision. Both are involved here. For the first time man in the eternal city and state will have an absolute and undiminished perspective of God both physically and spiritually.

So “seeing His face” stands first for being face to face with the Lord, in His very presence. It means having perfect fellowship and clear understanding and illumination by the light of His countenance. It stands for a fellowship

and understanding which is unblemished by our ignorance, or sins, or prejudices, or preoccupations with personalities, or anything else that might dim the light or distort the truth to our eyes or minds.

Today in Scripture, God uses anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms so we can understand ideas about what God is like. But then we will be in the direct presence of God with no fog or blurs to dim our vision of God. Today we believe in and teach the doctrine of the trinity. We know it, teach it, illustrate it, and believe it, but who can truly say he understands it? But then we will.

A Perfect Name and Identification (22:4b)

“And His name shall be on their foreheads” (cf. 7:3; 14:1; 2:17; 3:12). The name on the forehead stands as a seal and proof of ownership and belongingness. It will be our identification and guarantee that we are the Lord’s and belong to the eternal city, qualified to be there by the work of the Lamb. To help grasp the significance of this, note the following four points:

- (1) Those who took the mark of the beast on their foreheads (13:16) as a sign of their obedience and worship of the beast had their names removed from the Lamb’s book of life (Rev. 13:8; 17:8; 19:20).
- (2) The mark of the beast was either his name, a counterfeit to God’s name, or his number, 666 (13:17).
- (3) In Revelation 13:18 men are warned to carefully calculate the number of the beast and its meaning for no matter how far you carry out the number 666 it never becomes seven, the number of perfection, the number of God (cf. Rom. 3:23).
- (4) Those who have the mark of the beast fall short and are excluded from the eternal city, but those who have the name of God are accepted and belong to the eternal city because they are there through faith in the person and work of the Lamb.

Perfect Light and Illumination (22:5a)

Again we have an emphasis on the light or illuminating character of the eternal city (cf. 21:11, 23, 25). All light in the city will come directly from God’s presence which means: (a) the light in the new city will be perfect and complete (total). God who is absolute Light and in whom there is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5) can allow no darkness in the eternal city of His presence. (b) All the past sources of light, which were partial at best, will be rendered inoperative or superseded by the perfection and infinite light of the personal presence of God Himself; this includes both physical and spiritual light. So our passage says, “and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun.” Why? “Because the Lord shall illumine them.” As I sit at my desk writing this it is late morning, the sun is high, yet its light is dimmed because of fog and cloudy skies, but no such conditions can occur in the eternal city of God’s glorious presence either physically or spiritually.

Perfect Exaltation (22:5b)

“And they (the saints) shall reign forever and ever.” Why is this inserted here? I believe there is an important connection. Man originally lost his capacity to reign over the creation of God because he listened to the one of darkness. Our reigning with the Lord in the eternal state proceeds from our fellowship and from the illuminating presence of God and from this there can and will be no break or interference.

In summary of this section of Revelation, what do we have in the eternal and blessed city of the New Jerusalem?

- (1) Perfect restoration (no more curse, paradise regained),
- (2) Perfect administration (the very throne of God and the Lamb shall be on it),
- (3) Perfect subordination (His servants shall serve Him),
- (4) Perfect transformation (the saints shall see His face and we shall be like Him [1 John 3:2]),
- (5) Perfect identification (His Name on our foreheads),
- (6) Perfect illumination (He Himself shall illumine us),

(7) Perfect exaltation (we shall reign forever and ever).

Here are seven perfect conditions pointing to one absolutely perfect state. Hallelujah, what a Savior! How great is our salvation in Christ!!!

Lesson 31: The Epilogue (22:6-21)

The Concluding Promises of the Prophecy (22:6-16)

6 And he said to me, "These words are faithful and true"; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must shortly take place.

7 "And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book."

8 And I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. 9 And he said to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book; worship God."

10 And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.

11 "Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and let the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and let the one who is holy, still keep himself holy." 12 "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. 13 "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." 14 Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. 15 Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying. 16 "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star."

The Promise of Faithfulness (22:6)

There are perhaps no more significant and awesome words in Scripture than those of this epilogue. In these verses we have the manifold testimony of the voices of the angel, Jesus, the Spirit, the bride, and John. These verses are full of encouragement, declaration, warning, and response to God. They are tremendously significant; may we read them with care and attentiveness. Listen to these words in terms of your entire life, your lifestyle, purposes, goals, priorities, and commitment to God, His faithful Word, and the soon coming Savior.

"And he said to me, These words are faithful and true" declares the certainty and reliability of God's Word. Literally the Greek says, "these words (i.e., of this prophecy), faithful and true." This is a nominal sentence with no verb expressed. It is understood of course, but this is somewhat emphatic and stresses the ideas of faithful and true. "Faithful" is the Greek *pistos* and means, "reliable, trustworthy." "True" is *alethinos* and means, "real, genuine, versus spurious or false."

In contrast to the many human viewpoint foundations or cunningly devised fables upon which men try to build their lives stands the faithful and true Word from God. Man's viewpoint without the Bible must be built upon speculation, human reason, and experience, all of which are very unreliable due to man's condition in sin, his short life span, his deductive thinking, his constant tendency to interpret facts with his presuppositions, his limited experience and the amount of knowledge he can retain and use, and of course, due to the unseen and demonic forces which deceive and warp his viewpoint. All of this makes man's human viewpoint ideas about as reliable as a lily pad for a foundation, especially in spiritual matters.

The real issue here and throughout Scripture is that which makes the Bible, or any portion of it such as this prophecy, faithful and true. Behind Scripture or behind "these words" is "the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets." "Lord" is *kurios* and emphasizes God's sovereignty, universal power, and authority. "God" is *theos* which brings out the aspect of God's divine essence as God. So, in contrast to man and his weaknesses there is God who, in all His divine essence (sovereignty, omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, veracity, etc.), stands behind these

words ensuring their accuracy, reliability, and truthfulness. This is made clear by the next clause, “of the spirits of the prophets.” The preposition “of” represents in the Greek text what grammarians call a genitive of rule or control. God is the sovereign Lord in control of the spirits of the prophets (cf. 2 Pet. 1:20-21). “Spirits” refer to the human spirits within the prophets who were the human agents in the reception and transmission of Scripture.

The same God who inspired the Old Testament and the rest of the New Testament here authenticates the words of the book of Revelation as well. Two things are authenticated: (a) that these words (i.e., the prophecy) are faithful and true, but also (b) that it must all shortly take place.

“The things which must shortly take place” would be better translated as, “that which must quickly come to pass.” What must come to pass quite clearly refers to the future events, the events of the Tribulation as described in this book (Rev. 4-19). As seen before, the primary sense of “quickly” is that once these events start, the events of this book and their judgments will occur rapidly. But there is also a note of imminency (cf. 1:3; and 22:10 “the time is near”). The future is viewed, in God’s reckoning of time (2 Pet. 3:9), as imminent and without the necessity of any intervening time periods. After the church age, which is culminated by the rapture of the church, comes the Tribulation—and that could be just around the corner.

The Promise of His Coming (22:7a)

With the mention of these events that must come quickly and that are next in the program of God, our Lord immediately addresses John and says, “behold, I am coming quickly.” Here is that event, not a time period, which must come to pass, i.e., Christ’s return for the church. Here again is the blessed hope, the coming of Christ for the church which keeps us out of the hour of trial (3:10).

Note three things here about this blessed promise:

(1) It is introduced with “behold.” In the Greek this is a demonstrative particle used to arouse attention and enliven the setting. Christ our Deliverer is coming for us; this will be the most momentous event of our lives.

(2) “I am coming” in the Greek is a present tense verb. It is what we call a futuristic or prophetic present. This is used of an event which is so certain that it is regarded as already in the process of coming to pass.

(3) “Quickly” is the adjective *tachus* which means “swift, quick, speedy.” In the neuter singular, as here (*tachu*) it is used as an adverb to mean “quickly, at once, or suddenly (cf. 1:3; 3:3, 11; 16:15). The point is that our Lord is coming, and when He comes, He is coming suddenly, without warning, as a thief who comes without announcement. Then comes the Tribulation with all its horror. If one is not ready, that is one does not know Jesus Christ as his Savior, he will find himself in the Tribulation, in the events which must come to pass shortly or next.

The Promise of Blessing to Those Who Heed (22:7b)

Here is another of the beatitudes of Scripture, the pronouncement of blessing or happiness upon those who comply with certain imperatives and principles of the Word, not meritoriously, but out of faith in the truth of God. It describes a state of blessing which God promises for both now and the future life. It means the capacity for happiness now even in the midst of the trials. But it also describes the blessing or happiness which comes from facing life with the promises of the Word.

“Blessed” is the Greek *makarios* which means literally “happy.” But it describes not the boisterous, fun and games happiness of the world, but the inner happiness and spiritual contentment which comes from knowing and trusting the Lord by keeping His Word and living by its truth.

With the words, “is he who heeds...” we are pointed to the recipients of this happiness. Literally we can translate the Greek, “happy (blessed) is the one who continues to keep the words (plural) of the prophecy...” The Greek describes one who is characterized by the action of the verb, the action of keeping. This person is characterized by consistency in the realm of keeping these words. But what does it mean to keep?

The verb is *te,reo,,* “guard, watch over, protect, keep in custody, observe, fulfill, and pay attention or give heed to.” It is especially used of the teachings of the Word. Its equivalent in the Old Testament is the Hebrew *shamar*, “keep, guard.” All of these ideas have application, though the main point is obedience, the personal application of the truth.

Now what are we to keep? We are to keep “the words of the prophecy of the book.” “Words” is plural and it is the Greek term *logos* which, in the singular, is used of the Lord, the Word (John 1:1) and of the Scripture, the Word of God (Heb. 4:12). The use here of *logos* in the plural may suggest three things to us: (a) It stresses the importance and need of knowing the details of this book, as well as the rest of the Bible. The more we know and apply, the greater our capacity for real happiness. (b) The plural looks at the individual words, stressing the concept of inspiration down to the very words themselves. The understanding of concepts is based on the understanding of the words. (c) The plural of *logos* was however, also used of specific sayings, or teachings (doctrines), or parts of a whole work (cf. LXX, Exodus 34:28; Deut. 10:4). In this we see the necessity and blessing which comes from knowing the various doctrines or specific teachings of Revelation.

But how does one heed or guard the various doctrinal categories of Revelation and its teaching? (a) We keep it in custody, i.e., we learn it, store it, as a result of careful study. (b) We watch over it, protect what we have learned, i.e., we renew it, review it, keep it fresh and on our heart (Rev. 2:4-5). (c) We pay attention to it, obey it, i.e., we live in the light of it, we apply it to our lives.

For church age saints, finding happiness and spiritual joy through the words of this prophecy involves such things as: (a) Observing the warnings of chapters 2 and 3 to the church, warnings against dead, cold orthodoxy, apostasy, immorality, materialism, etc. (b) Living constantly in light of the presence of Christ in our midst and of His imminent coming, knowing that our work in the Lord is never in vain. (c) Carrying on a vital witness, having an open door to the unbelieving world in view of the coming Tribulation and the lake of fire that we might see men snatched from hell (Jude 23). (d) Living as sojourners who refuse to become bogged down with materialism and who live with a view to the eternal city. (e) Enduring the trials of this life during this age of darkness, seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, the glory which is to follow. (f) Remembering that God’s plan is being accomplished, that He is sovereign and still on the throne as we see this old world moving farther and farther away from the Lord and the absolutes of His Word.

These are just a few of the practical applications of this book and its various truths. There are many, many more. See how many you can think of.

The Promise and Declaration—God Alone is Worthy of Worship (22:8-9)

The Response to the Message (22:8)

First we read, “I (kago,, literally, “and I”), John, am the one who heard and saw these things,” i.e., the glorious things of the eternal city. Why does John identify himself here at this point? Because of the tremendous encouragement of these things and their overwhelming and awesome nature, he wanted his readers to be impressed with the fact that he really did see these things under divine inspiration.

Literally the Greek text has “the one hearing and seeing these things...” The Greek has the present tense. Though the visions were at that point a past historical fact, John used the vivid historical present tense in order to emphasize the vividness and reality of these revelations which he had received.

Again, as in 19:10, John is overawed by the things the angel had revealed to him. In the process, he again lost the biblical perspective and fell down to worship at the feet of the angelic messenger. The repetition of this (see 19:10) brings out the impending and imminent threat of this problem for both the messenger and the messengeree. The message of God’s Word is designed to focus us on the Lord and to enhance our worship of Him, but, if we are not careful we can lose sight of this in our excitement and appreciation of the Word and get our eyes on the messenger. When this happens we can, if we are not careful, become guilty of the carnal divisiveness of the Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor. 1:11-13; 3:3-4; 4:6-7; 1 Cor. 10:12).

The Rebuke of the Messenger (22:9)

Here we see the responsibility of the messenger to guard against such responses for his own spiritual equilibrium as well as that of those to whom he ministers the Word. The main emphasis is that God, who is the Creator of all that John had seen, is alone worthy of such worship.

The Promise that this Book is Not Sealed (22:10-11)

In this command that John is not to seal this book we actually have a promise that this book of apocalyptic revelation can be studied and understood by any who are positive to know God and His Word.

To seal up a book means to conceal, hide its message. “Seal up” is the Greek *sphragizo*, which means “to put a seal on something,” either to “mark it, identify it, certify it, or to close it, keep it secret.” This book, unlike Daniel 12:4, was never to be sealed and was meant to be understood and applied from the day John received it. Why? Because the time is near, imminent, and people need the truth of this book to understand what God is doing and to prepare for what is coming, i.e., to live with a view to these coming events through the perspective of eternity; the contents of this book were needed immediately by the churches and those living in the church age. In view of the imminent return of Christ, critical choices always need to be made.

Verse 11, which at first seems fatalistic, is closely related to verse 10, the unsealed character of this book and the imminent return of the Lord. Actually it is evangelistic. It is an appeal to men to respond to this book, for if one does not, there is no other message which can change him. Concerning this verse Walvoord writes:

If the warnings of the book are not sufficient, there is no more that God has to say. The wicked must continue in their wicked way and be judged by the Lord when He comes. The same rule, however, applies to the righteous. Their reaction to the prophecy, of course, will be different, but the exhortation in their case is to continue in righteousness and holiness. It is an either/or proposition with no neutrality possible. There is a sense also in which present choices fix character; a time is coming when change will be impossible. Present choices will become permanent in character.¹

The Promise of Reward at the Lord’s Coming (22:12)

Throughout the New Testament one finds repeated references to the return of the Lord for His bride, the church. Each time there is either a reference to the rewards which will be given or there is some sort of admonishment to godly and purposeful living. This life is a preparation time for eternity and we are to live this life with a view to eternity—God’s glory and our rewards or positions of responsibility in the eternal state.

Our tendency is to forget why we are here and to live as earth dwellers. You know the slogan, “You only go around once in this life, and you need to get all the gusto you can.” We are all going to be with Jesus Christ as believers with the possibility of special rewards and responsibilities, but the way we live while here on earth will determine just how we will reign with the Lord, our specific place of responsibility.

So again, as in verse 7, the Lord declares the suddenness, the absolute surety and imminency of His return. But here He emphasizes to us His return will mean a dispensing of rewards according to a believer’s faithfulness, “according to what he has done,” i.e., according to how a person has used his time and talents. Salvation is totally by grace, but rewards, though also by grace, are dependent on our works as we have responded to God’s grace.

This is then not only a promise of rewards, but an exhortation and an incentive to godly living and service. This, however, must not be disassociated from the emphasis of verses 7b and 10 which stress the need to know and understand the words of this prophecy, and ultimately Scripture in general. Why? Because the only way we can redeem the time is by living in the Word. The Word of God is both our motivation and correction.

The Promise and Statement of Christ’s Eternality (22:13)

Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. This, plus the other two titles given here of our Lord (cf. 1:8, 11, 17; 2:8; 21:6), all emphasize the concept that our Lord, who directly spoke to John, is both the beginning (source) as well as the goal and consummation of all things; He is the Eternal Word. This verse confirms and authenticates Christ’s capacity and ability to fulfill these promises (cf. Col. 1:15f; 2:3; John 1:1; 8:58).

¹ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1966, p. 334-335.

The Promise of Blessing to Those Who Wash Their Robes (22:14-15)

Here is the seventh and final beatitude in Revelation. Here the word “blessed” is plural, *makarioi*, which strongly brings out the multitude of blessings given to the robe-washers. The robe stands for one’s condition of righteousness. A dirty robe stands for being without righteousness, falling short of the glory of God. A washed robe is one which has been made white and clean by faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. It means the person stands in the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. It stands for imputed righteousness or justification by faith in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:19, 21; Phil. 3:9).

The tense of the verb is present, but it is what we call in Greek grammar, the perfective present; it describes the abiding results, “washed robes” (cf. Rev. 7:14; 3:5).

Some translations read “who do His commandments” instead of “who wash their robes,” but the older manuscripts have the reading of the NASB and NIV. This is also the most accurate theologically. The reference here is to those who qualify for entrance into the city where they have the right to the tree of life. Though obedience to the commandments of the Lord should be a characteristic of believers, and may even give evidence of one’s faith, entrance into eternity is obtained by faith alone in the person and work of Christ, not by obedience or works (Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5; John 3:16).

The word “right” in the clause “that they may have the right” is the Greek *exousia* which means (a) the right or authority to do something, or (b) the power or capacity to do something. Believers, by virtue of the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ and their glorified and sinless bodies, will have both the right and capacity to dwell in the eternal city in righteousness.

By contrast, unbelievers, who are excluded, are described in verse 15 in terms which bring out the habitual character that they are left with because, having failed to believe in the Savior, they must continue in their sin (John 8:24). The unregenerate remain in their unregenerate condition and character throughout eternity, and the promise is that our eternal home cannot be contaminated by the evil of those with such character as we see every day in our present world. Not only are they excluded from the eternal city and fellowship with God, but they remain in the misery and unhappiness of their fallen state, itself, a judgment of the greatest magnitude. One of the joys the true believer looks forward to is release from his sinful state, the loss of the sinful nature. Read and study carefully Romans 8:18-30 with 6:15-25.

The Certification of the Promises to the Churches (22:16)

16 “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star.”

First, we see that Jesus Himself sent His angel to bear witness of these things to John and for the churches as instruction, warning, and comfort. “I, Jesus” stresses the fact that Jesus, the man who walked the earth but who is now at God’s right hand, is the One who bears this solemn testimony to certify its reality.

Second, though much of this book will occur after the church is gone (Rev. 3:10), it is for us to know and understand. This information is important to our spiritual equilibrium. It aids our understanding of the future and shows us where the present world is going. It gives greater perspective for what is really important today (cf. Heb. 10:24-25; Titus 2:11f). Should this not cause us all to be more involved in reaching the lost for Christ as our next verse, verse 17, will show? Please note, this is the first occurrence of the term “church,” the Greek *ekkle,sia* since chapter 3. This indicates that the church is not in the Tribulation. Remember that chapters 6 through 19, which deal with the Tribulation, also deals with Israel. It is the time of Jacob’s trouble and Daniel’s 70th week. For this reason the church is not present or mentioned.

Third, so how does our Lord certify and assure the facts of these things? By who and what He is in relation to Israel and the church, the root and offspring of David and the bright and morning star. The word “root” may refer to a root as the source of something or to a shoot, that which comes from a root. The latter is the meaning here (cf. Isa. 11). Such an understanding here also fits with the idea of “an offspring of David.” Like a stump, Israel as a nation was cut down and dispersed. But Christ as a shoot which will spring up from David, the legal heir to the throne

through Joseph and physically from David through Mary, will fulfill all of God's promises and covenants. It is He who will restore Israel to the place of blessing (cf. Rom. 11).

"The bright and morning star." Literally the Greek has "the star, the bright one, the morning one." (Compare Num. 24:17, Balaam's prophecy; Matt. 2:2, the statement of the magi, and Rev. 2:28.) What does a morning star do? It heralds and assures us of a new day and of the conclusion of the night (cf. Rom. 13:11-14). So Jesus, as the morning star, heralds and assures us of the conclusion of this night season and the coming of a new day which will begin by His return for the church at the rapture to be followed by the glories of the millennium and then the eternal state at the end of the Tribulation. For Israel, Christ is seen as "the Sun of righteousness" (Mal. 4:2).

The Invitation and the Promise of Life without Cost (22:17)

17 And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.

Following this assurance, we immediately read "and the Spirit and the bride say, 'come.'" This refers to the Holy Spirit and the church, both of whom, along with the Word, are God's agents of evangelism which is the focus of this verse.

"Come" is a present imperative, used perhaps like an aoristic present meaning, "come today." It is an invitation for men to come to Christ. It reminds us of the concept of Isaiah 55:6 "Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near," Psalm 32:6 "Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time when You may be found," and 2 Corinthians 6:2b "... behold, now is 'the acceptable time,' behold, now is 'the day of salvation.'" This expresses the responsibility of believers to invite men to Christ and of the responsibility and need of those invited to respond.

Then we read, "let the one who hears." This refers to any person who really hears the message of this book. The effect of this hearing should be a desire to reach others for Christ. So they also say "come."

The final clauses of the verse refers to anyone who wants the life which our Lord seeks to offer. The invitation to come and take is an urgent command for the day will arrive when it is too late. Now is a day of grace, but a day of judgment is imminent and impending. Though multitudes can and will come to Christ during the Tribulation, it will still be a day when receiving Jesus Christ and being a believer will be the most difficult in man's history.

The Warning of the Prophecy (22:18-19)

18 I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book; 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.

In these verses we have a solemn warning against tampering with the meaning and truth of this book. More on this in a moment, but for now, note these phrases which emphasize the Word of God—all of which occur in this final chapter of God's Word.

- Verse 7—The words of the prophecy of this book.
- Verse 9—The words of this book.
- Verse 10—The words of the prophecy of this book.
- Verse 18—The words of the prophecy of this book.
- Verse 19—The words of the book of this prophecy
- Verse 19—Which are written in this book.

As William R. Newell said in his book on Revelation, “Beware lest the jealousy of God burn like fire—for He has exalted His Word above all His Name (Psalm 138:2).”

Then notice the emphasis of these words, “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify” (22:16), “I testify to every man that hears” (22:18), and “He who testifies these things says” (22:20).

Jesus Christ, the logos, the revelation of God, has borne witness to man of the truth. He did this first in the Old Testament Scriptures, then by His incarnation and life among men which was culminated and authenticated by the testimony of His death, resurrection, resurrection appearances, and ascension. Then He sent the Holy Spirit and the canon of Scripture was gradually completed—being completed with this book of Revelation before A.D. 90. So here He not only guards the words of the book, but absolutely declares Himself as the witness and guarantee of these things.

Therefore, we have had the emphasis in this book, “He that hath ears let him hear.” Are you positive to know the truth of God? My friends, God has revealed Himself to man and this revelation is found in the Scripture, and to a very limited degree in nature (Rom. 1:18f). Man, then, is without excuse. God can be known, but the details of this knowledge comes only through Scripture. Thus God says, “But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word” (Isa. 66:2b).

It is the truth of Scripture which sets men free so God guards His Word carefully because it is the only means by which man really knows God (John 8: 32; 17:17; 2 Pet. 1:2-4).

So now in verse 18 we have a solemn warning, but please note that the urgency and importance of this warning is supported by the solemn testimony of Jesus Christ Himself when He says, “I testify unto every man who hears...”

The First Offense with its Penalty (22:18)

The Offense

“If anyone adds to them,” i.e., to the words of this prophecy. There are other solemn warnings in the Bible about tampering with God’s Word (Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Prov. 30:5-6; Rev. 1:3). Alan Johnson writes:

These verses should not be taken as a warning against adding anything to the Bible. Early interpreters understood them as a warning to false prophets not to alter the sense of John’s prophecy—i.e., Revelation (so Irenaeus *Contra Haereses* 30.2)... Verses 18-10 are a strong warning against any who would tamper with the contexts of “this book” (Rev), either textually or in its moral and theological teaching (cf. 1 Co 16:22)²

But what applies here, surely applies to the whole of Scripture because the book of Revelation is the last book of the Bible. Jude tells believers to “contend earnestly for the faith once and for all received.” Jude was saying there was a completed body of truth, a body of truth which became preserved, a completed canon of Scripture. Revelation is the final book of the Bible. All the major themes of Scripture find their end and culmination in this book. No other is needed. It wraps up the revelation of God and brings man into the glorious eternal state. Thus, to tamper with Revelation is in essence to tamper with the whole. Walvoord says:

No one can dare add to the Word of God except in blatant unbelief and denial that the Word is indeed God’s own message to man. Likewise, no one should dare take away from the words of the book, since to do so is to do despite to the inspired Word of God. What a solemn warning this is to critics who have tampered with this book and other portions of Scripture in arrogant self-confidence that they are equipped intellectually and spiritually to determine what is true and what is not true in the Word of God. Though not stated in detail, the point of these two verses is that a child of God who reveres Him will recognize at once that this is the Word of God.³

² Alan Johnson, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12, Frank E. Gaebelin, general editor, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, pp. 602-603.

³ Walvoord, p. 338.

So how does one add to the Bible or revelation? One way is by claiming new revelation, that the Bible and the book of Revelation are not enough (as with the Book of Mormon or any other religious writing that claims to be from God). Another way is by claiming advanced knowledge in spiritual matters and that the Bible is not the answer or simply wrong (2 John 9). Liberal humanists are grossly guilty of this. Of course such action not only is adding but subtracting. The point is that this reveals a blatant unbelief in the Bible which denies that the Word of God is the revelation and testimony of God. Such action is a clear evidence of personal unbelief and rejection of Jesus Christ.

The Penalty

“God shall add to him the plagues...” In what sense will God add the plagues to the offender? First, the unbeliever, the person who does not believe the Word and so also rejects Jesus Christ, will go into the Tribulation. He will, therefore, face its plagues should he be living when the Tribulation comes. Second, should he die first without Jesus Christ, then he will still face the wrath of God from which the plagues proceed and spend eternity in the lake of fire.

The Second Offense with its Penalty (22:19)

The Offense: “And if any man shall take away...”

In other words, if he rejects any portion of Revelation, since Revelation is the culmination to the Word, this very well may have application to the whole canon of Scripture. So, if anyone denies the plain teaching of Scripture regarding the Lord Jesus Christ and the great testimonies of this book, he is doing despite to the inspired Word of God. This is a grave warning to the critics of higher criticism who, in blatant unbelief, have tampered with the books of the Bible in arrogant self-confidence thinking that they are spiritually and intellectually competent to judge the truthfulness of the Bible.

As Walvoord pointed out, the point of these two verses is that the true child of God who believes the Lord, will recognize this as a portion of the Bible as well as the rest of Scripture.

The Penalty

“God shall take away his part from the tree of life...” What does this mean?

To use these verses, however, as a proof that a child of God once saved and born into the family of God can lose his Salvation is, of course, applying this passage out of context. This passage assumes that a child of God will not tamper with these scriptures. It is the contrast of unbelief with faith, the blinded, fallen intellect of man in contrast to the enlightened Spirit taught believer. Although the true child of God may not comprehend the meaning of the entire book of Revelation, he will recognize in it a declaration of his hope and that which has been assured to him in grace by his salvation in Christ.⁴

The Benediction (22:20-21)

20 He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming quickly.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. 21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

These final words of testimony are yet another declaration of the promise of Christ’s imminent return: “Surely I come quickly.” With this announcement, in contrast to those in verses 7 and 12, this declaration adds the word “Yes,” which is the Greek *nai*, “yea, verily,” a particle noting an affirmation, agreement, or emphasis. To strengthen this even more, this declaration is followed by the word “Amen” (Greek, *ame,n*) often translated “verily, truly.”

The announcement “I come quickly” is therefore buttressed before and after by words used to emphasize the certainty of it. With the word *amen*, however, John begins his own prayer of response

⁴ Walvoord.

to this announcement: “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.” Though the book of Revelation concerns itself with a broad expanse of divine dealing with men including the time of Tribulation, the millennium, and the eternal state, for John the important event is the coming of the Lord for him at the rapture of the church. For this his heart longs, not only because he is on the bleak Island of Patmos in suffering and exile but because of the glorious prospect which his eyes have beheld and his ears have heard.⁵

The Tribulation has stressed the wrath of a holy God. But for the true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ there is only grace, grace, marvelous grace. My friends, do you know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ? So John, as a representative of the Lord Jesus, closes with the benediction, “The Grace of the Lord Jesus be with all, Amen.”

As you know, the Old Testament ends with the word “curse,” for it is the warning given an earth whose future hangs upon that of Israel—upon the conversion of the remnant and upon the receiving of the preaching of Elijah, . . . just before Christ should return. The law could make no absolute promise, and so God’s Word by Malachi ends, “Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.”

But now Christ has come and put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And, although the book of The Revelation has had to uncover the fearful rebellion of the earth, and the necessary and dire judgments of God; yet upon those who have believed, to His saints, the benediction of divine favor rests. Just as Christ lifted up His hands and blessed them over against Bethany, at His ascension, so all His saints are now—under his pierced, uplifted hands of blessing. Amen.⁶

A conclusion such as this is wholly appropriate for this prophetic message addressed to the ancient church and, indeed, to the whole body of Christ. The benediction is reminiscent of Paul’s usual practice (cf. the final verses in his letters). Nothing less than God’s grace is required for us to be overcomers and triumphantly enter the Holy City of God, where we shall reign with him forever and ever.⁷

Let us each draw near to our glorious Savior, who is revealed in such dramatic ways in this awesome book, that we may experience His power on our lives, represent Him faithfully as His servants. And all the while, may we be praying and anticipating with John, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

⁵ Walvoord, p. 338-339.

⁶ William R. Newell, *The Book of Revelation*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1966, p. 369.

⁷ *NIV Bible Commentary*, electronic version.

Appendix 1: Support for Imminency

That Christ's return or coming is imminent is supported by the following:

(1) In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul first addressed the issue of those who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord. Note that he says "we" and not simply "those." In the Greek text, the "we" is emphatic and seems to be designed to bring out an important point: The apostle included himself among those who could be alive at the Lord's return. The clear implication is that the coming of the Lord and the things described there were imminent and could have occurred in Paul's day. Any other viewpoint here fails to take into account why Paul used the emphatic "we" instead of the third person, "those."

(2) In John 21:22 Jesus said to Peter concerning the apostle John, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?" It is interesting that Jesus' last words recorded by John in this Gospel refer to His return. And though Jesus gave no indication as to when He would return and that Peter would die before His return, the implication here is that He could have come during John's lifetime which at least suggests imminency.

(3) In 2 Corinthians 5:1 Paul used the third class condition to speak about the very real possibility of his death, but the use of this third class construction left open the possibility that he might not see death. If he did see death, there was the sure fact of the future resurrection, but the use of the third class condition may show that he also had the hope of the return of the Lord and the experience described in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 was also a possibility because of the blessed hope.

(4) In Philippians 3:20 and in Titus 2:13, the apostle Paul spoke of the imminent hope of the coming of Christ when our bodies will be transformed into the glorious likeness of Christ's resurrection body. Paul used the present tense in both passages showing that he and all believers of all ages should be waiting expectantly for the personal coming of Christ. He was not and we are not to be waiting for a series of events that must take place first before the return of the Lord, but for the Lord Himself.

(5) Concerning the return of the Lord, the apostle divided believers into two classes—the living and the dead. Because Christ's return is imminent and yet, because no man knows when it will be, the apostle sometimes included himself in three ways:

- He included himself with the dead, with those who would experience resurrection (2 Cor. 4:14).
- Sometimes he included himself with the living who would experience transformation (1 Thess. 4:17; 1 Cor. 15:51-52).
- And sometimes he included himself in the category of either possibility (2 Cor. 5:1).

"One of the wonderful things about the hope of His coming is that it burns brightly in the hearts of each generation of Christians regardless of how long His return is delayed" (Ryrie, *First Thessalonians*, p. 64). "Longing for the Parousia of Christ, which is certain to come, yet not afraid of death, which may possibly come first, is, then, the characteristic attitude of each generation of Christians."¹

This means none of the signs connected with the Lord's return to earth at His second advent as mentioned in Matthew 24 were necessary before His return for the church. Since signs herald Christ's advent to earth in the form of the Tribulation judgments (Rev. 6-19), but none are necessary for His return for the church, His coming for the church must occur at least seven years before His advent to earth.

When will this be? We simply do not know and Paul did not know. But the more we see world events coming together for the conditions needed for the Tribulation like Israel's return to Palestine, the European nations banning together, and the rise of one world thinking in the new age mentality, the closer His return for the church must be.

¹ C. F. Hogg and W. E. Vine, *The Epistle of First Thessalonians*, Pickering & Inglis: London, 1929, p. 138.

Appendix 2: The Nature of the Divine Blessings of Grace and Peace

For many believers, the concept of grace goes little beyond the basic definition of “unmerited favor” or “the free gift of God,” but since grace is at the very heart, indeed, the very foundation of true Christianity, it is extremely important to think more precisely and have a better grasp of this important word and its truth.

The ramifications of God’s grace to us in Christ affects our lives on every hand. Throughout the New Testament the effects of God’s grace are emphasized. Everywhere we turn, we run into this word (114 verses in the NASB, and 104 references in the NIV; the differences stemming from different translations of certain passages). In fact, the Lord Himself is described as the very epitome and manifestation of God’s grace (Tit. 2:11).

The doctrine of God’s grace in Christ is multi-sided. Grace touches every area of truth or doctrine in one way or another. Every aspect of doctrine is related to grace. It is no wonder grace is an important word and one that Paul desires to be experienced by all.

What Exactly is Grace?

A Basic Definition—lexical

The Greek word for grace is *charis*. Its basic idea is simply “non-meritorious or unearned favor, favor or blessing bestowed as a gift, freely and never as merit for work performed.”

Expanded Definition—theological

Grace is “that which God does for mankind through His Son, which mankind cannot earn, does not deserve, and will never merit.”¹

Grace is all that God freely and non-meritoriously does for man and is free to do for man on the basis of Christ’s person and work on the cross. *Grace, one might say, is the work of God for man and encompasses everything we receive from God* (cf. Eph. 1:3 with 1:6 and John 6:27-29).

Remember, the coming of Christ is described as the manifestation of God’s grace. “Grace is summed up in the name, person, and work of the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:14,16; Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 2:11).”²

Description—an expanded explanation

The Characteristics of Grace

(1) Grace stresses God’s character and man’s sinfulness, while mercy stresses God’s strength and man’s helplessness. Grace finds its necessity in the fact of God’s holiness and in the sinfulness of man; in the nature of God as the creator and man as the creature.

(2) Grace is opposed to and excludes any idea of works for merit, works done as a means of blessing or as payment for what is done. Grace means you never deserve it nor can you earn it even by the old fashion way. The moment one adds works to gain favor with God, you go from grace to meritorious living (Rom. 4:4; 11:6). Note: Eph. 4:1, in a manner fitting, not in a manner that merits God’s love.

(3) But at the same time, grace is the fountain from which good works are to be produced in the Christian’s life when appropriated by faith (Tit. 2:11; 2 Tim. 2:1; 1 Cor. 15:9-11). In other words, Grace gives power and motivation

¹ Charles Swindoll, *Growing Deep in the Christian Life*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1986, p. 416.

² Swindoll, p. 416.

for Christ-like living (Rom. 12:1; Eph. 4:1; 6:10; 2 Tim. 2:1). Titus 2:11 teaches us that God's grace in Christ is a dynamic means of instruction on the Christian life. It literally teaches us how we should live.

(4) Though grace is the New Testament way of life, it still contains rules and imperatives that God expects us to live by not as a means of merit, but because of and through God's grace; in other words, grace is not antinomian or anti-law (1 Cor. 9:21; Rom 6:14; 8:1f). As Titus 2:12f teaches us, God's grace in Christ demands the denial of the wrong things in life and direction and obedience toward the right things. It becomes quite evident from this that grace never means unbridled living or doing as one pleases for there is the Grace of God (Rom. 5:20-6:1f; Gal. 5:13). As Ryrie has wisely put it, "The final cause of the revelation of the grace of God in Christ is not creed, but character."³

(5) Grace glorifies God because it reveals God's person, His glory and excellence (Rom. 4:1f; Eph. 1:6; 2:8, 9; 2 Pet. 1:2-4). God's gracious salvation and work for man in Christ is to the "praise of the glory of His grace" (Eph. 1:6).

(6) Grace guarantees the believer's salvation. It makes it impossible for any man to get out of the plan of God positionally. Why? Because salvation depends on the character and work of God in Christ and not on man's record for no matter how hard man tries, he always falls short of God's holy character (Rom. 8:33-39).

(7) Grace guarantees us of God's love and provision for anything we might face in life (Rom. 8:32-39).

The Blessings of Grace

Covered here are four main areas or blessings of God's grace.

(1) Though sinful and deserving of God's wrath, grace means the **Blessings of Acceptance** (Eph. 1:6). Grace means we are completely accepted because of the perfect work of Christ which redeems us (Rom. 3:24), reconciles us (2 Cor. 5:19-21), forgives us (Rom. 3:25; Eph. 1:6,7), delivers us (Col. 1:13), justifies us (Rom. 3:24; 5:1), and glorifies us (Rom. 8:30). Note 1 Cor. 1:29-30.

(2) Though weak and without capacity for spiritual things, grace means the **Blessing of Enablement**, spiritual power and capacity to live the Christian life (1 Cor. 15:10; Phil. 4:13). Special divine ability is secured for the believer under and in the grace of God which is ours in Christ. This is stressed by the following: (a) No longer under Law, but under grace (Rom. 6:14; 2 Cor. 3:6-13). (b) Christ in you, the hope of glory (Col. 1:27). (c) Baptized and circumcised in Christ unto new life potential (Rom. 6:4f; Col. 2:11). (d) Indwelt by the Spirit of God for power or ability to live the Christian life (Rom. 8:2f).

(3) Though in Adam and dead in sin, grace means the **Blessings of a New Position** (Eph. 1:3; 2:1-5). The believer in Christ, under grace, has a new position in Christ which brings into the believer's life every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3; Col. 2:10). This means the gift of such things as: (a) Every believer a priest—members of a royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5,9). (b) Citizens of heaven and thereby left here on earth as ambassadors for Christ (Phil. 3:20; 2 Cor. 5:20). (c) Children of God, members of God's family (Eph. 5:1). (d) Adopted as adult sons with all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities (Gal. 4:5). (e) Gifted for ministry (1 Pet. 4:10; 1 Cor. 12:4-7).

(4) Finally, though cut off from God and bound for hell, grace means **the Blessings of an Eternal Inheritance**, one that is imperishable, undefiled, that will not fade away, and reserved in heaven for believers (1 Pet. 1:4).

The great need is grace orientation and its multiplication (1 Pet. 1:2f) This comes through the knowledge of the Word and faith.

The Hazard

The great hazard is grace disorientation. But what does that mean?

(1) The Hazard Defined. Grace disorientation occurs when we fail of the grace of God (Heb. 12:15). When we fail of God's grace, we always turn to our own solutions, strategies, and methods for handling life which range all the way from humanism and legalism (ignoring God's Grace we depend on self [Gal. 5:1-5]) to the opposite pole, license (using God's grace as an occasion for the flesh [Gal. 5:13]).

³ Charles C. Ryrie, *The Grace of God*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1962, p. 53.

(2) The Hazard Depicted. Biblical pictures to warn us of the danger. The Bible has a number of word picture which portray this constant problem with man: leaning on the arm of the flesh which leaves one in desert like conditions (Jer. 17:5), hewing out broken cisterns that hold no water (Jer. 2:13), warring according to the flesh or using human weapons against spiritual forces (2 Cor. 10:3), leaning on the staff of a sharp reed of man’s solutions that pierces the hand (Isa. 36:6), walking by our own firebrands to light our path (Isa. 50:10-11).

(3) Forms this Hazard Takes.

HUMAN STRATEGIES FOR LIVING	
From	To
Indifference	Overwork, extreme business
Escape mechanisms	Defense mechanisms
Loss of control	Rigid control
License	Legalism

(4) Consequences of the Hazard. When we fail of God’s grace, we fail to exercise faith in God’s provision which leaves us operating in our own strength. This nullifies the power of God in one’s life, dishonors God, quenches the Spirit’s power, results in the production of the works of the flesh (mere human good and carnality), and general misery (Rom. 4:4; 11:6; Gal. 3:1f; 5:1-5).

Definition of Peace

The Greek word for peace is eire,,ne,,. It apparently comes from eiro,, which means “to join.” It means a state of untroubled tranquillity where there is no war or dividing faction or enmity. It means a state of harmony and well being. But in the use of this word and its application in Scripture, there are several aspects of peace which God’s grace gives.

Kinds of Peace

(1) The Peace of Reconciliation, Peace with God. It may refer to the peace of salvation where man is brought into a right relationship with God through faith in Christ (Rom. 5:1; Gal. 6:12-16). In Ephesians 2 Christ is seen as the peace maker (Eph. 2:14-18).

(2) The Peace of Fellowship, the Peace of a Conscience Void of Offense. This is the personal peace which God gives to the individual through fellowship with the Lord, through walking in concord with God with all known sin confessed and turned over to God’s grace and knowledge of all things (1 John 1:9; 3:19-21; Gal. 5:22; 1 Tim. 1:5; Acts 24:16).

(3) The Peace of Assurance, the Peace of God. This is the peace that comes from being confident of God’s supply, that God is in control. This is the peace that settles our nerves, fills our mind, and allows us to relax even in the midst of uproar around us (Phil. 4:6-9; Gal. 5:22; Ps. 119:165; Pr. 3:13-17).

(4) The Peace of Harmony, Peace with Others. This is the peace of unity and oneness in the body of Christ; oneness of mind and purpose (Eph. 4:3; Phil. 2:2-4; 1 Thess. 5:13). God reaps a harvest of peace where there are believers sowing and watering their minds with the Word. But Satan, the agent of disunity and strife, seeks to reap a harvest of discord through hurt feelings, unwillingness to forgive, and selfish ambition when people refuse to operate on the principles and promises of the Word (cf. 1 Cor. 2:6-11; Mark 9:34 with vs. 50; Phil. 2:1-4).

(5) The Peace of State, Public Peace. This is a society without war or turbulence. It comes through good rulers or government acting in accord with the principles of the Word and through a strong nucleus of godly citizens who apply and live by the truth of Scripture (Acts 24:2; 1 Tim. 2:2; Rom. 13:1-7; Compare also the early chapters of Isaiah).

(6) Global or World Peace. This will only occur with the return and reign of Jesus Christ (Rom. 16:20; Rev. 20). Until then, there will be wars and rumors of wars (Matt. 24).

(7) The Peace of Orderliness. Refers to doing things decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40).

(8) The Peace of Pronounced Blessing. Refers to the wish and prayer for spiritual and physical prosperity, security, and safety for others (cf. most of the salutation of Paul and John 20:19,21,26).

Spheres in which the Peace of God Exists in our Lives

- (1) The peace of eternal security with the assurance of our salvation.
- (2) The peace of good conscience, of no known sin unconfessed.
- (3) The peace of knowing God's will, of God's direction.
- (4) The peace of knowing that God will supply.

Appendix 3: Who Are the Overcomers?

Introduction

The promises to the overcomer in Revelation 2 and 3 present us with some important, but difficult questions that need to be answered in order to properly interpret and apply these promises. But as is so often the case with difficult passages, students of the Word are divided on the answers. The main questions as I see it are simply, who is the overcomer and what is the nature of the promises?

(1) Are these warnings against the loss of salvation as some have advocated?

(2) Is “overcomer” a title for all believers because of initial faith in Christ? In other words, does 1 John 5:5 define the overcomers of Revelation 2 and 3?

(3) Or is the overcomer equivalent to a special name for genuine believers because of the ultimate triumph of their faith?

(4) Is this a warning against false profession or is it a challenge and motivation to all believers to faithfulness for rewards?

These seven passages are not the only passages that touch on the issue of overcoming or victory over the conflicts and adversaries that we face in this life. Obviously, then, to get a better picture, it would be helpful to integrate these verses in Revelation with other portions of Scripture that speak of overcoming or similar terms such as “triumph” or “conquer” and that deal with issues that might shed light on the subject of victory. Even though we might not be able to agree on all the details, there will be certain truths that are self evident and very practical, exhorting and challenging to us in our Christian walk.

The Principle of Conflict

The Principle Declared

The term “overcomer” comes from the Greek *nikao*,, “to conquer, prevail, triumph, overcome.” This verb is found 28 times in 24 verses in the New Testament. This presupposes and calls attention to the presence of war, contests, battles, and conflicts in man’s struggle with evil. The New Testament clearly teaches us, as does life itself, that we are in a conflict, indeed, a holy war, with specific adversaries. Even after salvation, the conflict still rages in and against the life of the Christian. This is everywhere evident in Scripture and so obvious in life that one has to deny reality to ignore or disclaim it. Two key passages that illustrate the nature of our conflict with evil are Ephesians 2:1-2 and 6:12:

Eph. 2:1-2 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

Eph. 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.

The Adversaries Defined

(1) **Satan**, our chief adversary, the devil: 1 Pet. 5:8-9; Eph. 6:12; John 16:11; Col. 2:15; but note 1 John 2:13-14.

(2) The **world**, a system and arrangement of the affairs of men and government under the control of the evil one and opposed to God and His purposes for man: John 16:33; 1 John 5:4; Eph. 2:2.

(3) Indwelling sin or the **flesh** and all its corrupting power and life dominating patterns: Rom. 7:15; 8:4-8, 13; Gal. 5:16-26.

(4) Other forms stemming from the above three: darkness (Col. 1:13), blindness (2 Cor. 4:3-4), death (Rom. 8:4f; Rev. 2:11), evil (Eph. 5:16), disobedience (Eph. 2:1), rebellion in every conceivable form (2 Tim. 3:1f).

The Provision of Victory

The Means

(1) The Person and Work of Jesus Christ: That Christ is *the Overcomer*, that is, the ultimate source and means of victory is the great message of Scripture and everywhere evident in its pages. Note the following passages:

John 16:33 These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.

Rev. 3:21 He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, *as I also overcame* and sat down with My Father on His throne. (emphasis mine)

Rev. 5:5 and one of the elders said to me, “Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.

Rev. 17:14 These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him {are the} called and chosen and faithful.

Rom. 8:37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

2 Cor. 2:14 But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place.

Col. 2:15 When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

Closely related to Christ’s victory through His person and work on the cross is another aspect of the means of our victory, the work of the Spirit in regeneration and indwelling.

(2) The Ministry of the Spirit in Regeneration and Indwelling. Compare the following verses:

John 4:4 You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world (cf. 4:2).

1 John 5:4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world.

We should note the emphasis here. The text does not say, “He that overcomes,” as the NIV translates (the participle is neuter), but “everything or whatever is born of God.” Overcoming is specifically non-personalized in order to stress a point: it is never the man that overcomes, but his birth from God and what that brings into his life; this is that which overcomes or gives capacity to overcome the world.

So, 1 John 5:4-5 gives us some insightful principles regarding those who overcome the world, namely: (a) the *source of victory* is the new birth and the new life that it brings, “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world”; (b) the *method for appropriating victory* is faith, “and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith”; (c) the *object of faith* must be Jesus Christ because He is the real victor, “And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”

The Method

This too is clearly marked out for us in the Bible.

(1) Faith (1 John 5:5; 2 Cor. 5:7; Gal. 2:20; 5:5; Eph. 3:17). 1 John 5:5 makes it abundantly clear. “And this is the victory that overcomes the world—our faith.” Since victory was accomplished by Christ and not by what we have

done, victory always comes by faith in the work of God through Christ. Our victory is not a victory to be won, by one to be claimed by faith.

(2) The Filling of the Spirit: Appropriating the Manifold Ministries of the Spirit (John 14:16f; 1 John 4:2-4; Eph. 3:16; 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Rom. 8:1f; Gal. 5:16f). Though saved and identified with Christ in His life and death, all believers would be helpless to overcome because of the presence of the flesh without the Holy Spirit who is God's provision for strength and victory.

(3) Biblical Insight Through the Knowledge of the Word (Ps. 119:9, 11, 45; John 8:32; 17:17; Rom. 10:17; Eph. 6:17; 1 John 2:13-14; Heb. 4:12; Col. 1:9-12). Obviously, if I am going to believe God's message of grace, trust God with my life, and deal with my inner man, I must know the Word. Faith and the ministries of the Spirit do not exist independently of God's precious Word. They are directly tied to knowing the Word. The Word builds my faith, directs it, and the Spirit speaks to us through the Word.

But there is another element of victory and one that is vital for victory and fruitfulness; it's human responsibility as the next point shows.

(4) Diligence, Discipline (Rom. 13:14 [put on]; 1 Tim. 4:7 [discipline yourself]; 2 Pet. 1:3-10 [applying all diligence]; Gal. 5:16 [walk]; Eph. 5:18 [be filled]). There is a fine balance that must be observed in Scripture. Salvation and victory is completely of the Lord. We are to put no confidence in the flesh (Phil. 3:3). We do not overcome by our works, by the energy of the flesh, or by our sincerity, or by our effort, or by our will power because we are powerless. Nevertheless, victory requires our cooperation with God's operation. It means discipline, diligence, commitment to draw near to God and to act on His promises and provision by faith. Note also 1 Corinthians 15:10; Philippians 2:12-13.

The Meaning of the Overcomer Passages

Lexical Considerations

There are five Greek words that should be considered: "Overcomer" and "conquer" are translations of *nikao*,, "to overcome, to conquer, prevail, come through victoriously." "Victory" is *nike*,, the noun form of *nikao*,, "Overwhelmingly conquer" is *hupernikao*,, (Rom. 8:37), a compound of *nikao*,, and the preposition *huper*, "over, beyond, above." "Triumph" is *thriambeuo*,, "to triumph over, to lead in triumphant procession" and hence to make a public spectacle of a conquered enemy (Col. 2:15). One other word, *hetaomai*, is translated "overcome" in the NASB and KJV. This word means "be defeated by, or succumb to a person or thing" (2 Pet. 2:19-20). The only other occurrence is 2 Corinthians 12:13 where it means to be treated as an inferior.

Interpretational Considerations

It appears that there are four primary views of the overcomer passages of Revelation 2 and 3:

(1) The loss of salvation view: According to this interpretation, the promises are written to believers to encourage them to overcome lest they lose their salvation. To fail to overcome is to lose salvation. But the loss of salvation view contradicts the clear teaching of Scripture that believers are kept secure by the finished work of Christ. It is His record that keeps us not ours. A large portion of the New Testament demonstrates such a view to be wrong. The following passages illustrate this truth: concerning believers, Jesus said, "and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand" (John 10:28-29), they "shall not come into judgment" (John 5:24), and "have [already] passed from death into life" (John 5:24). The apostle Paul declared that "neither death nor life...nor things present nor things to come...shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39). "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph 2:8-9). He even told the believers at Thessalonica that "whether we wake or sleep [i.e., whether we are morally alert or spiritually slothful], we should live together with Him" (1 Thess. 5:10).

(2) The perseverance or ultimate triumph of the saints view: According to this view all genuine believers persevere and overcome the world by living godly and obedient lives. Overcoming is equivalent to faithfulness or

obedience which proves the genuineness of salvation. MacArthur is a proponent of this view. He writes: “John was so confident of the ultimate triumph of faith over sin that he had a special name for the believer: ‘the one who overcomes’ (1 John 5:5; Rev 2:7, 11, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:7).”¹ MacArthur is interpreting these passages according to what has come to be called the ‘Reformed Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints’ which states that all true believers will persevere in a life of godly obedience. They admit that there may be temporary setbacks and bouts with sin, but that ultimately, true believers live victorious, holy lives to the end.

Concerning this view, Bob Wilkin writes:

There is a major problem with this interpretation. The Bible does *not* promise that all true believers will live victorious, holy lives. Believers may have more than temporary setbacks and bouts with sin. It is sadly possible for believers to backslide terribly and to remain in that backslidden state until death. Certainly the church at Corinth was hardly a picture of believers experiencing ultimate victory over sin in their lives (cf. 1 Cor 3:1-3; 11:30; see also Gal 6:1-5; Jas 5:19-20; and 1 John 5:16)!

I’m not saying that eternal security is not true... What I *am* saying is that there is no guarantee in Scripture that eternally secure people will live overcoming, victorious lives here and now. Believers can fail.²

It should be noted that some of the Christians at Corinth had died in a state of carnality as a direct result of God’s judgment which Paul carefully defined as God’s disciplinary action. This shows God was dealing with them as His children (cf. 1 Cor. 11:29-32 with Heb. 13:5-11).

(3) The view that all believers are overcomers: According to this view, all believers become overcomers the moment they believe in Jesus Christ. The very act of believing overcomes the world: “Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:5). Faith, not faithfulness is the primary focus point in this position.

Ryrie writes:

An overcomer is not someone who has some special power in the Christian life or someone who has learned some secret of victory. John himself defined an overcomer as a believer in Christ (1 John 5:4-5). Thus every Christian is an overcomer, though the various promises in these seven letters are addressed particularly to each local believing group, and tailored to the special circumstances found in each church.³

Walvoord agrees and writes: “This promise should not be construed as reward for only a special group of Christians but a normal expectation for all Christians.”⁴

Wiersbe also agrees:

Note that a special word is spoken to the “overcomers” in each church (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). These “overcomers” are not the “super-saints” in each church, a special group that will receive special privileges from Christ, but the true believers in each of these churches. We dare not assume that every member of every local church in every period of history is a true child of God. Those who truly belong to Christ are “overcomers” (1 John 5:4-5). In every period of history, there have been true saints in the professing church (often called “the invisible church”). Christ speaks a special word of encouragement to them, and certainly we may apply these words to ourselves today.⁵

¹ John F. MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, Revised and Expanded Edition, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1988, p. 253.

² Bob Wilkin, “Grace Evangelical Newsletter,” March 1995. (See the *Grace Evangelical Society* home page for more on this and other grace-oriented subjects at <http://www.gracenet.com/grace/index.html>.)

³ Charles C. Ryrie, *Revelation*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1968, pp. 22-23.

⁴ John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, “Revelation,” Scripture Press: Wheaton, IL, 1983, 1985, electronic media.

⁵ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines On the New Testament*, electronic media.

I appreciate and highly respect the views of each of the above writers, and while this view appeals to me and I wish I could hold to it, there are certain problems with this interpretation that I have not been able to reconcile in my own thinking. Does John's use of the overcomer expression in 1 John 5:4-5 dictate its meaning in Revelation 2 and 3?

It is true that 1 John 5:5 teaches that our faith overcomes the world. It is a mistake, however, to conclude that because John so used that expression in one place, he must have used it the same way in all other places. The contexts in which the expression is found in Revelation 2-3 are greatly different than the context of 1 John 5:5.⁶

The messages to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 present very different contexts than that of 1 John 5. 1 John 5:4 teaches us that the means of victory over the world is "our faith." Then verse 5 declares that the only ones who can overcome the world by faith are those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Why? Because only these have experienced the new birth of God in spiritual regeneration and it is that regeneration that gives the power for victory (vs. 4a). But the context of the seven letters suggests that John is there admonishing believers to overcome specific trials and temptations by faithful obedience through faith in their new life in Christ. Consider the following examples from each of these messages:

- Revelation 2:7b reads, "To him who overcomes I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God." But the context for this is the admonition in 2:5 which reads, "Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first..."
- The admonitions "Do not fear..." and "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (2:10) form the immediate context for the promise, "He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death" (2:11).
- The call to repent in 2:16 precedes the promise to the overcomer in 2:17.
- "Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come. And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS" (2:25-26). Again, the promise is in a context of two admonitions for faithfulness. While some versions leave out the "and" that begins verse 26, the Greek text contains this connecting particle and shows a relationship exists between the promise and the admonition.
- The promise of 3:5 is directly connected to the concept of faithfulness described in 3:4. "But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white; for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments;..."
- Again, an admonition, "Hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown" (3:11) forms the context for the promise of 3:12, "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God,..."
- Finally, the last promise to the one who overcomes (3:21) is set against the context of the Savior's invitation for fellowship (3:20). Believers cannot overcome without dining intimately with the Savior in daily fellowship.

(4) The rewards view: According to this view, the overcomer passages are promises of rewards given to believers to encourage them to overcome the trials of life through faithfulness.

This view is held by some very outstanding expositors of the Word. For instance, J. Sidlow Baxter writes:

But the promise is to "the *overcomer*." Are all believers "overcomers"? Let him think twice who would answer a dogmatic "Yes" to this question. The letters to the seven churches, at least, suggested otherwise to an unprejudiced reader. Our standing in Christ is no artificial position of immunity. As there are degrees of punishment [in hell] so there are degrees of reward [in heaven]. One is made ruler over ten cities, another over five. "One star differeth from another star in glory."⁷

⁶ Bob Wilkin, Grace Evangelical Society Newsletter, March 1995.

⁷ J. Sidlow Baxter, *Awake My Heart*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, p. 323.

Barnhouse has a similar view which sees the promises to the overcomer as promises of rewards for faithfulness and writes:

Some have said that eating from the tree of life was the equivalent of receiving eternal life, but this is most evidently a false interpretation. Eternal life is the prerequisite for membership in the true Church. Eating of the tree of life is a reward that shall be given to the overcomer in addition to his salvation. His work, built upon the foundation that is Christ Jesus, abides the test of the Lord's appearing, and he receives over and above his entrance into eternal life, a place in the Heavens in the midst of the paradise of God.⁸

These men, along with others, would heartily agree that all believers are overcomers in one sense, in the sense they have become children of God, have been translated out of darkness into the glorious light of Christ, have been taken out of Adam and placed into Christ. In this glorious position, they have become identified with Him as to His person and work, etc., and enjoy many other marvelous blessings in Christ (Eph. 1:3; Col. 2:10). Every believer is an overcomer in that sense (1 John 5:4-5). But these expositors would also insist that all believers do not overcome absolutely. Christians can fail to live for the Lord and overcome the desires of the flesh (1 Cor. 11:28f; 1 John 5:16-17). Furthermore, while the failure to overcome may be an indication of false profession, the fact a believer does not overcome the struggles of life, does not automatically prove they are not true Christians. If they have truly believed in Christ, they cannot lose their salvation, but they will lose rewards as the Lord warns in Revelation 3:11 and the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15. Those holding to the rewards view would say the overcomer passages are promises given to believers to encourage and kindle love and obedience in view of who they are in Christ and what they possess in Him. These are not warnings against the loss of salvation, nor necessarily warnings against false profession, though that could be one application of these promises. Furthermore, they are not statements affirming the preservation of the saints. Instead, they are guarantees of special blessings or rewards for faithful service and lives of faith.

The Problem Discussed

Does 1 John 5:4-5 define who the overcomers are in Revelation 2 and 3? In other words, do the overcomer promises apply to all believers regardless of the kind of lives they live? At this stage in my study of the issues here, I have become convinced that 1 John 5:4-5 is not synonymous with the statements of Revelation 2 and 3.

They occur in different books, with different contexts that contain a number of differences and the differences are such that they suggest that the references to overcoming in Revelation 2 and 3 are not defined by 1 John 5.

In 1 John the apostle affirms that through believing in Jesus Christ there is a permanent victory over the world in one sense. When a believer exercises faith in Christ, he does overcome the world in the sense that the world system is intrinsically hostile to God's commands, to faith in Christ, and is satanically blinded to the truth and under his dominion of control and death (2 Cor. 4:3, 4; Eph. 2:1-3; Heb. 2:14), but through faith in Christ, the believer has overcome that condition in that he is made a child of God, has been rescued from the domain of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's beloved Son (Col. 1:12-13).

In Revelation, however, the overcomer concept is restrictive within the realm of the daily conflicts and battles of the Christian life according to the context of each of the seven letters. Here are illustrations of the battles that believers must overcome and for which rewards are promised for overcoming. "But this is a long way from saying that all Christians live ultimately victorious lives. In fact, that is something the New Testament does NOT say."⁹ Regardless, as demonstrated above, many use 1 John 5:4-5 to interpret the overcomer promises of Revelation 2 and 3 because of the similarity of terms.

Overcoming and the promises of these passages find their root in the Lord's statement in John 16:33, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." The Christian life is full of conflict, tribulation, but victory awaits all believers through

⁸ Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Revelation, An Expository Commentary*, "God's Last Word," Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1971, pp. 43-44.

⁹ Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, Redención Viva: Dallas, TX, 1982, pp. 118-119.

the victory accomplished by the Savior, but it is a victory that must be appropriated by an active faith that is fed through fellowship with the Lord.

While all believers have overcome the world in the sense of 1 John 5, conflicts and trials come to the believer in a variety of different shapes and degrees. When we turn to Revelation 2 and 3, we find each church with its own particular conflict and problems with specific rewards that are in keeping with or somehow related to the problem faced. No two Christian's lives are the same in terms of their struggles and triumphs. The basis of victory is the same, faith in the person and work of Christ and our blessings in Him, but the struggles are different and it seems that God tailors the rewards accordingly.

These letters do not present victory as a *certainty*, but rather as an *aspiration* which each individual should pursue. The Savior's words are never to *them* who overcome, but to *him* who overcomes. Victory is not a collective right, but an individual attainment...Clearly, the promises to the overcomers are rewards for obedience to the commands of the Lord of the Church.¹⁰

The problems that most have with this view come in the nature of the rewards mentioned in these promises and admittedly, these are difficult. The rewards in Revelation 2 and 3 are usually viewed as blessings all believers will automatically receive as, for instance, the right to the tree of life. This is associated with possessing eternal life, but as we will see, this is probably not the case.

An investigation of the promises in Revelation 2 and 3 will seek to show that these are not promises all believers experience because every believer is an overcomer, but that these promises are special rewards to believers who overcome specific conflicts in the Christian life through faith and obedience in their daily walk.

The Proof or Evidence

The Exegetical Evidence

There is exegetical evidence within the letters themselves which restrict the meaning of the overcomer.

(1) In Revelation 2:26 the Greek text contains the conjunction "and" (kai) at the beginning of this verse. It reads, "And he who overcomes,..." This links the promise to the overcomer back to verse 25 and the statement, "Nevertheless what you have, hold fast (krateo,, a strong word meaning 'to hold firmly to something so that it is not lost') until I come." This both connects overcoming to the preceding admonition and makes it dependent on holding fast.

(2) In Revelation 2:26 overcoming is also connected to what follows or to keeping Christ's works until the end. The Lord says, "And he who overcomes *and* (italics mine) he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS." This clearly shows that the overcomer here is not only a believer, but one who keeps the Lord's deeds in contrast to the evil deeds promoted by the Jezebel like false prophetess being tolerated in the church at Thyatira.

(3) In Revelation 3:5, the promise to the overcomer is tied into verse 4 by the word "thus," the Greek adverb, houto,,s. It may look at what follows, or it may draw an inference to what precedes as here. This shows us that the overcomer is restricted to those who have not defiled their garments in their earthly walk and are thus worthy of reward—the reward of being clothed in white garments. This is not the garment of salvation or the imputed righteousness that comes through faith in Christ.

In support of this, let's compare Revelation 19:8. This verse shows that the wedding garment mentioned in this verse consists of the "righteous acts of the saints." The Greek word here is dikaio,,ma. Instead of imputed righteousness, this Greek word refers to the state or virtue of righteous character. In this context, it refers to the acts or deeds or works of righteousness for which rewards are given, i.e., the wedding garments. Two different Greek words, dikaio,,sis and dikaiosune,, respectively are used in the New Testament to refer to imputed righteousness. It should be evident, then, that the white garment in 3:5 is a reward for works of righteousness that occur after salvation.

(4) In Revelation 3:12 the promise to the overcomer is again connected to a crown of reward for holding fast (krateo,,) at least by implication or location. And this fits with the thrust of 2:25-26 where the overcomer reward is specifically linked to holding fast by the word "and" in the Greek text.

¹⁰ Zane C. Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse*, Redención Viva: Dallas, TX, 1987, p. 108-109.

(5) In Revelation 21:6-7 we find an important contrast. The waters of life are free. All believers partake of this, but eating of the tree is for overcomers in the broader sense. Compare 22:14 with 15. In the light of Revelation 3:4-5 and 19:8, access to the tree of life through the New Jerusalem is restricted for those who cleanse their lives through fellowship with Christ.

In 22:14 John pronounces a blessing on those who wash their robes, who lead the clean and pure Christ life, for they thereby have the right and privilege of entering into the gates of the city and partaking of the tree of life. This means not only immortal existence, but such relations with Jesus Christ and the Church that each has unrestricted access to all that is good in the universe of God.¹¹

The Contextual Evidence

The context of the letters restricts the meaning of the overcomer from all believers to rewards to faithful believers who overcome in the specific conflicts of their lives. Each letter without exception moves from an address to the church as a whole, of the church corporate and individual groups in each church, to the individual aspect with a personal appeal to the one who has an ear and to the one who overcomes.

The Applicational Evidence

To apply these promises to all believers seems to rob them of their force as promises. As Hodges points out, “a command that everyone keeps is superfluous, and a reward that everyone receives is nonsense.”¹²

The Analogical Evidence

Evidence from the analogy of Scripture is consistent with the teaching of the New Testament in other places; a Christian may lose or gain rewards according to what he does with the stewardship God has given him (1 Cor. 3:11f; 9:27; 2 Cor. 5:10; Luke 19:11-26). In fact, if the promises of Revelation 2 and 3 are not restrictive, then we have what appears to be a contradiction between Luke 19:11f and Revelation 2:26 and 3:21. Many believe there is a difference in the New Testament between entrance into heaven and being an heir of the kingdom (cf. Rom. 8:16-17).

True, some of the promises are hard to explain and understand as rewards and not as general gifts that go with eternal life, but because of the above evidence we should give strong consideration to the view that these are promises that pertain to rewards. In the exposition of the messages to the seven churches of Revelation I will cover each of the overcomer promises in their contexts.

¹¹ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, V, James Orr Reeve, general editor, p. 3010.

¹² Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse*, p. 109.

Appendix 4: Seven Subtle Snares of Worldliness

(1) Materialism

- **Explanation**—Matter is all that matters.
- **Its Distortion**—Deformed view of the world.
- **The Snare**—I am what I own.
- **The Effect**—Affluence, accumulation, occupied with things, consumer mentality, neglect spiritual things.

(2) Activism

- **Explanation**—I must fill my life with activity.
- **Its Distortion**—Deformed view of work. Seeking from work what only God can give.
- **The Snare**—I am what I do, what I produce.
- **The Effect**—Neurotic, consuming ministry. Seeking significance from work rather than from the Lord.

(3) Individualism

- **Explanation**—I must depend on no one but myself.
- **Its Distortion**—Deformed view of self. Produces a me-ism society.
- **The Snare**—I am the source of my own life.
- **The Effect**—Loneliness, resistance to authority, inability to work on a team.

(4) Conformism

- **Explanation**—Recognition by others is primary and necessary.
- **Its Distortion**—Deformed view of the importance or the opinions of others.
- **The Snare**—I am who others recognize me to be.
- **The Effect**—Praise dependent, seeking significance from the approval of others.

(5) Relativism

- **Explanation**—It matters not what you believe as long as you believe something.
- **Its Distortion**—Deformed view of truth. Refuses to recognize revealed truth.
- **The Snare**—I am whatever I want to believe.
- **The Effect**—Subjective approach to life, to Scripture; experience oriented, uncertain faith, emotional.

(6) Secularism

- **Explanation**—Man has no need of religion. Man is sufficient.
- **Its Distortion**—Deformed view of man. Fails to take into account man's sinfulness.

- **The Snare**—I am sufficient to handle my affairs.
- **The Effect**—Sunday only kind of Christian. Fail to integrate God into all areas of life or reject God completely.

(7) Religionism

- **Explanation**—If I am good, go to church, etc., I will be okay.
- **Its Distortion**—Deformed view of God.
- **The Snare**—I am okay because of my religious works and activities.
- **The Effect**—Have some facts about God, engaged in some religious activity, but lacking in inner reality. Fail to integrate God into all areas of life.

Biblical Solutions

(1) Materialism

- **Biblical Value**—Spiritual and eternal values, treasures.
- **Responsibility**—Renewal, reevaluation, trust in God rather than in things.
- **Result**—Ability to follow God, ministry, laying up eternal treasures.

(2) Activism

- **Biblical Value**—Christ-directed ministry, His initiative.
- **Responsibility**—Fellowship, prayer, sensitivity, openness.
- **Result**—Peace, fruitfulness, rest, absence of burnout.

(3) Individualism

- **Biblical Value**—Body life, co-worker, no man an island.
- **Responsibility**—Team work, submission to others, loving one another.
- **Result**—Edification of the body.

(4) Conformism

- **Biblical Value**—Biblical sense of who I am in Christ. Accepted, belong, capable.
- **Responsibility**—Learn to live as unto the Lord while resting in Him for my significance.
- **Result**—Content, relaxed, able to love others and put them above self.

(5) Relativism

- **Biblical Value**—Biblical absolutes based on the index of the Bible
- **Responsibility**—Objective Bible study based on exegesis, not eisegesis.
- **Result**—Confidence, divine guidance, knowing truth which gives freedom.

(6) Secularism

- **Biblical Value**—Biblical view of God and man.

- **Responsibility**—Total dependence on God.
- **Result**—Experience God in all areas of life.

(7) Religionism

- **Biblical Value**—Finished work of Christ plus obedience.
- **Responsibility**—Rest in Christ's work, honesty, openness, worship, faith.
- **Result**—Ability to truly love God and people.¹

¹ This information was adapted from material in *Defeating the Dragons of the World*, Resisting the Seduction of False Values, by Stephen D. Eyre, InterVarsity Press.

Appendix 5: The Doctrine of the Tribulation

Definition

The word “tribulation” comes from the Greek word *thlipsis* meaning “affliction, distress.” It is used in general of any kind of testing, affliction or distress which people experience throughout life, and especially of the church and her problems in this world (Acts 7:10-11; 11:19; Rom. 5:3; Rev. 1:9; 2:9, 10, 22). But Bible students have also used the term, “the Tribulation,” to refer to a specific eschatological time of trouble, a special time of judgment from God that will come upon the entire world, will be unprecedented in its affliction, and will be culminated by the personal return of Jesus Christ to earth. There are many passages that anticipate this time of trouble under a variety of names (see below), but two very special passages are Matthew 24:4-21 and Revelation 6-19. Others will be mentioned in the progress of this short overview.

For the purpose of accuracy, it should be noted that the word tribulation (*thlipsis*) is used prophetically to describe the distress that will occur in this specific future time of trouble preceding the return of the Lord only in Matthew 24:9, 21, 29; Mark 13:19, 24; and Revelation 7:14. Each of these passages are dealing with the time of Daniel’s seventieth week, also called the “time of Jacob’s distress” (Jer. 30:7). In five of the passages, the word “tribulation” refers to conditions in the last half of this time period and is either described by some qualifying terms like “great” (Matt. 24:21; Rev. 7:14), by a clause describing the unprecedented nature of the distress in the last half of this short period of time (Mark 13:19), or *thlipsis* has the article and in some way refers back to the great distress mentioned in the preceding context (Matthew 24:29 has, “after *the* tribulation of those days” and Mark 13:24 has, “following *that* distress” [emphasis mine]).

But since this seven-year period is a time of trouble (distress) involving judgments that will be poured out as the Lamb consecutively opens the seven-sealed scroll, Bible students often referred to this entire period as “the Tribulation,” and rightly so. Since the judgments of the seals, the trumpets, and plagues grow in intensity, the last half is by far greater than the first half, and for this reason, it is called in Scripture, “the Great Tribulation.”

The Source of the Tribulation

The post-tribulation rapturist (those who believe the rapture occurs at the end of the Tribulation) often refuses to distinguish between the general tribulations of this age which the church will endure and the unique, universal, and unprecedented Tribulation of Revelation 6-19 and Matthew 24:4-31. As such, they insist that the Tribulation is not the judgment of God, but that it comes from man and Satan and that the church will go through the majority of the events of Revelation 6 and following. They often see any future tribulation as merely the devil’s wrath poured out against Christians.

True, the Tribulation will witness Satan’s wrath and the persecutions of his man, the beast (Rev. 12:12-17; 13:7), but Scripture shows that even this is a manifestation of God’s wrath using Satan and mankind as the instruments of divine judgment as Assyria was used as the rod of His wrath (Isa. 10:5f). The clear emphasis of Scripture is that the Tribulation (Daniel’s Seventieth Week) is a time of God’s special judgment poured out upon the earth. The events or judgments of the Tribulation (Rev. 6-19) are clearly specified as the result of the sovereign actions of the Lamb who opens the seals which produces the judgments that follow (Rev. 5:6-9; 6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12; 8:1).

Key Scriptures: Isaiah 24:1-13; 26:21; Daniel 9:24-27; Joel 1:15; Zeph. 1:18; Revelation 6:1-17; 11:18; 14:7, 10, 19; 15:4, 7; 16:1, 7, 19; 19:1-2.

The Nature and Character of the Tribulation

Read Deuteronomy 4:30-31; Isaiah 2:19; 24:1, 3, 6, 19-21; 26:20-21; Jeremiah 30:7; Daniel 12:1; Joel 2:1-2; Amos 5:18, 20.

(1) It is a time of unprecedented trouble (Joel 2:2; Matthew 24:21). Everything about it will be unprecedented. Compare also Zephaniah 1:14-18.

(2) It is a time of God's wrath or indignation and the vindication of God's holiness (Zeph. 1:15, 18; Rev. 6:17; 1 Thess. 1:10; Rev. 14:7, 10; 19:2). God's wrath against man's sin and rebellion will be withheld no longer.

(3) It is a day of utter darkness, gloom and extreme cloudiness (Joel 2:2; Zeph. 1:15).

(4) It is a day of destruction and global catastrophes (Joel 1:15; 2:3; 1 Thess. 5:3; Rev. 6-19).

(5) It is a day of extreme lawlessness, sin and demonic activity (Rev. 9:20-21; 2 Thess. 2:12).

(6) It is a day of extreme deception and delusion (2 Thess. 2:9-12; Rev. 9:1f; 13:2-3, 11-18; Dan. 8:24f). This deception is caused by a number of factors: (a) the removal of the Spirit indwelt church with its restraining influence (2 Thess. 2:6-8), (b) the increase of demonic activity (2 Thess. 2:8-10), and (c) the blinding judgment of God (2 Thess. 2:11-12).

(7) It is a time of death (Rev. 6:3-11; 9:15, 18; 11:13). Large portions of the populations of the earth will be wiped out suddenly, both human and animal.

(8) It is a time of utter negative volition, cold indifference, and rebellion against God even though the world will know it is under the wrath of God (Rev. 6:14-17; 9:20; 11:10, 18).

(9) It is a time of internationalism religiously (Rev. 17), politically (Rev. 13:17), economically (Rev. 18), militarily (Joel 3:2, 9-14; Rev. 17).

(10) It is a time of extreme anti-Semitism (Rev. 12; Matthew 24:9, 13f).

(11) It is a time of unprecedented apostasy and blasphemy against God (Rev. 11:1f; 13:1f; 2 Thess 2:3f).

(12) It is a time of the martyrdom of believers, both Jew and Gentile (Rev. 6:9; 7:14f).

(13) It is a time of global and universal war, human and angelic (Rev. 6:2-4; 16:14; 19:14f; Joel 3:2, 9f; Rev. 12:7).

(14) But it is also a time of unprecedented evangelism (Rev. 7:9; Matt. 24:14).

Names Used of the Tribulation

(1) Jacob's trouble or distress (Daniel 9:24-27)

(2) Daniel's 70th week (Daniel 9:24-27)

(3) A time of trouble or distress (Daniel 12:1)

(4) The great day, the one of their wrath (Rev. 6:17)

(5) The hour of testing which shall try the whole earth (Rev. 3:10)

(6) The indignation (Isaiah 26:26)

(7) Tribulation and the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:9, 21, 29; Mark 13:19, 24; Rev. 7:14)

(8) The Day of the Lord (Joel 1:15; 2:1; 1 Thess. 5:2)

In Scripture, "The Day of the Lord" is often associated with this time of great judgment which God will pour out on the earth against Israel and the nations. But it is also associated with the time of millennial blessings which follow during which the Lord will rule on earth. Compare Isaiah 13:6-22 speaks of judgment, but 14:1-3 the result which is peace with Israel re-gathered and in blessing (Joel 1:15f; 2:1f, 12-18f; 3:1f).

Key Players in the Tribulation

(1) **Unbelievers:** The Tribulation will begin with only unbelievers since the body of Christ will have been removed through the rapture and kept from this hour of trial (Rev. 3:10; 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9). The Tribulation is uniquely a time to test the earth dwellers (Rev. 3:10; Isa. 24:17), those who during the church age had no time nor interest in spiritual things and who therefore never received Christ as their Savior by faith (2 Thess. 2:10-12). The Tribulation is a time of God's wrath or judgment. For believers in Christ there is no judgment (Rom. 8:1), we are not appointed to the Day of the Lord, the time of wrath (1 Thess. 5:2, 9).

(2) **Jews and Gentiles:** The participants of the Tribulation may be further categorized according to their racial heritage as either Jews or Gentiles. Scripture categorizes men today in three categories: (a) The church; (b) Israel; and (c) the Gentiles or the nations (1 Cor. 10:32). In the Tribulation the church will be gone, so the world will consist of only Jews (Israel) and Gentiles. Compare Ephesians 2:11-22 for the reason why the church is a new entity of people, i.e., a new man, a new creation where Jew and Gentile are made one in Jesus Christ.

The reason for these two categories is found in the dispensational purposes of God and God's special calling and purpose for Israel according to the Old Testament covenants with Abraham and the patriarchs, and with David (Gen. 10; 11; 12; 2 Sam. 7:12-16; Rom. 3:9, 19; 11:1-32; Luke 21:24).

(3) **144,00 Bondservants of God:** 12,000 Jews from each of the twelve tribes. These are Jews who will be saved after the Tribulation begins. They are sealed, which refers to their salvation, identification and protection for special service during the rest of the Tribulation. From the context of Revelation 7, it appears they will be the special evangelists whom God will use to lead multitudes to Christ from every nation, tribe, people and tongue (cf. Rev. 7:1-8 with 9-10).

(4) **The Two Witnesses:** This refers to the two men who will come on the scene as a virtual (though probably not literal) Moses and Elijah. They will perform miracles like those of Moses and Elijah, and will prophesy during one half of the Tribulation—most probably the last half (Rev. 11:1-14).

(5) **Satan and his Demons:** Revelation 9:1-11; 12:3-17; 16:13-14; 13:2. Obviously, as a day of delusion and great darkness, Satan and his demon hosts are key figures in this drama. All the lawlessness, the murders, drugs, wars and blasphemies of this period are a result of satanic activity in conjunction with the degeneracy of man (2 Thess. 2:9-12).

(6) **The Beast:** Revelation 13:1f; 16:13; Daniel 2:40-43; 9:27; 8:23f; 7:23-26; 11:36f. This title applies to both a man and his governmental system. The system is the revived imperial form of the Old Roman Empire which is a consolidation of ten European countries into one 10 nation confederation. But this system is headed up and controlled by a Satan-possessed man from whom the system gets its character and beastly nature.

(7) **The False Prophet:** While the beast is primarily a political figure (though he later becomes religious in that he seeks to be worshipped and claims to be God), the False Prophet is religious and promotes the ministry and person of the beast (Rev. 13:11-18). Since the first beast is Satan-possessed, this forms the unholy trinity, Satan, the beast, and the False Prophet. Satan is to the beast what the Father is to the Son, and the False Prophet is to the beast what the Holy Spirit is to Christ.

(8) **The Fallen Angels and Michael and His Angels:** Rev. 12:7. The entire Book is filled with the ministries of the angels of God in service to God and of the activity of fallen angels that do Satan's bidding.

(9) **The Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings, The Lamb and Lion from the tribe of Judah:** Rev. 4; 5; and 19. He is the central figure who is revealed in all His glory and splendor, person, and work and who puts an end to God's enemies and establishes God's kingdom on earth.

(10) **The Bride of Christ, the Church:** Rev. 19:7f. She is viewed as married to the Lamb and coming with Christ at His second advent for the marriage supper, the millennial kingdom where she will reign with Christ.

(11) **The Great Harlot, Religious Babylon:** This is the great religious system, the mother-child cult, the mother of all harlotry stemming from the time of ancient Babylon. It finally becomes a great ecumenical, one-world religious system of the Tribulation (Rev. 17).

(12) **The Merchants of the World:** Rev. 18. This refers to the conglomeration of multinational companies and organizations and their merchandising of the world.

(13) **The Ten Nations of Europe:** Rev. 17:12. This refers to ten nations, a Mediterranean or European federation which falls under the power and authority of the beast.

(14) **The Kings of the East:** Rev. 16:12f. This refers to an oriental block of nations who will march across the Euphrates River when it is miraculously dried up. Their goal is to enter Palestine for the final battle of the campaign of Armageddon to be fought on the plain of Esdraelon near the Mount of Megiddo.

The Time of the Tribulation

The Tribulation occurs after the removal of the church (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 5:1-9) and is followed by the 1,000 year reign of Jesus Christ (Rev. 20:1-4; Ezek. 20:33-38; Matt 24 and 25). It is that period of time through which the Lamb defeats His enemies and establishes His right to rule on earth (Rev. 4 and 5; 11:15-18).

Some arguments for the pre-tribulational rapture, i.e., that Christ comes for His church before the Tribulation are:

(1) It is a time of divine wrath and judgment upon sin and the church has not been appointed to wrath (1 Thess. 5:9; Rom. 8:1; John 5:24).

(2) The church has been specifically promised it will be kept out. See chart and the exposition of Revelation 3:10 in lesson 10.

(3) The church and Israel are two distinct groups or peoples of God (1 Cor. 10:32; Rom 9; 10; 11). The church age is a parenthesis in God's program with Israel. The Tribulation is the resumption of God's program with Israel, to conclude it and establish the kingdom. The Tribulation is thus Jacob's Trouble, Jeremiah 30:7. It is for Israel and not the church, the Body of Christ.

(4) The coming of Christ for the church is seen as imminent in the epistles. By this we mean it is not preceded by signs. Christ could come for us today (1 Thess. 1:10; Titus 2:13; John 2:22). If the church had to go through the Tribulation, then His coming could not be imminent, but would be preceded by signs.¹

(5) The contrasts between Christ's return for His saints (the church) and His return after the Tribulation also support two separate and distinct events separated by some time. (See the contrasts at the end of this Appendix.)

The Purposes of the Tribulation

(1) **For Israel:** Being uniquely a time of Jacob's (Israel's) distress (Jer. 30:7), it is a time to discipline Israel for her stubbornness and rejection of Christ, to purge out the rebels and to bring the nation to faith in Christ and so prepare her for restoration and regathering for the millennium (Matt. 23:37-39; Ezek. 20:33-38; Zech. 12:10; Jer. 30:1-17). The Tribulation is also designed to break the yoke of Gentile bondage (Jer. 30:8, 11; 31:11).

(2) **For the Nations:** The Tribulation will serve as divine judgment for anti-Semitism (Zech. 1:15-21; 12:3f; 14:3; Joel 3:2; Jer. 30:8, 11, 16). The Tribulation will also be used to bring many Gentiles to faith in Christ (Rev. 7:9; 13:10). Finally, it is a test to try all the inhabitants of the earth.

(3) **In Relation to Satan:** The Tribulation will reveal the true character and program of Satan. The Tribulation will permit Satan's program to come to its logical conclusion resulting in judgment from God. It will demonstrate that Satan is the cause of war, murder, and deception, and that he deserves his judgment from God (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 12:7-12; 20:1-3; Isa. 14:12-17; Ezek. 28:12-19).

(4) **In General:** The Tribulation is an open judgment against all mankind for rebellion to God and rejection of Jesus Christ (Zeph. 1:15, 17, 18; Joel 3:12-14; Rev. 6:16-17).

(5) **In Relation to God:** The Tribulation will demonstrate that God is holy, righteous, just, and still on the throne. That He has not ignored man's rebellion or sin, but that He has held back only in mercy and longsuffering, not willing that any should perish (2 Pet. 3:9).

The Length of the Tribulation

Daniel 9:24-27 teaches us that the Tribulation (Daniel's 70th week) consists of seven years. This is further verified by the time periods of Revelation which divide the Tribulation into two periods of three and one-half years. (Rev. 11:2-3; 13:5; 12:6; Daniel 7: 25; Rev. 12:14).

¹ For an excellent discussion concerning the imminent return of the Lord, see the chapter by Earl D. Radmacher in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, Welsey R. Willis, John R. Master, General Editors, Charles Ryrle, Consulting Editor, Moody Press: Chicago, pp. 247-267. Also, see J. Barton Payne's, *The Imminent Appearing of Christ*.

Understanding these basic truths concerning the Tribulation will help prepare the student for a study of Revelation 6-19.

**Contrasts and Comparisons Between
the Two Phases of Christ's Second Coming**

Christ's Coming for the Church, the Rapture	Christ's Coming to the World
(1) At the rapture believers meet Christ in the air. It is the translation of all believers (1 Thess. 4:17).	(1) At His second coming to earth, no translation is seen (Zech. 14:4).
(2) His coming is as a thief. Only believers of the church will see him (Acts 1:11; 1 Thess. 4:17).	(2) Every eye shall see Him, it is open, public, and manifest to the world (Rev. 5:16; Matt. 24:30).
(3) Believers are taken off the earth and unbelievers remain to go into the Tribulation (1 Thess. 4:13-17; John 14:3).	(3) Unbelievers are taken and believers are left to go into the millennium (Matt. 24:37-39; Rev. 19:17-21).
(4) Christ comes for His saints and they return with Him into the heavens (1 Thess. 4:17).	(4) Christ comes with His saints (1 Thess. 3:13; 2 Thess. 2:10-12; Zech. 14:5; Rev. 19:7f).
(5) It is imminent, not preceded by any specific signs (Tit. 2:13; 1 Thess. 1:10; Rom. 13:11-14; 1 John 2:28).	(5) It is preceded by specific signs included in the Tribulation (Matt. 24).
(6) Christ comes as our Deliverer from the wrath to come. He keeps believers out of the Tribulation (1 Thess. 4:18; 5:9-10; Rev. 3:10).	(6) Christ comes as Judge. The world is judged (Matt. 25:31-32, 46; Rev. 6-19; Matt. 3:11-12; Joel 2:1-11; 3:1-17; Jude 15).
(7) It is a source of comfort to believers (1 Thess. 4:18; 5:9; Rev. 3:10).	(7) It is a source of fear to man (Rev. 6:15-17; 9-11).
(8) There are no recorded changes in nature mentioned in connection with the rapture.	(8) Many changes in nature recorded (Rev. 6; Isa. 35).
(9) It is a mystery, a truth hidden in the OT (1 Cor. 15:51).	(9) It is the subject of extended prophecy in the OT.
(10) No reference or dealing with Satan. Instead, his activity increases (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13-18 with 2 Thess. 2:1f).	(10) Satan is bound for 1,000 years (Rev. 20:1-3).
(11) At the rapture the Mount of Olives is unchanged.	(11) At His return, the Mount of Olives is split and forms a valley (Zech. 14:4-5).
(12) At the rapture we have the examination, rewards, and wedding of the bride (Rev. 19:7-10).	(12) Christ's return to earth is followed by the wedding feast and the church is seen already rewarded.
(13) At the rapture believers receive a glorified body (1 Cor. 15:51-53)	(13) Believers of the Tribulation go into the millennium with mortal bodies (Isa. 65:20-25).

Appendix 6: The Book of Life

Introduction

A number of passages in the Bible refer to a book called “the book of life,” a figurative expression that originated from the ancient customs of (a) keeping various kinds of records like genealogical records (Neh. 7:5, 64; 12:22, 23) and of (b) registering citizens for numerous purposes (Jer. 22:30; Ezek. 13:9). Accordingly, God is represented as having records of men, of their works, and of God’s dealings with them. One such record is called “the book of life.”

There is some evidence that in the city of Sardis a person’s name was sometimes removed from the city register before death if he had been convicted of a crime. This is undoubtedly behind the promise given to the overcomer in Revelation 3:5, “I will not erase his name from the book of life.”¹ But what is the meaning and significance of the various references to the book of life in relation to salvation, to the believer, and to the unbeliever? Is it a record of all who are saved or could it be a record of all those for whom Christ died, which under the doctrine of Christ’s unlimited atonement, would include all the world?

Passages Referring to the Book of Life

(1) Psalm 69:28 “Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous.”

(2) Daniel 12:1 “Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands *guard* over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued.” Though the word “life” or “living” is not used here, it is part of the same concept.

(3) In the gospels Christ says, “... but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven” (Luke 10:20). “Are recorded” is a perfect tense and looks at an abiding condition. This is evidently another reference to the book of life.

(4) In Philippians 4:3, Paul speaks of “the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.”

(5) Revelation 3:5 “I will not erase his name from the book of life.”

(6) Revelation 13:8 “all who dwell on the earth will worship him (the beast), everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.”

(7) Revelation 17:8 “... And those who dwell on the earth will wonder, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come.”

(8) In Revelation 20:12 “And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.”

(9) Revelation 20:15 “And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

Categories of Books in Scripture

In addition to the book of life, there are other categories of records or books mentioned in Scripture. These are:

(1) **Book of Wars:** Numbers 21:14. This was a collection of war songs celebrating the glorious acts of God on behalf of Israel.

(2) **The Book of Jasher:** Joshua 10:13; 2 Samuel 1:18. This was an early chronicle of the history of Israel.

¹ Alan Johnson, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12, Frank E. Gaebelin, general editor, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1981, p. 450.

(3) Book of Remembrance: Malachi 3:16-17; Psalm 56:8. This was a book of remembrance for special blessings and rewards for faithfulness.

(4) Book of Those Physically Alive (a dooms day book): Exodus 32:32-33. This refers to a register of the physically living. To be blotted out meant to experience physical death (cf. Exodus 17:14; Deut. 29:20; Psalm 9:5-6).

(5) The Book of Works: Revelation 20:12-13. This consists of a record of the deeds of unbelievers as a basis of their judgment proving they all fall short of the righteousness of Jesus Christ (Dan. 7:9-10; Rom. 3:19-24).

Thoughts on the Book of Life

In Relation to Believers

First, believers are told their names stand permanently written (recorded) in the book of life. The tenses used in Luke 10:20, Hebrews 12:23, and Philippians 4:3 suggest an abiding state. Both Luke 10:20 and Hebrews 12:23 use the perfect tense which can carry the idea of “stand recorded or enrolled.” The perfect tense in its basic meaning, unaffected by context or a particular verbal idea, refers to completed past action with existing results. But when used in context, the emphasis may be on the accomplished action; this is called the *consummative* perfect. On the other hand, the emphasis may be on the existing state, the results without any thought or emphasis on the past; this is the *intensive* perfect. And of course, the emphasis can be on both elements, completion and results. The *intensive* perfect is much like an emphatic or intensive present. “The attention is directed wholly to the present resulting state, the past action of which it is the result being left out of thought.”²

In Philippians 4:3, the verb in the clause, “are in the book of life,” is a present participle suggesting a continual condition and would likewise stress the permanence of this record.

Second, in Revelation 3:5, overcomers are promised that their names will never be erased or blotted out of the book of life. The negative “not” represents the emphatic double negative *ou me*, in the Greek. The idea and emphasis is “by no means or under no circumstances will I erase...” As discussed in the lesson on the church at Sardis (see lesson 9), this statement in Revelation 3:5 is an illustration of *litotes*, a rhetorical device designed to stress the positive by the use of a negative. If I were to say, “That’s no small problem!” you would immediately understand, “That’s a big problem!” This promise not only stresses the security of the believer, for every believer’s name stands permanently written in the book of life, but by stating the promise in this way, the Lord is promising something special to the overcomer in the kingdom and eternal future.

As mentioned above, there is historical evidence that in the city of Sardis a person’s name was sometimes removed from the city register before death if he had been convicted of a crime. When these messages were written, Christians were under the constant threat of being branded as social rebels and stripped of their citizenship if they refused to recant or denounce their faith in Christ. In other words, they were branded as criminals. Thus, as a source of motivation and encouragement the Lord personally reminds the overcomer not only of the safety of his heavenly citizenship, but of the special acknowledgment the Lord Himself will give him before the Father and before His angels.

Blotting names from the book of life is never applicable to a believer in Christ because believers are secure in Him, being kept by the power of God (1 Pet. 1:5) and held secure in both the hand of the Son and of the Father (John 10:28-30).

In Relation to Unbelievers

When we examine Scripture as a whole, there is evidence that some names, however, will be blotted from the book of life. In relation to Revelation 3:5, Walvoord writes:

On the basis of this some have considered the book of life not as the roll of those who are saved but rather a list of those for whom Christ died, that is, all humanity who have possessed physical life. As they come to maturity and are faced with the responsibility of accepting or rejecting Christ, their names are blotted out if they fail to receive Jesus Christ as Saviour; whereas those who do ac-

² E. DeWitt Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses*, 3rd edition, T. & T. Clark: Edinburgh, 1898, p 37.

cept Christ as Saviour are confirmed in their position in the book of life, and their names are confessed before the Father and heavenly angels.³

(1) Psalm 69 is a messianic Psalm portraying the suffering of Christ caused by His enemies. The passage is clearly talking about unbelievers for verse 21 reads, “They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” This was prophetic of actions that would be carried out by unbelievers against Christ during His crucifixion. Then, in Acts 1:2 Peter specifically applied Psalm 69:25 to Judas. Judas was a Christ rejecter and a representative of unbelieving Israel as a whole.

(2) In Psalm 69:27 David said, speaking of these enemies, “... and may they not come into Your righteousness.” Why could they not come into God’s righteousness? Because of rejection of Christ. In the Jew’s zeal to pursue their own self-righteousness they rejected the gift of God’s righteousness through faith in His Son (see Rom. 10:1-6).

(3) Then, in Psalm 69:28, still talking about the unbeliever, David adds, “may they be blotted out of the book of life and may they not be recorded with the righteous.” In the context, “be recorded” means either remain recorded, or it may point to the goal or end result—so they may not remain on the same register. “Be recorded” is in the imperfect tense in the Hebrew text which may, depending on the context, express an aim or result. It may be that David was not just praying for the untimely death of his enemies, but for removal from the book of life. Why? Because their actions not only demonstrated unbelief, but such a hardened condition of the heart that it precluded repentance or ever coming to faith in the righteousness of God through Messiah.

(4) Exodus 32:31-33:

Then Moses returned to the LORD, and said, “Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves. 32 But now, if Thou wilt, forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out from Thy book which Thou hast written!” 33 And the LORD said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.”

This was probably a register of those who were physically alive and to be blotted out of this book meant an untimely death. However, God’s physical and material dealings with Israel were often types and pictures of God’s spiritual dealings with man, and especially with the church today (1 Cor. 10:1f). For David’s enemies in Psalm 69 “blotting out of the book of life,” as in the case of Judas and the unbelieving in Israel, meant removal from the book of life and from remaining recorded with the righteous. This is supported by the fact that in Christ’s day all unbelieving Jews were not put to death, though Judas died by suicide. So likewise this Exodus passage may typically portray the removal of the sinner, the unbeliever who rejects Jesus Christ, from the book of life (John 16:8-9).

(5) Revelation 20:11-15 refers to the judgment of the unbelieving dead. These are those whose names are not in the book of life and are condemned to the eternal lake of fire. As will be suggested below, it may be that their names were originally there, but were removed because they never trusted in the person and work of Christ as their Savior.

Limited vs. Unlimited Atonement

Some believe in a doctrine of limited atonement (that Christ died for only the elect), but Scripture states plainly that Christ died for the sins of the entire human race. This is the doctrine of unlimited atonement.

From the human side or perspective, Christ’s saving work is limited only by man’s rejection or failure to respond to God’s grace (cf. 1 John 2:2; John 3:16, 36; 2 Pet. 2:1; Isa. 53:6; 1 Tim. 4:10; Titus 2:11; 2 Pet. 3:9; John 7:17; 1:9, 11; Rom. 2:4).

From the divine side or perspective, Christ’s saving work is limited by God’s elective purposes, but this does not alter the clear statements of Scripture that Christ died for all and the offer of salvation is for all. God’s sovereign election and man’s volition and responsibility to believe constitute a difficult concept for man to grasp. It is an example of what some theologians have called an antinomy, two laws or principles that are true, but that seem contradictory to the human mind.

Some possible implications:

³ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1966, p. 82.

(1) Since Christ died for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2), since God is perfectly just, fair, and impartial in His dealings with man (Rom. 2:2, 4, 11), and since all men are potentially saved in Jesus Christ (provision is made for all [cf. 1 Tim. 4:4-6; 4:10; 2 Pet. 2:1; 3:9]), it may be that the name of every person born into this world was written in the book of life from the foundation of the world.

(2) Since the issue for salvation is receiving Jesus Christ by personal faith (John 1:12), the unbeliever's name is blotted out at death because of rejection of Christ or negative volition to the grace of God, including the pre-salvation work of the Spirit of God that attempts to lead him to Jesus Christ. Romans 2:4 reads, "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" Obviously, all do not come to repentance or faith in Christ. This is what grammarians call a conative present pointing to what God desires and attempts to do, but He is hindered by man's hardness and rejection.

(3) This can never happen for those who have believed in Christ, however, since they have trusted in the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ.

Difficult Passages

But what about Revelation 13:8 and 17:8?

(1) In both these passages the words, "has not been written," are in the perfect tense. Remember that the perfect tense, unaffected by context or a particular verbal idea, refers to completed past action with existing results. Depending on the verb and the context, the emphasis may be on the accomplished action, the *consummative* perfect. Or, the emphasis may be on the existing state, the results without any thought or emphasis on the past, the *intensive* perfect. And of course, if the context suggests, the emphasis can be on both the completion and results.

(2) The verb used to illustrate the intensive perfect in grammar after grammar is the word "to write," *graptein*, which in the perfect, *gegraptai*, means "to stand written." When the negative "no" is added, it could mean: (a) it was never written in the book, or (b) it does not stand (remain) written. Why does it not remain written? If the above proposal is correct it is because their names are blotted out at death because they had refused to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

(3) Some might argue that in Revelation 13:8 and 17:8 the names of the beast worshippers are already viewed as removed from the book of life, that is removed or absent from the book of life before death. But those mentioned in these two passages are the earth dwellers, those who worship and marvel at the beast and who receive his mark. Receiving the mark of the beast is a clear indication of complete rejection of Jesus Christ; it demonstrates that the possessor of the mark has reached such a place or condition of hardness that it precludes repentance or faith in Christ. Receiving the mark of the beast, then, terminates one's chance to receive Jesus Christ. It is equivalent to death for Tribulation people. It is proof they will never receive Jesus Christ, and God knows this absolutely. This is similar to the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit that could only occur during the life of Christ on earth (Matt. 12).

(4) By contrast compare Isaiah 4:1-3 and Daniel 12:1. Both of these passages anticipate the blessings of the millennium following the Tribulation. Further, they are dealing with the remnant, those left at the end of the Tribulation who were not killed by the beast and who did not receive his mark, those whose names are still recorded in the book of life. These believers will go into the millennium and will experience its blessings.

(5) What about the words "from the foundation of the world"? In Revelation 13:8 these words are grammatically connected with "the Lamb who has been slain." Literally the Greek reads, whose names "do not stand written in the book of life of the Lamb, who was slain from the foundation of the world." This statement compares with Acts 2:23 and 1 Peter 1:20. It is the Lamb whose death was ordained from the foundation of the world. In Revelation 17:8, however, the construction is different. Here "from the foundation of the world" is connected with "the book of life." Literally the Greek says, "whose names do not stand written in the book of life from the foundation of the world." The book itself exists from the foundation of the world. The removal of names does not occur until death, or in this case, until they take the mark of the beast.

Three Categories of People

Finally, there are three categories of people that we might consider in relation to the book of life:

(1) Normal individuals who have reached the age of accountability; they must receive Jesus Christ as Savior, or at death their names will be blotted out and they will face the great white throne judgment (Rev. 20:11-15).

(2) The child who never reaches the age of accountability, but dies before he or she is capable of understanding and is thereby incapable of either rejecting or receiving Jesus Christ. Since Christ died for all, and since the issue is accepting or rejecting Christ, these names remain written in the book of life (cf. John 16:8-9; 1 Cor. 7:14).

(3) The mentally retarded, the person who can never reach the age of accountability because of their inability to understand the gospel. Such a person would also fall in the same category as number two above.

Appendix 7: Glossary of Prophetical Terms

Advent

This term comes from a Latin word *adventus* and means “arrival, presence.” It corresponds to the Greek *parousia* (coming or presence), or *epiphaneia* (manifestation, appearance), or *apokalupsis* (revelation, unveiling). Advent has become a theological term used of Christ’s appearances on earth—His first and second coming. So we speak of Christ’s first and second advents. The first advent includes our Lord’s birth, life, death, resurrection and was culminated by His ascension. The second advent refers to Christ’s second coming which will begin silently when He comes for His saints in the air (1 Thess. 4:13-18), and then openly to the world at the end of the Tribulation when He comes to earth (Matt. 24:27-30; 1 Thess. 3:13).

Amillennialism

A system of eschatology which, among other things, interprets the millennium as symbolical of present life in heaven.¹

Analogy of Faith

The principle that any interpretation of the Scripture must conform and harmonize with the whole teaching of Scripture on that given subject.²

Apocalypics

Prophecies that deal with the disclosure or revelation of the end time events. The word is derived from the Greek word, *apokalupsis* (sometimes written *apokalypsis*) “an unveiling, revelation.”

Apocalypse

A term sometimes used for the Book of Revelation since the word revelation comes from the Greek *apokalupsis*, “an unveiling, revelation.”

Antichrist

Anti means “against” or “in place of.” Antichrist, therefore, may refer generally to any apostate teacher who is against Christ or who claims to be Christ (Matt. 24:23-24; 1 John 2:18; 4:3). The Antichrist refers to the final and horrible world ruler of the Tribulation. He is one who stands both against Christ and who seeks to usurp Christ’s place as the false Messiah of the Jews (1 John 4:3b; Rev. 13:1-10).

Chiliasm

The belief in a thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. Comes from the mention of the 1,000 (Greek, *chilioi*) years used in Revelation 20:2-7.

Daniel’s Seventieth Week

This is another title or Scriptural reference for the Tribulation. It refers to the last seven years of the seventy weeks of years (or 490 years) prophesied concerning the nation Israel in Daniel 9:24-27. The seventy weeks of years concerns God’s program for the nation beginning with the time of Daniel and extending to the second advent of Christ. The first sixty-nine weeks (483 years) were from 445 BC to the time of Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem (29 AD). The last week (seven years) is yet to be fulfilled and can’t be until the fullness of the Gentiles is complete and the Church is removed by means of the Rapture. It will begin with the signing of the peace treaty with Israel by the prince that will come, the final world ruler who rises out of the revived Roman empire (Dan. 9:26-27).

Day of Christ

¹ Paul Lee Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, Assurance Publishers: Rockville, MD, 1974, p. 363.

² Tan, p. 363.

The Day of Christ is that period of time which begins with the rapture of the Church (1 Thess. 4:14-18) and includes the events which follow in heaven as the Judgment Seat of Christ and the Marriage of the Lamb (1 Cor. 1:8; 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14; Phil. 1:6, 10; 2:16). 2 Thessalonians 2:2 should be rendered “the Day of the Lord” and refers to a different period of time. The Day of Christ is a time of reward and blessing for the Church following the Rapture.

Day of God

This is the name based on the Greek Text behind the KJV that is sometimes given to those events which bring to a close the Day of the Lord and usher in the eternal state with the new heavens and the new earth. The events of the Day of God include the dissolving of the old heavens and the old earth (2 Pet. 3:10-14). This name is also used of the great war described in Revelation 14:16 and consisting of several battles, beginning with Antichrist’s campaign into Egypt (Dan. 11:40-45), including the siege of Jerusalem (Zech. 14:2) as well as the final battle of Armageddon (Rev. 14:16).³

Day of the Lord

This is the period of time which begins with the Tribulation and extends through the millennial reign of Christ on earth through the destruction of the heavens and the earth and into the ushering in of the new heavens and earth and the eternal state. 2 Peter 3:10 gives authority for including everything from the Tribulation through the Millennium. This day begins as a thief (1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10) being instituted by the signing of the peace treaty of Daniel 9:27 with mankind believing a new time of peace and safety has been ushered in.

Eschatology

The doctrine of “last things” or “things to come.” The word eschatology comes from the Greek, *eschatos*, meaning, “last, extreme.” As used theologically, this word refers to those truths of Scripture that pertain to the end times, the coming of the Lord, the rapture, the Tribulation, the millennium, etc.

Exegesis

The study of the intended meaning of a passage of Scripture through observation of the essentials of the text as the context, grammar, meaning of words, literary style, and the cultural and historical background. Exegesis comes from the Greek word *exegeomai*, “to lead out, explain, unfold.” Eisegesis is just the opposite. It means to read into the text one’s own ideas. We want to avoid eisegesis and do exegesis.

Fullness of the Gentiles

This refers to the completion of God’s purpose in the church age during which time God is calling out from among the Gentiles a people for His name, namely the Church (Acts 15:14; Eph. 1:22-23; Rom. 11:7-32).

Great White Throne Judgment

Often called, the “final judgment,” the great white throne judgment follows the millennial reign of Christ. Its purpose is not to determine whether one is saved or not, but rather to pass judgment on the works of the unsaved to demonstrate their unrighteousness and that they fall short of the holiness of God. The sentence is the second death: eternal separation from God in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11-15).

Hades

See **Hell**.

Hell (and related words)

Hell: In common usage, this term refers to the place of future punishment for the wicked. The word properly translated “hell” in the New Testament is the Greek *Geenna* or *Gehenna*, a place in the valley of Hinnom where human sacrifices had been offered and where continuous burning of rubbish made it an apt illustration of the eternal lake of fire (cf. Matt. 5:22). Other words like *sheol* or *hades* are improperly translated by this term.

³ Charles C. Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible, Expanded Edition*, NASB, Moody Press: Chicago, 1995, p. 2036.

Sheol: The general idea of this word is “the place of the dead” including the grave (cf. Num. 16:30,33; Ps. 16:10), and the unseen place of those who have departed from this life, the place of departed spirits or both the righteous (Gen. 37:35) and the wicked (Prov. 9:18).

Hades: This word is basically the New Testament counterpart of the *Sheol*. It refers to the unseen world in general, but specifically to the abode of the unsaved dead between death and the final judgment at the great white throne (cf. Luke 16:23 and Rev. 20:11-15). It differs from hell in that it is temporary while hell is permanent.

Lake of Fire: Refers to the eternal state of the wicked who are forever separated from God and consigned to a special abode of suffering because of their rejection of Christ or their lack of the righteousness of Christ. It is equivalent to and identified with the second death in Revelation 20:14.

Imminency

This is a term used in connection with the return of Christ for the church. His coming for the church as promised in John 14:3 is imminent, without the necessity of any event that must take place before the Lord returns for His church. His coming for the church “is not qualified by description of any signs or prerequisite events.”⁴ By contrast, the return of Christ at the end of the Tribulation is preceded by a number of signs (Matt. 24:4-22). Scriptural evidence for imminency provides strong evidence for the pre-tribulation viewpoint.

Judgment Seat of Christ

This term describes that event when believers will be brought into an examination before the Son of God (1 Cor. 3:9-15; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10). The Greek word for “judgment seat” is *βῆμα* which once referred to the platform where the umpire for the Greek games would sit and issue rewards to the athletes. Thus, the purpose for the judgment seat is not to determine whether the one judged is a believer or not, but rather to publicly assess, whether acceptable or worthless, one’s works (outward) and character (inward) for rewards or their loss.

Kingdom of God, and Kingdom of Heaven

The word “kingdom” means “rule, reign.” Thus, the names kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven mean the rule or reign of God and the rule or reign of heaven. Some Bible teachers designate the eternal kingdom as the kingdom of God and the earthly program of God’s reign in the present mystery form and the millennial form of the future as the kingdom of heaven. Such a distinction, however, cannot really be supported by the use of these terms in Scripture.

The difference in the terms does not lie in the terms themselves as much as in the usage in the context. Both are used of the eternal kingdom (cf. Matt. 6:33 with 18:3-6; 7:21 and 19:14). Both are used in reference to the future millennial kingdom (Matt. 4:17 and Mark 1:14-15; cf. Matt. 3:2; 5:3, 10; 6:10; Mark 9:1, 47; 14:25; Luke 19:11; 21:31). And both are used in reference to the present form of the kingdom (Matt. 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10).

Some would say the differences in the terms are found in the following: (1) The Kingdom of heaven stresses the kingdom has its source and origin in heaven, is patterned after heaven and its perfection, and has eternal and lasting value. (2) The kingdom of God points to the spiritual character of the reign and dominion, i.e., the reign of God, and to the chief object and goal of the kingdom, the glory of God. (3) The kingdom of God when used of a spiritual kingdom includes only good angels and saved men. (4) The kingdom of heaven, when used of the earthly aspects of the God’s kingdom, deals with the external aspects of the kingdom, i.e., Christendom, and includes saved and unsaved.

Lake of Fire

See **Hell**.

Millennium

⁴ John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, Dunham Publishing: Findlay, OH, 1957, p. 79.

The word millennium means a thousand years and refers to the promise of Scripture that Christ would reign on earth for a thousand years. The millennium has come to be synonymous for not only Christ's reign on earth, but for the fulfillment of all Old Testament hopes and expectations associated with the kingdom of God on earth—peace, no war, perfect seasons, Israel and Jerusalem the center of the earth, Gentile domination removed, etc. (key verses, Isa. 2:1-4; 9:7; 11:2f; Rev. 20).

Premillennial View: The second coming of Christ will occur before the Millennium.

Amillennial View: The second coming of Christ is at the end of the Church Age and there is no earthly Millennium. Strictly, amillenarians believe that the present state of the righteous in heaven is the Millennium, but there is no earthly Millennium.

Postmillennial View: The second coming of Christ is after the Millennium.

Mystery

Mystery, the Greek *mustērion*, is not something mysterious (in the modern sense) but something unknown until revealed to the initiate. In Scripture it refers to God's secrets, His counsels and purposes, which are not known to man apart from His special revelation in Scripture or by His prophets. It is particularly used in the New Testament of truth unknown in the Old Testament, but revealed in New Testament times. Eleven different mystery truths can be distinguished in the New Testament (Matt. 13:11; Rom. 11:1-25; 1 Cor. 15:51-57; Eph. 3:1-11; 5:25-32; Col. 1:26-27; 2:2; 1 Thess. 2:7; 1 Tim. 3:16; Rev. 1:20; 10:7; 17:5,7).

Prophecy

As used here, prophecy refers to that part of God's revelation in Scripture that is predictive, the revelation which God gives from His sovereign and eternal plans and foreknowledge of things to come. The prophet was one who spoke God's message to His people. In this he was both a forth teller (preaching) and a fore-teller (prediction). It is the predictive element we are concerned with here, however, we must always keep in mind that prophecy, though dealing with the future, carries a current message for godliness, peace, and comfort.

Rapture

Pretribulation Rapture: The rapture of the Church (i.e., the coming of the Lord in the air for His saints) will take place before the seven-year period of the Tribulation begins. Therefore, the Church will not go through any of the Tribulation period (the events of Revelation 6-18) according to this view.

In this view, some believe the second advent of Jesus Christ has two phases: one secret as a thief comes to take what is valuable to him (to the church only, 1 Thess. 4:13-18), and one open and manifest to all the world (2 Thess. 2:8, "the manifestation of His coming"). Others would say it is distinct from the second coming to earth.

Prewrath Rapture:⁵ The rapture of the church occurs prior to the wrath of God poured out on the earth, but in this view, the wrath of God does not occur until about or after the last quarter of the Tribulation. Thus the church will experience most of the events of the book of Revelation.

Mid-tribulation Rapture: The rapture will occur in the middle of the Tribulation, after three-and-a-half years.

Post-tribulation Rapture: The Church will be on earth during the entire Tribulation. Some would say the rapture is a part of the second coming, others that it is distinct from the second coming though separated by only a very short interval of time.

Partial Rapture: Only saints who are worthy will be raptured before the wrath of God is poured out; those who have not been faithful will remain on the earth to endure the Tribulation.

Sheol

⁵ A recent view promoted by Marvin Rosenthal in his book, *The Prewrath Rapture of the Church*, Thomas Nelson: Nashville, 1990.

See **Hell**.

Times of the Gentiles

This is an expression used by our Lord in Luke 21:24 of the period of Gentile domination over Israel when Israel has no king on the throne of David. It began in 586 BC with the captivity of Judah under Nebuchadnezzar (2 Chron. 36:1-21) and will continue until the return of Christ to earth. Daniel's visions and prophecies foresee this domination under the pictures of the four beasts and the great image (Dan. 2:31f; 7:3f).

Tribulation

This term is used by most theologians to refer to Daniel's 70th week, the seven-year period of unprecedented trouble that will occur on earth through a series of divine judgments to be poured out on the entire inhabited earth (Dan. 12:1; Rev. 6-19; Matt. 24:21,29). It begins with the signing of a peace treaty with Israel by the Roman prince that will come, the man of sin, the beast of Revelation 13 (cf. Dan. 9:26, 27; 2 Thess. 2:8). The Great Tribulation (Matt. 24:21) refers to the last half of this seven year period. It is so called because of the increased wrath that will occur in these last three and half year.