

**THE
UNSEALED
BOOK**

A STUDY OF
THE REVELATION
OF JESUS CHRIST

BY DR. MARK ROSER

COPYRIGHT AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Scripture quotations are primarily from the New International Version and the King James Version of the Bible. The Revised Standard (RV), the New American Standard (NAS), the Amplified Bible (AMP), and The Message (MB) are indicated in the footnotes when they are quoted.

Printed By Morris Publishing
3212 E. Hwy. 30, Kearney, NE 68847
1-800-650-7888

**COPYRIGHT 2006 UTTERMOST PUBLICATIONS
1232 WEST KEMPER ROAD
#179
CINCINNATI, OHIO 45240, USA**

All rights reserved.

Written permission must be secured from Uttermost Publications to reproduce any part of this book, except for brief quotations.

**THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO ALL THOSE WHO LOVE JESUS
AND LONG TO SEE HIM RETURN IN GLORY!**

Special thanks to my wife, Pat, who has always encouraged me to give my best in service to the Lord. She allowed me countless hours to research and write.

Thanks also to the leadership
of Borrowdale Brooke Church, Harare, Zimbabwe.

You understood my call to write
and minister to the wider body of Christ.

I will always cherish my memories as your missionary-pastor.

Many thanks also for the pictures used in the seven parts of the book, provided courtesy of Pitts Theology Library, Candler School of Theology, Emory University.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART, CHAPTER, TITLE, REFERENCE AND PAGE

INTRODUCTION: TESTIMONY AND VIEWS.....5 - 10

PART ONE: MESSAGE

CHAPTER ONE: Core Message (Rev. 1:1-3).....13 - 24

CHAPTER TWO: Revelation Terms (Rev. 1:1-20).....25 - 37

CHAPTER THREE: Envision Jesus (Rev. 1:12-20).....39 - 48

PART TWO: CHURCHES

CHAPTER FOUR: Seven Letters (Rev. 2:1-3:22).....51 - 62

CHAPTER FIVE: Seven Churches (Rev. 2:1-3:22)..... 63 - 75

PART THREE: HEAVEN

CHAPTER SIX: Rapture Questions (Rev. 4:1ff)..... 79 - 88

CHAPTER SEVEN: Envision Heaven (Rev. 4:1-5:14).....89 -103

PART FOUR: SERIES

CHAPTER EIGHT: Series Questions (Rev. 6:1-16:21).....107 - 117

CHAPTER NINE: Seven Seals (Rev. 6:1-8:1).....119 - 132

CHAPTER TEN: Servants Sealed (Rev. 7:1-17).....133 - 145

CHAPTER ELEVEN: Seven Trumpets (Rev. 8:1-11:19).....147 - 161

PART FIVE: WARTIME

CHAPTER TWELVE: Two Witnesses (Rev. 11:1-19).....165 - 178

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: Woman and Dragon (Rev. 12:1-17).....179 - 190

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: Two Beasts (Rev. 13:1-18).....191 - 205

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: Seven Approaches (Rev. 13:1-18).....207 - 216

CHAPTER SIXTEEN: Time Question (Rev.11:2-22:21).....217 - 229

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: Lamb Followers (Rev.14:1-20).....231 - 243

PART SIX: BABYLON

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: Seven Bowls (Rev. 15:1-16:21).....247 - 258
CHAPTER NINETEEN: Babylon and Beast (Rev.17).....259 - 268
CHAPTER TWENTY: Seven Solutions (Rev.17).....269 -283
CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: Babylon’s Judgment (Rev.18).....285 - 297
CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO: White Horse Rider (Rev.19).....299 - 310

PART SEVEN: CONSUMMATION

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE: Millennium Question (Rev. 20) 313 - 326
CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR: New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:1-22:6)...327 - 344
CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE: Our Responses (Rev. 21:1-22:6).....345 - 357

APPENDIX: ADDED MATERIAL

NUMBER ONE: Epoch Questions (Rev. 1:4,10,20).....359 - 363
NUMBER TWO: The Dream Church (Rev. 2:1-3:22).....364
NUMBER THREE: Pretribulation Origins (Rev. 4:1ff).....365

BIBLIOGRAPHY: COMMENTARIES AND REFERENCES

AUTHORS: Book Titles on Revelation.....367 - 371

AUTHOR OF THE UNSEALED BOOK AND UTTERMOST MISSIONS

OTHER BOOKS BY DR. MARK C. ROSER

END PAGES

INTRODUCTION

TESTIMONY AND VIEWS

BOOK OF REVELATION

The end of the world always interested me. My first apocalyptic image was Charlton Heston in “*The Omega Man*.” Due to a test vaccine, Dr. Robert Neville is the only survivor of an global war waged with biological weapons. Everyone has died except for a few hundred deformed, nocturnal people. They are sensitive to light and homicidally psychotic. They believe technology caused the war and Neville, as the last symbol of that world, must die. Neville, using bright electric lights and machinery, attempts to hold them at bay and restart the human race.

Since “The Omega Man,” hundreds of movies have depicted the End. The glut of these films depict an earthly remnant who kill to survive in the wake of whatever apocalyptic cataclysms destroyed mankind: a nuclear holocaust, an asteroid, a collapse in nature, a techno take-over, a global plague, an alien invasion, the Devil in a little boy named Damien, even a couple of fallen angels with attitudes - whatever people fear. The plot is always about avoiding the End or surviving when others do not survive.

Our culture is obsessed with the End. Shouldn't Christians wisely take advantage of this preoccupation? Hollywood has. Numerous films deal with the end of life, as we know it, but they never quite end. They mutate from apocalyptic to post-apocalyptic themes, revealing only our fears and lack of genuine faith. I find this trend alarming because these movies propagate an end without God. *An empty, godless world view that says **man must save himself since there is no God who will ever intervene to save man.***

The Book of Revelation tells us that God will end this evil age and rescue His own! Yet sadly, most Christians either ignore this book or make it into something it is not. Instead of learning God's version, we watch the latest ‘apocalypse now’ or we accept our favorite TV preacher's rundown on the End. Do we leave the End for others to explain because we think Revelation is impossible to understand - the eschatology of the Matrix more lucid?

I am concerned that Christians may stumble as Israel did at Christ's first coming. Most Israelites thought the Messiah would deliver them from Roman rule and set up a temporal kingdom with Jerusalem as its capital. But that interpretation of Scripture, by those who were supposed to know, was amiss.

Israel missed her Messiah. Today false expectations also abound of what must happen, and when have we known God's people to rightly anticipate the fulfillment of a Bible prophecy? Have Christians figured out what 666 entails? Have we even got the Rapture and the Great Tribulation right?

A PROMISED BLESSING

Revelation promises to reveal and bless. "*Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy.*" No Bible book but Revelation promises such a blessing at its outset, if we will "*take to heart what is written in it.*"¹

I experienced that promise in 1978. I was a Political Science major at college. My world was just starting. I had put my childish fears of the End behind me. After all, my future was mapped out - Law School and a career in politics. The plan was power and money, and the thought that God might have other plans for my life never crossed my mind. Who would have thought Christ would set me free from a self-centered life, and send me as a missionary to Africa for twenty some years. But that is Jesus for you! He has something better planned, and His plans for the End are also better than you thought!

Prophecies of Christ's Return did for me what years of church attendance never did. They convinced me that Jesus is LORD; so I turned my back on a fully paid scholarship, and I sought God's purpose for my life. Such is the power of the message of Christ's Return. I have never been the same. And as a new believer, I had a passionate desire to understand this last book of the Bible. It became the first book in the Bible that I read in its entirety. Although I understood little of what I read, one big thing was clear - Jesus is the only Omega Man. That was enough. Leaving university, I began to study every book I could get my hands on to make more sense out of John's vision. I quickly discovered that commentators have vastly different ideas about the End.

SCHOOLS OF INTERPRETATION

Some say Revelation deals strictly with events that occurred in the First Century A.D.. John's Apocalypse, they claim, is a sort of early church track to comfort those persecuted by Imperial Rome. The early readers, educated in the book's cryptic language, would have fully understood its message. This school of interpretation is called the **Preterits Approach**, which simply means past - *past events* in the early Church.

¹ Rev. 1:3

On the opposite end of the interpretative spectrum, many popular books on Revelation look solely for a future fulfillment. They talk of the Rapture of the Church and Daniel's Seventieth Week. They teach that John's prophecies await fulfillment during a seven-year period called the Great Tribulation. This **Futuristic Approach** claims that John deals exclusively with *future events* that will take place just before Christ's Return.

I also read fascinating books that interpret Revelation as a summary of *the major events* of world history from Christ's ascension to His return. This **Historical Approach** sees in Revelation the first martyrs, the conversion of the Roman Empire, the barbarian invasions, the rise of the Papacy, the Dark Ages, the French Revolution, World War I, II and other major events.

If that were not enough, I discovered the **Symbolic Approach** or what is called the allegorical interpretation of Revelation. These books claim that there are *no events* in Revelation. Only general visions and lasting principles that reveal the great conflict between Christ's Church and the Devil's world. The aim, they claim, is simply to reveal Christ's victory and to encourage perseverance in those who believe the message concerning Christ.

MERITS AND LIMITATIONS

Is the book of Revelation about past events that occurred in the First Century? Or does it predict only events that are still in the *future*? Is it an outline of *all* the great events of history or does it contain *no events* at all? Being a new believer, I was confused.

When I compared each of these interpretations to John's words, I saw weaknesses as well as merit in them. **Preterists** account for the historical context in which John wrote. They make it meaningful to the early Church, but they limit Revelation to the First Century and *discount its prophetic nature*. In contrast, the **Futurists'** View upholds the prophetic nature of the book. Yet, they too limit Revelation to the *last seven years* of the Church age, looking only for *literal, chronological events* occurring over a few years.

The **Symbolic** Approach has merit because of its emphasis on symbolism. Revelation is full of symbols. It makes the book relevant to the Church throughout her history, assuring us of victory over Satan. As the saying goes: "I read the final chapter and we win!" It is restrictive, however, in that it *spiritualizes everything*, failing to show us what kinds of things must shortly take place. Whereas, the **Historical** School answers the question of what kinds of things are prophesied in the Seals, Trumpets and Bowls. Yet,

its interpretation of the text is far from convincing, limited to passing events that occur around the time the author, and when he wrote his commentary.

As we study Revelation, we revisit these four basic views, although most commentaries only present their own viewpoint. My interpretation also differs from these four, but I want you to understand how each school interprets the debated sections of Revelation. The Seals, Trumpets and Bowls are debated, and the identity of the Beast and Babylon and the timing of Millennium are greatly debated. Once informed, you can decide what you believe is true.

I believe a true interpretation of Revelation speaks to the early and later Church. That guiding principle means that John's original readers could understand and keep the book's message and we, today, can also understand and keep it. Therefore, if Revelation is all about the past, how can we keep its prophecy? And if it is limited to a brief, seven year period in the future, what could believers over the past two thousand years gain from it?

AN UNSEALED BOOK

We must also accept that Revelation is a book of unsealed prophecy. It is unlike the book of Daniel who was told to seal up the words of his prophecy. John was told *not* to seal his prophecy.² Daniel's prophecy was sealed because the time was far off, and the Messiah had not ushered in the last days. God said, "the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end." But John is told, "*Seal not up the prophecies of the book for the time is at hand.*"³

I have entitled my book, "*The Unsealed Book*," because Revelation is unsealed. This does not mean that I have unsealed Revelation by my interpretation, but rather it was already unsealed in its first edition. For the angel instructed John. "*Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book.*"⁴ Revelation is also called "The Apocalypse" or literally "the unveiling." And seven times in Revelation we read, "*he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*"⁵

Thirty years ago, I viewed Revelation as a cryptic, road map of events. I thought it would tell me what specific calamities the world would soon face and when Christ would return. Once I unlocked its treasure, I thought I would write a book to reveal its mysteries. How human! Again, Jesus had something better in mind. He has taken me on an extended course, enabling me to accept what Revelation has said about itself all along. It is unsealed, since the time is continually at hand. It is not for us or someone else to unseal it.

² Dan.8:26; 9:24;12:4; Rev. 22:10 ³ Rev.22:10 ⁴ Rev. 22:10 ⁵ Rev 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22;13:9

The message of Revelation is that Jesus is coming soon. We receive God's gracious blessing if we take that clear prophecy to heart. When grasped, it encourages us to live in a constant state of readiness, which is extremely vital to our well being and that of our churches. Sometime ago, I began a helpful practice of reminding myself, "Mark, one less day until Jesus comes!" This saying "one less day" inspires me to faithfully focus on and joyfully anticipate what is of ultimate importance. It puts everything in perspective. It helps me keep short accounts with the Lover of my soul. Because, whether in my lifetime or not, with each passing day, I can honestly say, "one less day until Jesus comes!"⁶

Let us study Revelation with an aim to strengthen, in our lives, the blessed hope of His coming, as we allow John's prophecy to speak of itself!

STRUCTURE AND PARTS

In Part One, we start with Revelation chapter one and John's core prophecy. Chapter one lays a sure foundation to understanding all that follows. We *look at* the nature of prophecy in Revelation so as to avoid a common pitfall of interpreters. We also *explore* how that prophecy is communicated, appreciating its literary style. In Part Seven, which is our last set of chapters, I *enlarge* on the kind of response God desires to Jesus' Revelation. The angel calls for this response in the Epilogue. We conclude on this note of response, since practical application is always an essential part of God's Word.

We cover Revelation section by section, noting the powerful use of contrast. John shows us the Lamb and the Dragon, the two Beasts and the two Witnesses as well as the two Woman. At certain junctions like when the Seals are introduced, I provide a detailed exegesis. It is vital that we see the relationship between the Seals, Trumpets and Bowls. You will notice that I outline each chapter in seven points. I got that idea from Revelation's use of the number 'seven' and found this helpful in covering the book. At the end of each chapter there are also seven discussion questions for use in small groups.

At the start of each chapter, I will share a sometimes-humorous anecdote. I also have brief stories throughout to illustrate the text. This will, hopefully, make your reading more interesting. If you use this study in a small group, you can assign your readings according to your meeting times. You might read a chapter of Revelation along with a chapter of my book before you meet. It is my prayer that as you study Revelation, you will really understand its message, ready for Christ's Return and motivated to witness for Him!

⁶ Rom. 13:11-12

MY PRAYER
REVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1 What has been your experience with Revelation? What school of interpretation?
- 2 Why do you want to study Revelation?
- 3 How do you hope to benefit from this study?
- 4 When do you plan to make time to study?
- 5 Do you feel ready for Christ to return?
- 6 Do you expect Christ to return soon?
- 7 Review books on Revelation and determine which of the four views they hold?

Father, you bless us with prophecies of Your Son's Return. You say, "pay attention to them, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts."⁷

Lord, as we attend to the prophetic Word, make the

Morning Star rise in our hearts. Grant us "the Spirit of revelation, so that we may know Christ better."⁸ Have the Holy Spirit guide us into truth and show us things to come. Help us to be like the noble believers at Berea who "received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so."⁹

Thank you, Father, that our salvation is secure and our brotherly fellowship maintained - not by the Endtime doctrines we hold but by the death and resurrection of your Son. As we apply ourselves to this study, may Jesus be honored and glorified in our lives!

PART ONE

MESSAGE

CHAPTER ONE: CORE MESSAGE
(REV. 1:1-3)

CHAPTER TWO: REVELATION TERMS
(REV. 1:1-20)

CHAPTER THREE: ENVISION JESUS
(REV. 1:12-20)

The Book of Revelation has caught the imagination of artists throughout the centuries. Many have sought to produce a visual rendition of John's Apocalypse. In each of the seven parts of this book we provide examples of their work.

The picture is by

CHAPTER ONE

CORE MESSAGE

SEVEN MAJORS IN REVELATION 1:1-3

A young preacher stood up before the congregation with only his Bible. From behind the pulpit he read, “Behold, I am coming quickly.” Although he had prepared much to say, his mind went completely blank. So with more force he said, “Behold, I am coming quickly.” This time he threw his hands forward for inspiration. But nothing came. Moving from behind the pulpit, he walked to the edge of the platform, and with more force, he shouted, “Behold, I am coming quickly.” However, during his forward movement, his ankle gave way. Suddenly, he went stumbling down the steps onto the lap of an elderly lady in the front row. Terribly embarrassed, he apologized. She simply said, “Don’t worry, Sonny. You warned me three times that you were coming!”

My mom always said, “A word to the wise is sufficient.” In his prologue, John tells us what Revelation is all about. Jesus is coming soon! That is the basis for interpreting all that follows. It is Revelation’s core message. Taken from the first three verses of Revelation, we will look at John’s core message in seven points, each point beginning with the letter “M.”



MESSAGE: IT IS ABOUT JESUS *“The Revelation of Jesus Christ”¹*

“You can’t see the forest for the trees” aptly describes many views of Revelation. The course prospectus for the Book of Revelation at a particular Bible School claims there are 154 keys for unlocking its mysteries. That is a very big key chain for the average person to handle. They make Revelation an obscure mystery, most difficult to unlock and certainly not a revelation! Apart from the Holy Spirit, men cannot understand God’s Word.

HIS PERSON AND WORK

The first verse of the last book of the Bible says it is “*the revelation of Jesus.*” The message of the Bible is Jesus Christ. He is the book’s one great theme. Some commentators debate whether it is the revelation of the person of Jesus or simply a revelation given to Him. It is both. Jesus opens the revelation and He is the One revealed in it. The Father gives His Son the revelation, which He unfolds to His servants by sending His angel to His servant, John.

¹ (Rev. 1:1) The dark veil of sin is only taken away by faith in Jesus. (2 Cor. 3:14-4:4)

What we learn of Jesus in it will agree with the rest of the New Testament. Four times in the first and last chapter, Jesus is called the Alpha and Omega.² He is the very start and the final conclusion of every matter. He also mediates all that happens in between. In the beginning all things were created by Him, currently all things are upheld through Him, and soon all things will end in Him. God has willed that His Son be the One through whom history is revealed, put in motion and brought to a consummation.

Revelation's theme is Jesus' manifestation to the world at the end of the age. The Merriam-Webster dictionary says *theme* literally means "something laid down." The entire edifice of the Book of Revelation is built on Christ's Return. As Lord of Lords and King of Kings, He is coming to rescue His people, to judge the wicked, and to subjugate every other power and force. He will soon conclude His work of redemption.

The end of the age is, therefore, nothing other than, "*the revelation of Jesus Christ.*" Peter says, "Rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the *revelation of Jesus Christ.*"³



MANIFESTATION: IT IS PROPHETIC OF HIS COMING
"What Must Soon Take Place"⁴

The Book of Revelation is like "Chinese boxes." You open up a box and discover another box inside the one you opened. We start with the large box, which is the revelation of Jesus Christ. Inside that box, we find another box that says this is the revelation of His Coming. Within that box there are smaller boxes like the Seals; yet, we must not forget that all these boxes are contained within the revelation of His Return. Whether we read about the Beast or the Bowls, each is contained within that message. Otherwise, we will fail to see 'the forest' because of the individual trees.

Repeated throughout Revelation is the simple message that Christ is coming.⁵ This core message could not be more conspicuous. The book opens and closes with it. It is reiterated again and again. Christ is coming and He will soon manifest Himself to the world as the Sovereign Lord. Then the kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdom of our Lord and He will reign forever and ever. Jesus solemnly testifies to the veracity of everything related to His Return, using the words "trustworthy," "true" and "surely."

² Rev. 1:8,17; 21:6; 22:13 ³ 1 Peter 1:13 ⁴ Rev. 1:1 ⁵ OT is saturated with such prophecies. Scholars estimate that there are 1,845 references to Christ's Second Coming in the OT. In the 260 chapters of the NT, there are 318 references to Christ's Return - an amazing one out of every thirty verses. Twenty-three of the twenty-seven NT books refer to this great event; yet much of Christendom has no expectation of Jesus' Return.

“The angel said to me, ‘these words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place.’ ‘Behold, I am coming soon...’ He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”⁶

Christ’s Coming calls us to ponder our passing days and the dawn of eternity. A great mathematician said that he was not concerned about spiritual matters until he vividly saw life’s “two magnitudes - the shortness of time and the vastness of eternity.” When these truths came home to him, he became a devoted disciple of Jesus. With our first child, older adults would say, “Enjoy them now, because they will grow up faster than you ever thought possible.” It happened right before my eyes and now I tell others the same thing.

Poets have often described life by using the metaphor of a day; the morning is our youth, afternoon our middle age, and the evening with darkness approaching represents our older years. Paul speaks of the entire Christian age in terms of one late, night, saying, “The night is far gone, the day is near.”

ONE GREAT PROPHECY

We are to keep Revelation’s prophecy. *“Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.”*⁷ The words of the prophecy of this book are simply that Jesus is coming soon. Throughout Revelation, it reads, *“the words of the prophecy of this book.”* All five times prophecy is found in the singular and not prophesies, plural.⁸ There is one great prophecy in the Book of Revelation and that is Christ is coming soon.

Since Jesus is coming soon, the things preceding His Return are *“what must soon take place.”*⁹ But what is meant by “soon?” This is a critical question. A lot rides on our interpretation of “soon.” In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that one’s entire view of Revelation is dependent on this single word. Rendered *“soon”* (NIV) or *“shortly”* (KJV), it is a much-debated word. Each main school of interpretation interprets *“soon”* differently.¹⁰

- **Preterits claim soon or shortly means near to John’s day.**

For Preterists, “soon” means the date is coming soon as men deem soon. It indicates that all will take place near the time of John, Revelation’s author. No way, they argue, can *“soon”* mean 2000 years. John wrote to achieve a specific result in the lives of First Century believers. Therefore, the view that a book written in the First Century did not apply until the Twenty-first Century

⁶ Rev. 22:6-7, 20 ⁷ Rev. 22:7 ⁸ Rev. 1:3; 22:7, 10, 18-19 ⁹ “Come to pass in their entirety” (Marvin Vincent’s Word Studies). ¹⁰ Greek “tachos” means “quickly, swiftly, speedily, promptly, suddenly.” (Luke 18:8; Acts 25:4; Rom. 16:20; Rev. 22:6-7).

is unthinkable to Preterists. As a result of this, some allege that John and the apostles believed Jesus would return in their lifetime. Others Preterists try to side step that inference by saying the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. is the end of the age that John addresses.¹¹

- **Futurists say once the time comes, there is no delay in the action.**¹²

The Futurist interpret “soon” quite differently, translating “*tachei*” as “quickly.”¹³ They point out that the Greek word can mean without delay and suddenly by surprise.¹⁴ Since Jesus’ Second Coming is “*like a thief*,” the surprise rendering is adopted.¹⁵ They assert that in three parables, Jesus implies that it would be a *long time* before His Return.¹⁶ For them, the day can be quite distant, but events will transpire rapidly once that day arrives. In the Futurists’ minds, the Divine clock has been on hold since Christ’s first coming, awaiting Daniel’s Seventieth Week. This normal line of interpretation for the Futurists School fits well into their timeframe of seven literal years.

- **Historical interpreters take “soon” to mean that these events would begin promptly and extend to the return of Christ.**

The Historical view sees in Revelation the history of the Church unfolding. Although beginning in John’s own day, the conclusion of these events would take us to the Return of Christ. For the historical interpreter, the events of Revelation would soon commence.¹⁷ But when they would end could be thousands of years later.

- **The Symbolic approach says, “soon” is simply the symbolic language of the Seer, in which past, present and future are interwoven.**

The Symbolic view approaches “soon” in pragmatic ways. Some say there are many comings of the Lord even as there are many days of the Lord. They claim that the Lord is ever coming and that whatever powers oppose Him will soon be overthrown. For example, Jesus came in the third century, figuratively speaking, and overcame pagan Rome. For others soon is interpreted in the light of a prophetic perspective in which the End is always imminent.¹⁸

Paul writes, “the time has been shortened.”¹⁹ The Greek word here for time is significant. It is not “*chronos*” from which we get chronology, a succession of clock-time, but Paul chose the word “*kairos*.” It points to a special fixed,

¹¹ Some differentiate between the signs leading up to the End but not including the end and Jesus’ Return. They interpret John’s 42 months - as 67 to 70 AD when the Roman armies ravaged Judea. It was “the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written.” (Luke 21:22). The “power of the holy people” was “finally broken.” ¹² Luke 18:8; Acts 12:7, 22:18, 25:4; Rom. 16:20; Rev. 22:6-7. ¹³ Rev. 1:3 ¹⁴ KJV retains some of the ambiguity by translating “*tachei*” as *quickly*. ¹⁵ Rev 3:3, 16:15 ¹⁶ Matt. 24:48, 25:5; 25:19 ¹⁷ Rev. 1:3; 2:10 ¹⁸ God will vindicate His elect without delay (Luke 18:8). He will “soon” crush Satan under their feet (Rom. 16:20). ¹⁹ 1 Cor. 7:29 NT Greek

definite time, appointed for key events. When we read in Revelation, *“The time is at hand,”*²⁰ *“kairos”* is used, because it means *“the appropriate or due time is at hand.”* *“Chronos marks quantity, kairos, quality.”*²¹

The New Testament writers believed that the beginning of the end of the present world-order began with the resurrection of Jesus. Christ’s exaltation to God’s right hand had set into motion the flow of events that would lead to the end of chronological time. This squeezing of time created a unique understanding that time had been reduced. *“Chronos”* or clock time would run out on human history due to a compression of *“kairos.”* *“Kairos”* time now awaits Christ’s Return - the final cosmic event *“in the fullness of time.”*²²



MEDIUM: IT IS REVEALED BY ANGELIC MINISTRY

*“He made it known by sending His angel”*²³

Of the five links in Revelation, from the Father to us, angels are very vital. The revelation goes from the Father to Jesus and then from Jesus to His angel. It then goes from His angel to John. Then it goes from John to the seven churches and from the churches to us.

Angels are messengers. They appear throughout the Bible in that role. However, in Revelation, the significance of angels is overwhelming. They are seen 67 times, appearing in Heaven, worshiping, offering up the prayers of the saints, blowing trumpets, and waging war. There are even angels of churches. They give John visions and explain to him what they mean. On earth they administrate God’s judgments and are said to hold back the wind. They are over rivers. And on and on it goes.²⁴

Christ’s coming *“soon”* is not an allegorical or spiritual return.²⁵ The appearance of Jesus, bodily and unmistakably, in the clouds of heaven, is foretold clearly in Revelation and marks the end of the world.²⁶

1. *“Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him.”* (Rev. 1:7)
2. *“Only hold on to what you have until I come.”* (Rev. 2:25)
3. *“I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have.”* (Rev. 3:11)
4. *“Behold, I come like a thief!”* (Rev. 16:15)
5. *“Behold, I am coming soon.”* (Rev. 22:7)
6. *“Behold, I am coming soon. My reward is with me.”* (Rev. 22:12)
7. *“He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”* (Rev. 22:20)

²⁰ Rev. 1:3; 22:10 ²¹ In Vines NT Words ‘kairos’ is contrasted with chronos. ²² In Galatians 4:4 time is ‘chronos.’ ²³ Rev. 1:1 ²⁴ Ministry of angels is a common element in apocalyptic literature. Christ’s Return creates a lot of angelic activity just as His first coming did. (Luke 1:11, 26) ²⁵ Jesus refers a coming judgment in the churches, not His Return in Revelation 2:5, 2:16, 3:3. ²⁶ Acts 1:9-11



MAN: IT IS JOHN WHO WROTE A GOSPEL
“To His servant John”²⁷

John had striking visions of the End. This is the same John who wrote the fourth gospel that bears his name. This is John of whom Peter inquired, “What shall this man do?” Jesus said, “If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?...Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that this disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, he shall not die; but, ‘If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?’”²⁸

I believe that John’s vision of Christ’s Return is the fulfillment of Jesus’ words. John says, “*I was in the spirit on the Lord’s day.*”²⁹ We will see how noteworthy that statement is. We will also see how John takes the little book from the hand of the angel and eats it. The angel then says to him, “*Thou must prophesy again before*³⁰ *many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.*”³¹ John’s prophetic ministry abides with us today as evidenced by our study of his Apocalypse, and so his ministry will remain until Christ comes.

Some members of the early Church, however, misunderstood Jesus’ words. They thought that Christ meant that John would not die. But “Jesus did not say that he should not die.”³² Churchmen today twist such Scriptures.³³ Certain verses test both the sincerity of our faith and the depth of our understanding. My faith was tested by such verses, as a new Christian at a liberal university. My theology professor taught that Jesus and His disciples expected the end of the world in their lifetime. I felt like the Seminary student who said, “All day long they tore my Bible to pieces and all night long I put it back together.”

My professor cited a verse from the Gospels as proof. “There are some standing here that shall not taste of death until they see the Son of man come with power.” I pointed out, however, that Jesus fulfilled these words. The text says it came to pass, “About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray...his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.”³⁴

Peter points to this as a type of the Second Coming. “We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty...when we were with him on the sacred mountain.”³⁵ Like Peter, John and Abraham, we too can see, by faith in God’s Word, Christ’s Return and rejoice in it.³⁶

²⁷ (Rev. 1:1) John identifies himself 4 times (Rev. 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). Justin Martyr 165 AD; Irenaeus 180 AD; agree that the John mentioned here was Jesus’ apostle. ²⁸ John 21:23 ²⁹ Rev. 1:10 ³⁰ Greek preposition ‘*epi*’ is best translated “before.” ³¹ Rev. 10:8-11 ³² John 21:23 ³³ Peter warned of such a danger. (2 Peter 3:16). ³⁴ Luke 9:27-29 ³⁵ 2 Peter 1:16-18 ³⁶ John 8:56

The ‘message of soon’ has a personal dimension. Our approaching death is the close of an age for us. Every person living on the planet now is literally running out of time. Whether we die in the next five days or in fifty years, it is all the time we have. We do not know when we will die, even as we do not know the day that Jesus will return; yet, we do know that from an eternal perspective that event for everyone is soon.

The End covers more than our personal allotment of time. It is historical in the sense that it deals with the destiny of societies, nations, civilizations and the whole cosmos. In a real sense, it is the Lord’s patience and grace that anyone has any time left at all. When all generations stand together at Christ’s Coming, it will be too soon for the omega generation, which will be alive on earth, but has rejected God’s day of saving grace.



METHOD: IT IS GOD’S WORD IN VISION FORM

“The Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus Christ”³⁷

It is easy to see different things when we look at John’s visions. Two people gazing at the night sky both look at the same collection of stars, but one sees the image of a plough and the other a dipper. The stars are in a fixed position, but the lines that join them can vary. The visions depicted in Revelation are like the fixed stars of the heavens. Objectively they are there for all to see; yet, how we group them depends on the subjective connections we make. One observer draws lines between these two, another between others.

This metaphor is more compelling if we knew that some grand artist was trying to tell us something, and placed the stars where they are with a purpose. In the Book of Revelation, God wishes to show us what He has revealed. But what frame of reference can we agree upon? What can I point to as an objective reference to join lines for us to see. The text of Revelation is our fixed point of reference, and the rest of the Bible is our only means of putting it all together. God is the author of Revelation just as He is the author of all the books of the Bible. If we are to see what God would show us, Scripture must be our final authority, joining Scripture to Scripture.

With that in mind, we now come back to an absolutely essential question. How should we interpret “soon” in Revelation? What does it mean? Having outlined different approaches to the book, we saw that with the word “soon” scholarly men head down different roads of interpretation. But the deciding factor for us as we interpret Revelation must be, “What do we find in the rest of the New Testament?” What do the Scriptures say?

³⁷ Rev. 1:9

ABUNDANT EVIDENCE

Categorically, the New Testament teaches that the time is short. Many passages major on this shortness of time.³⁸ James says, “The coming of the Lord is very near... The judge is already standing at the very door.”³⁹ Peter says, “The end of all things is near.”⁴⁰ “Salvation is ready to be revealed in the last time.”⁴¹ Paul says, “The time is short.”⁴² “The Lord is at hand.”⁴³ “Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here.”⁴⁴ John says, “We know it is the last hour.”⁴⁵

The New Testament evidence is abundant. Jesus is an endtime figure. The entire sweep and sequence of history flowed in one direction, awaiting Christ’s first coming. Everything anticipated that hour from the time of Man’s Fall in the Garden. In the fullness of time, the Seed of the woman came, ushering in the last days. Jesus said, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is *at hand*. Repent, and believe in the Gospel.”⁴⁶

God’s Kingdom was inaugurated by Jesus’ atoning death and resurrection. The promised Holy Spirit was poured out as prophesied by Joel. Since then, we have been living in the last days. The entire New Testament agrees with this view of time. Hebrews says, “God spoke in times past by the prophets and has spoken to us *in these last days* by his Son... But now once *in the end of the world* has he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”⁴⁷ Paul writes to the Corinthians that upon us, “The end of the ages have come.”⁴⁸

All the apostles taught that the End is near. Who will argue otherwise? They understood that time is short. His return is near. If that is the case, then why, in Revelation, is “*soon*” a stumbling block? Revelation simply reinforces what the New Testament already teaches, which is the united testimony of Scripture and of Jesus Himself. So please bear with me as we go step by step with this vital endtime truth of “*soon*.” We must accept that soon is a revealing term, an insight into reality - the way things really are!



MEANING: IT IS “SOON” AS GOD SEES IT
“Take To Heart What Is Written”⁴⁹

The prophecy of Jesus’ “soon” return is the Big box, containing all Smaller boxes. If we miss that, little else in the book will fit. Therefore, the obligation of Bible believing churches is to keep announcing His Return just like the Old Testament prophets kept proclaiming His First Advent.

³⁸ Rom. 13:11-13; 1 Cor. 7:29-31; 1 Thess. 5:1-2; 1 Peter 4:7, 17; 2 Peter 3:8-13 ³⁹ James 5:8-9
 AMP ⁴⁰ 1 Peter 4:7 ⁴¹ 1 Peter 1:5 ⁴² 1 Cor. 7:29-31 ⁴³ Phil 4:5 ⁴⁴ Rom. 13:11-12 ⁴⁵ 1 John 2:18

⁴⁶ Mark 1:14-15 ⁴⁷ Heb. 1:1-2; 9:25-26 ⁴⁸ 1 Cor. 10:11 ⁴⁹ Rev. 1:3

When the Church fails to proclaim Christ's Return, she has fallen away from the truth of Scripture. This does not mean that we set a day. Rather we say, the day is approaching, although no man knows when.⁵⁰

In the Book of Revelation there is certainty as to the issue - Christ is coming! There is perpetual expectancy as to time - it is soon! These two conditions are consistent with a realization of every-day responsibility. This expectation should drive every aspect of the Church's life. We should be daily motivated to live holy, to proclaim boldly, and to joyfully anticipate Christ's Return. This is a most vital missing dynamic in the life and mission of the Church.

ENIGMA OF TIME

"The Enigma of Time," an article in National Geographic, caught my eye. "And who," said the article, "better to explain time than Richard P. Feynman, Nobel Prize Winner." An expert in how matter and energy behave, Rick says this about time. "We physicists work at it every day, but don't ask me what it is. It is just too difficult to think about." Graffiti on a wall in a café in Austin, Texas says, "Time is nature's way of keeping everything from happening all at once." I am sure the busy waitresses appreciate that feature of time.

Ask six people to explain time and like six blind people poking at an elephant, you will get six answers. Physicists say that time is one of two basic building blocks of the universe, the other being space. For a clock-maker, time is the tick-tock of his handiwork. A biologist sees time as the internal clock that keeps plants and animals in sync with nature. For a banker, time is money. More attention is given to measuring time than anything in nature says Germot Winkler, Director of Time Services at the US Naval Observatory.

Now here is my point. Throughout history time was looked upon as the flow of a river. Sir Isaac Newton said, "It flows equally without relation to anything external." That is obvious, is it not? Obvious until Einstein's theory of relativity redefined time as a dimension, like height and width, giving meaning to events and the order in which they occur. Time is related to space and Einstein showed that our perception of time is local, peculiar to our planet. This is because time is affected by the gravitational field of each celestial body; it is therefore unique to any one spot in the universe.

- **"The Unsealed Book" interprets "soon" as a revelation of time.**

"Soon" is a divine disclosure of time. God is timeless. In the beginning, He created time. From the eternal perspective of the Ancient of Days, time is

⁵⁰ Jesus stressed, "you do not know the day or the hour" (Matt. 24:27,36,44; 25:13; Luke 12:40).

very short and fleeting.⁵¹ Since God is the one who uses the term, “soon,” I accept His estimation of time. When we look back from eternity, we too will realize how quickly it really went. In fact, because God set eternity in our hearts, even now we, too, look at time as short. We have all heard people say, “Where did the day go?” Or “the week?” Or “the year?” Perhaps, “my life?” And everybody says the older you get, the faster it goes.

*“When as a child I laughed
and wept,
time crept.*

*When as a youth I dreamed
and talked, time walked.*

When I became a full-grown man, time ran.

And later as I older grew, time flew.

Soon I shall find while travelling on, time gone.”

This anonymous poem could have been written by anyone who has ever lived. No wonder God tells us that our life appears for a little while and is gone. “It is like a vapor of smoke.”⁵² When you consider that some people live for up to a hundred years, it means only twenty lifetimes or “vapors of smoke” would take us back to the birth of Christ in Bethlehem.

“Soon” is a comparative word that reveals the End is near. Not only in comparison to eternity, but also in the light of human history it is near. Looking at the history of God’s redemptive work, we say “soon” as we consider what has already transpired and what remains to take place. The Father has exalted His Son to His right hand, who is waiting until His enemies are made His footstool. Meanwhile, a new faith community, the Church, is going into the entire world with the saving message of His Son. No matter how many days pass and regardless of which watch in the night Jesus Returns, we proclaim, “He is coming soon,” if we are to speak in biblical terms.

“Soon” is also an eloquent visionary term. When we say, “Jesus is coming soon,” it should not sound strange to others. We are showing them the ways things really are - the human condition as we experience it. For instance, I saw a child rejoicing in his youth, the sunshine of his mother and joy of his father. I returned and the child had become old. Trembling with the weight of years, he stood the last of his generation. Time, you see, is a messenger with wings at its feet; it flies. When young our years are ages. In mature life, they are 365 days. In old age, they have dwindled to a few weeks. Who then can argue with Revelation’s use of soon.

⁵¹ Isa. 57:15 ⁵² James 4:14 compare with Eccl. 3:11 ⁵³ Rev. 1:3



MOMENT: IT IS CLOSER WITH EACH PASSING DAY
***“The Time Is Near”*⁵³**

Years ago I was drawn to a book, *“The Tyranny of Time.”* Have you ever stopped to consider how much of our life is driven by time? We have clocks on walls in our houses and offices. We wear watches and our cars and mobile phones tell time. We have appointments to keep, time to be at school and time to get out of school. Time to go to bed and time to get up. Time to be at work and time to get off work. We have Game time, and even something that we call Daylight Savings Time, although I have not seen it save anyone time.

NOW IS THE ACCEPTED TIME

It is absolutely critical that we agree with Revelation’s use of “soon” if we are to receive its message. For God does not promise us more time, although we tend to take it for granted. God’s thoughts and ways are higher than our own, as is His view of time. To show us the value of time, God never gives us two moments together. Nor does He give us a second moment until He has withdrawn the first, still keeping the third moment in His own hands so that we are uncertain whether we will have it or not. He gives us life one moment at a time. And that’s the way we have to live it.

“Behold, now is the accepted time.” He says, “Behold, now is the day of salvation.”⁵⁴ Now is our opportunity to seek the Lord. That is the blessing of taking to heart the message that Jesus is coming soon. God would teach us to redeem the time, number our days, and apply our hearts to wisdom. God alone knows the moment of our death and when this world will end. The origin, the progress, and the conclusion of all things are perfectly known to Him beforehand. It is contained in the “hollow of his hand.” It occupies, as it were, one instant of His being!

THE LANGUAGE OF FAITH

“The time is near” is the essence and language of faith. A man of faith says, “For in just a very little while, ‘He who is coming will come and will not delay.’”⁵⁵ Like Paul, the man of faith says, “because of the impending distress (that is even now setting in).” So John does not peer into the distant and dim future only to proclaim, “The time is short; the end is at hand.” No! John and all the New Testament writers recognize what God has done and with the same spirit of faith, they say, “For he will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ 2 Cor. 6:2 ⁵⁵ Heb. 10:35-38; 1 Cor. 7:26 AMP ⁵⁶ Rom. 9:28

The preparations for Christ's Return have begun. They are under way now. Heaven's great harvest-day approaches. The train of events that will bring Christ back to us are on the move. Only as we recognize this do we understand the meaning of the time in which we live. Of old, whether men knew it or not, every event was made subservient to His first appearing. Now every event is being guided and controlled to prepare the way for His Second Coming. Not a moment is lost.

My aim is "to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and...through your apostles. First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, 'Where is this "coming" he promised?... ***Do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.*** The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient

with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."⁵⁷

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think the Bible has a whole book on Christ's Return?
2. Why do you think it is called "the revelation of Jesus Christ?"
3. What thoughts come to your mind when you think of Christ's Return?
4. How do you interpret the term soon as it is used in Revelation? How do you define time?
5. What impact would a conviction that "Christ is coming soon" have on your church?
6. How old do you feel? Does time seem to pass quickly for you? In what ways?
7. When would you say that Jesus is coming?

Mindful of the words of the apostles, the message that Christ is coming soon was the only safe position for the early Church and is the only safe one in all the centuries since then. It is right to believe that it will occur soon. The thrust of Revelation is that the close of the age is

imminent; it has been since the day Jesus ascended. We will see that the rest of Revelation agrees with that assessment.

⁵⁷ 2 Peter 3:1-9

CHAPTER TWO

REVELATION TERMS

SEVEN INTERPRETATIVE GUIDELINES IN REVELATION 1:1-20

To interpret what a person says is not always easy. The story is told of a farmer, who walked into an attorney's office and said, "I want to get one of those dayvorcees." The attorney asked, "Well, do you have any grounds?" "Yea, I got about 140 acres," replied the farmer. "No, you don't understand, do you have a suit?" "Yes sir," said the farmer, "I got a suit. I wear it to church." The exasperated attorney then inquired, "Well, sir, does your wife beat you up or anything?" "No sir, we both get up about 4:30 am." "Okay, let me put it this way," the lawyer declared, "Why do you want a *dayvorcee*?" "Well, she claims she can never have a meaningful conversation with me."

Jesus told Nicodemus "You must be born again." He asked, "How can a man be born again when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb?"¹ Jesus said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again." The Jews objected, "How can you rebuild this temple in three days? It took forty-six years to build."² Jesus said, "Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no life in you." They retorted, "How can we eat his flesh and drink his blood?"³ "I have water to give you to drink." The Samaritan woman, however, questioned Jesus, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep."⁴

SPIRITUAL WORDS

Like the farmer with the lawyer, Nicodemus and others misconstrued Jesus' words. Re-birth, rebuilding the temple, eating Jesus' flesh and drinking His blood are spiritual not physical realities. There is a birth from above, Jesus' body is God's temple, His broken body is the true bread from Heaven, and the Holy Spirit is living water. Jesus expects spiritual leaders to understand these things. He said to Nicodemus, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and do not understand these things...If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"⁵

Like the farmer and those of Jesus' day, we too can misinterpret Revelation, failing to grasp the spiritual realities its terms signify - like the term "*soon*." This chapter concerns other important terms in Revelation. To interpret these terms, it requires the Holy Spirit to instruct us. Paul said, "This is what we

¹ John 3:10,12 ² John .2:19-22 ³ John 6:51-61 ⁴ John 4:11 ⁵ John 3:10-14

speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”⁶

May God’s Spirit help us to discern Revelation’s heavenly terminology and overcome our natural mind-set. Seven interpretative guidelines are now provided, from key phrases in chapter one, to do just that.

 **1 CHRIST’S RETURN IN TERMS OF THE ENTIRE BIBLE**
“Everything John saw—that is, the word of God.”⁷

The Book of Revelation rightfully stands at the end of the Bible. The whole Bible flows in its direction. This wide, flowing river of inspiration is seen in John’s constant use of Old Testament language, imagery and phrases. More than any book in the Bible, it alludes to other Scriptures. A virtual mosaic is found in Revelation. We also find a marvelous circle of truth. Genesis gives us the creation of the heavens and the earth while Revelation presents a New Heaven and Earth.

BIBLE LITERACY

We can only understand John’s terms in the light of Scripture. And since Scripture cannot be broken, our construction, if accurate, must be supported by an array of other verses. John’s terms test our level of Bible literacy like the lawyer’s legal terms tested the farmer’s vocabulary.

A young minister heard Dr. G. Campbell Morgan preach and was very impressed with Morgan’s knowledge of the Bible. So he asked the visiting preacher how he understood Scripture so well. “If I told you, you wouldn’t do it,” the older man said. The veteran went on to explain, “Before I study a book, I read it fifty times.” There is no substitute for reading Revelation and pouring over its images and amazing number of cross-references.

The Bible would be incomplete without Revelation. We would not know what to expect before, during and after Christ’s Return. Like Jesus’ early disciples we want to know not only the end of the story, but also what leads up to the End. Christ’s tells us there will be wars and various troubles. “I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.”⁸ By foretelling troubles, John supports our faith instead of undermining it.⁹

⁶ 1 Cor 2:13-14 ⁷ Rev. 1:2 ⁸ John 14:29; John 13:19 ⁹ Foretelling is a proof of inspiration.



CHRIST'S COMING IN TERMS OF THE CHURCHES

*"To the seven churches in the province of Asia."*¹⁰

John wrote to seven actual churches, who could understand what he wrote. Its unsealed message assured them of a blessing if its words were kept. No one, however, can keep what they cannot understand.¹¹ The early saints may have struggled with certain terms, as we do, but they could grasp John's message. This means that for our reading of Revelation to be correct, it must be something the original readers could also understand. Therefore, we must not limit John's writing, by our interpretation, to a mere past or future century. The Revelation must speak until Christ comes.

COMPANIONS IN TRIBULATION

John wrote to the churches from Patmos Island as a brother and companion in tribulation.¹² Nothing brings a soul so near to another soul as companionship in trouble. Like a 'band of brothers' are those who fight a war alongside one another. This has always been the case and so it was for the Christians of the first generation. Together, they fought the good fight of faith. They shared a three-fold experience: kingdom, tribulation, and endurance.

John helped these persecuted churches look beyond their present distress. Although it seemed as if they would be utterly crushed, John sounds a clear note of victory. Jesus is coming soon. In tribulation, believers especially love this book. I think of persecuted churches in Africa and Asia. But, in fact, the saints of every land and every generation share a common experience. We enter the kingdom through many personal troubles.¹³

John wrote from the One "*who is, and was and is to come. And the seven Spirits that are before His throne.*"¹⁴ Christ not only came and will come; "*He is*" with us now. The Lord is an ever-present help in times of trouble.

Christ is our contemporary. He alone bridges the course of time with all men. Jesus said, "I will be with you always, to the very end of the age."¹⁵ Jesus is with us, even as He was with His first disciples when He walked the earth. He walks with us like he did those who travelled on the road to Emmaus. He was present in the midst of the seven churches of Asia, and He is present with His churches now. Jesus clearly promised to be present with us in the future until the very day that He physically returns. And when He returns, we will see He is visibly present; we too will be 'present with Him always.'

¹⁰ Rev. 1:4,11 ¹¹ Revelation claims to be an unveiling whose contents remain unsealed for those who are prepared to hear its words. ¹² Rev 1:9 ¹³ Tribulations produce in us kingdom perseverance and character. (Rev 3:10; 2 Thess 3:5; James 1:2ff). ¹⁴ Rev. 1:4 ¹⁵ Matt. 28:20



CHRIST'S COMING IN PROPHECIC TERMS

“What is now and what will take place later.”¹⁶

The Book of Revelation is not classified as a poetical book like the Psalms. It is not a law book like Deuteronomy nor a historical one like Chronicles. Stated at its beginning and end, it is a prophetic book. *“The words of the prophecy of this book.”¹⁷* To interpret Revelation, we need to understand its prophetic nature. What it means by the term *“prophecy”* and how can it be kept?

John says he was shown, *“what is now and what will take place later.”¹⁸* Revelation is predictive. John’s inaugural vision has all the characteristics of the account of the calling and investiture of the classical, Old Testament prophets. His visions resemble what we find in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and the Minor Prophets from which he heavily drew. These prophetic visions of comfort and warning John saw and heard.

John’s words can be kept since they inspire and comfort the faithful with promises of deliverance and rewards for their troubles. Revelation’s consistent aim is to admonish and comfort. *“He that prophesies, speaks to men for edification, exhortation, and comfort.”¹⁹* His words, however, also warn sinners of a coming retribution, which calls them to repent of their sins. And so John’s words incorporate a strong predictive element.

SPECIFIC OR GENERAL PROPHECY

By understanding the term ‘prophecy,’ we can see the type of events that are predicted and avoid the limitations of the other schools of interpretation.²⁰ We must discern that Bible prophecies can be either specific or general. Specific prophecies speak of a specific person, a particular geographical place, a one-time historical event, or some other single occurrence. When Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, Isaiah’s prophecy was fulfilled, once and for all.²¹ Many Bible prophecies are specific and require a solitary, one-time fulfillment. The birthplace of Christ, Bethlehem of Judea, is one particular place. Christ was to come from the tribe of Judah and none other than the house of David.²²

We are better versed in specific prophecies than general ones, because specific prophecies are more easily recognized once they are fulfilled. However, not all Bible prophecies are specific. In fact, general prophecies appear in the New Testament more often than specific ones. In general prophecies, the Bible predicts kinds of people, types of events, various trends and characteristics of

¹⁶ Rev. 1:7, ¹⁷ Rev. 22:18 ¹⁸ John 16:13 ¹⁹ 1Cor. 14:3 ²⁰ Preterits past events; Futurists final 7 years of specific events; Historical all major events. Symbolic no events at all. ²¹ Isa. 7:14 ²² Micah 5:2

the last days. For example, Jesus predicts wars, famines, earthquakes, false Christs, diseases, persecutions and such like.²³ These predictions do not have a one-time fulfillment. For that reason they are in the *plural* not singular. Paul also predicts general trends like “perilous times.”²⁴

MULTIPLE APPLICATIONS AND FULFILLMENT

Certain Scriptures also have more than one application. A verse can apply to Israel, Christ and the Church. For example, “Out of Egypt I have called my son” first referred the Israelites and their Exodus from Egypt. Later Matthew applies this passage to the child Jesus. Jesus went down into Egypt with Mary and Joseph and then returned “out of Egypt.” It also has a typological usage in the Church since God’s children come out of Egypt, a type of the world.²⁵

Prophecy can have an initial, primary fulfillment and secondary fulfillments. At Pentecost, the Spirit was poured out on those in the Upper Room. Peter says, “This is that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel. God will pour out His Spirit on all flesh.”²⁶ James tells us to be patient for the Lord’s coming, because God, like a patient farmer, waits for the early and later outpourings of the Spirit.²⁷ Some prophecies thus have an ongoing fulfillment.²⁸

Understanding the difference between general and specific prophecy is crucial, because then we can ascertain what type of fulfillment to expect – either in a one time event or as a series of events. In Jesus’ birth, death and resurrection, we have specific prophecies, fulfilled once and for all. But general prophecies are ongoing in events like wars, persecutions and earthquakes.

BILLION DOLLAR QUESTION

The study of prophecy raises a huge question. What do we find in Revelation? Is it specific or general prophecy? Not only a billion dollar question but also a very necessary one, because, although Revelation is prophetic in nature, is it prophetic of specific one-time events, fulfilled all at once? Or is it trends that are fulfilled in multiple stages and installments? Or does Revelation contain both general and specific prophecies?

Futurists interpret Revelation’s prophecies as specific, one-time events. The Historical School also sees a fulfillment in specific historical events like the fall of Imperial Rome and the rise of the Papacy. The Symbolic interpreter does not look for events or trends. So what is my take on this?

²³ Matt. 24:1ff; Mark 13:1ff; Luke 23:1ff ²⁴ 1 Tim. 4:1-4, 2 Tim 3:1-9 ²⁵ The church is made up of the called-out ones. *Ekklesia*, from *ek*, “out of,” and *klesis*, “a calling” is used of the Church in Matthew 16:18. ²⁶ Acts. 2:16ff ²⁷ James 5:7 ²⁸ Elijah is an example. He has come and is coming.

In the seven Seals and Trumpets, I see general prophecies. For Revelation embodies prophetic trends like Jesus' Mount Olivet Discourse? These general prophecies lead us to *the* prophecy of Christ's Return and judgments at the end of the world. These ongoing general prophecies point to Revelation's core message that Jesus is coming and that the time is at hand.²⁹

John validates this approach to prophecy when he writes of Antichrist. "Little children it is the last time: and as you have heard that antichrist shall come, even now there are many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time."³⁰ The trend of many Antichrists reveals that is the last time. John may not discount embodiments of Antichrist but he does hold to imminence.



CHRIST'S COMING IN SOVEREIGN TERMS

*"Who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."*³¹

Bible prophecy makes it impossible to believe in chance or only natural laws. Knowing there are things that "*must come to pass*" delivers us from the fear of evil men. It helps us to trust in God's plan that spans the ages.

We hear a repeated refrain in Revelation in reference to the Father and Son: "*Who is, and who was, and who is to come.*" That reveals God's eternal existence, "*the King of the ages,*" and His revelation in human history.³² It also tells us that the supreme and final revelation is close at hand: "Who is to come." "*The Almighty*" and "*the Sovereign Lord*" are part of the refrain too, used seven times of both the Father and the Son. These names teach God's absolute sovereignty.³³ God is all-knowing and all-powerful, which Revelation teaches as much as any book in the Bible.

WHO'S IN CHARGE

Revelation's dominant note, "*Surely I come quickly*" is not Christ's only message to His troubled saints. Jesus reveals Himself as the Sovereign Lord who rules from Heaven now with all authority and power. It is imperative that we know who is in charge when we go through tribulation.

What happens on earth is directed from the Savior's throne. He "*reveals what must take place.*"³⁴ He looses the Seals. He directs the blowing of the Trumpets and the pouring out of the Bowls.³⁵ Christ determines the degree and length of judgments that befall the earth. He prevents the winds of adversity from blowing and decrees that the grass and water be not harmed until His servants are sealed.³⁶ He decides that the demonic hordes "*were not given*

²⁹ Matt. 24:32-33; Mk. 13:28-29; Luke 21:28ff ³⁰ 1 John 2:18-19 ³¹ Rev. 1:8,17-18 ³² Rev. 1:4,8;4:8;11:17

³³ Rev 6:10;7:12;15:3;16:7;16:14 ³⁴ Rev 3:7;4:1 ³⁵ Rev 5:3;6:1,12;16:1 ³⁶ Rev. 7:1,3;8:7;9:4

power to kill men, but only to torture them.”³⁷ He positions the “four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour.”³⁸ The Sovereign Lord puts into the heart of kings to accomplish His purposes by burning the Great Prostitute with fire.³⁹ Christ rules over all, including the Beast, allowing him a limited time to offer his deception.⁴⁰

To trust God in times of trouble, we must know that not a single event in the entire universe can occur without His permission – not even the fall of a sparrow to the ground.⁴¹ Revelation makes clear what many find difficult to accept; both calamities and good fortune are under God’s control. Thankfully, the Devil can do nothing without God’s permission; otherwise, our trust in God would be limited by the possibilities such uncontrollable events present.⁴² The comfort of an all-powerful, all-knowing, ever present Savior, directing the affairs of this life, is an essential part of Revelation’s message.

I like how Charles H. Spurgeon said it. “There is no attribute more comforting to His children than that of God’s sovereignty. Under the most adverse circumstances, in the most severe trials, they believe that sovereignty has ordained their afflictions, that sovereignty overrules them, and that sovereignty will sanctify them all. There is nothing for which the children ought to more earnestly contend for than the doctrine of their Master over all creation—the Kingship of God over all the works of His own hands—the Throne of God and His right to sit upon that throne...for it is God upon the Throne whom we trust.”

The saints in glory ask, “*how long, Oh, Sovereign Lord?*” The earthly saints may ask, “why” when calamity strikes. But none need question who is in charge.⁴³ In light of God’s sovereignty, Revelation is a book of supreme optimism, promoting great faith and perseverance in the saints.⁴⁴



CHRIST’S COMING IN APOCALYPTIC TERMS “*On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit.*”⁴⁵

Old Testament prophets like Isaiah and Ezekiel and New Testament apostles like John and Paul had divine visions and revelations, recorded in Scripture.⁴⁶ On one occasion Paul was caught up to the third Heaven, unsure if he remained in his body or out of his body. He heard “inexpressible things, things that a man is not permitted to tell.”⁴⁷ Unlike Paul, when John was caught up to Heaven, he knew that he was not in his body but “*in the spirit.*”⁴⁸ And John was also instructed to tell all that he saw and heard.⁴⁹

³⁷ Rev. 9:5 ³⁸ Rev. 9:15 ³⁹ Rev. 17:16-17 ⁴⁰ Rev. 13:5 ⁴¹ Matt. 10:29-31 ⁴² Last pg. “God’s Sovereignty.”
⁴³ Rev. 5:8 ⁴⁴ Rev. 6:10;7:12;15:3;16:7,14 ⁴⁵ Rev. 1:10 ⁴⁶ Rev. 4:2;17:3;21:10; Ezek. 3:12, 14; 37:1; Isa. 6:1ff; Acts 10:10f; 22:17. ⁴⁷ 2 Cor. 12:4 ⁴⁸ Verb tense (Rev.1:10). ⁴⁹ Rev. 1:2,11,19; 22:8

THE LORD'S DAY

This happened to John “*on the Lord’s Day.*” In some circles, Sunday is known as the Lord’s Day. But John is not referring to the first day of the week.⁵⁰ From the following verses, we understand the true meaning of this term. “*The day of the Lord* will come like a thief in the night.” “The great and glorious *day of the Lord.*” “His spirit saved *on the day of the Lord.*” “We will boast of you in *the day of the Lord.*”⁵¹ Confirmed by an array of Old and New Testament verses, the Lord’s Day is the title for the day of Christ’s Return.⁵²

When John “*came to be in the spirit,*” he saw Christ come to end the world. John was caught up to the height of heaven into the time zone of eternity. From there he viewed history as if he were watching a parade from a tall building. From this vantage point the entire parade is visible at one time, from beginning to the end. John looked back on his day and our day and on all of man’s days to “*the Lord’s Day.*”

Scientists at the “Goddard Space Flight Center” report that one of the largest stars in our galaxy is about to self-destruct. With a mass one hundred times greater than that of our sun, Eta Carinae could become a blazing, exploding supernova. What interested me most in the report was the statement that since light from the star takes thousands of years to reach the earth, the actual explosion could have already taken place. That reminds me of why certain Bible prophecies are written in the past tense, because, although they concern the future, in God’s mind it is as if the events (He shows His prophet) have already happened.

ANOTHER BILLION DOLLAR QUESTION

Another major question is, ‘what kind of literary work is Revelation?’ Understanding its literary method will help us to interpret its content. Otherwise, we can come up with wild interpretations or give up on the book. John Stott says, “Many Christians fight shy of the Book of Revelation. It seems to them well nigh incomprehensible... and they cannot easily accustom themselves to the book’s bizarre imagery. To start reading the Revelation is to step into a strange, unfamiliar world of angels and demons, of lambs, lions, horses and dragons. Seals are broken, trumpets blown, and the contents of seven bowls poured out on the earth. Two particularly malicious monsters appear, one emerging out of the sea with ten horns and seven heads, the

⁵⁰ On Sundays, the first believers assembled, since Jesus rose on that day. But Sunday did not replace the Sabbath nor are we under a new Sabbath day law. (Col. 2:16; Rom. 14:5; Gal.2: 16ff). ⁵¹ 1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14; 1 Thess. 5:2; Isa. 2:12; Joel 1:15, 2:1, 3:14; Ezek. 13:5; Mal. 4:5; Acts 2:20; 2 Peter 3:10 cp. w. Rev. 1:10. ⁵² There is not a single verse to support Sunday as *the Lord’s Day.*

other rising from the earth with a lamb's horns and a dragon's voice. There is thunder, lightning, hail, fire, blood and smoke. The whole book appears at first sight to contain a chaotic profusion of weird and mysterious visions."⁵³

APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

It helps to know what kind of literary method Revelation employs. Ezekiel, Zechariah and Daniel employ this same literary tool. Jesus also adopted elements of this method when He spoke of the end of the age, because the End is so awesome it requires a style all of its own.⁵⁴ This literary style is called apocalyptic and is well suited to visions and revelations. This type of literature is characterized by the use of symbols and figurative language. A wild beast represents an empire and candlesticks stand for churches.

Apocalyptic images do not depict things as in a photograph. They are meant to be "*seen*" as one sees a giant mural, which inspires the viewer with the grandeur of its message. In such a mural details may be important, but their full meaning is only seen in the context of the larger scene. The Lord uses this form of literature, because it is tailor-made for His two-fold purpose: to impress upon the reader the enormous dimensions of the message and to hide its meaning from outsiders. The figures were huge and gigantic, but for insiders the message was simple: hold on because Christ is coming soon.

AN ANCIENT VERNACULAR

In apocalyptic literature, conflict drives the plot. The conflict that drives the plot of Revelation is the Dragon's war on the saints and the world's reluctance to repent in spite of many temporal judgments. It is a conflict with supernatural dimensions, taking many forms and only ending when Christ returns. Basic to that conflict is an understanding of God's righteous nature that judges sin. Also because God is merciful, He will rescue His people. This type of literature was produced by Jews and Christians in times of persecution and arose from two factors: oppressive persecution and a messianic hope.⁵⁵

The churches of Asia could understand Revelation's message and so can we. Just like we can understand Paul's letter to the Romans. We must simply understand its background and literary style. Recently, I found myself watching a talk show on sports with my oldest son. Not having followed American sports for the past twenty years, since living in Africa, I found

⁵³ John Stott's "Letters to the Seven Churches." ⁵⁴ Matt. 24:1ff Mark 13:1ff; Luke 21:1ff. ⁵⁵ Various Apocalypses assured deliverance by the advent of the Messiah. Enoch, the Apocalypse of Baruch, the Book of Jubilees, the Sibylline Oracles are examples of Christian apocalypses. Revelation distinguishes itself from these in important ways. John writes real prophecy to real churches.

it difficult to follow the show. The names of the players and the issues being discussed left me baffled. I said to Johnathan, “it’s easier to interpret Revelation than the US sports’ scene.” It would take less time too. That brings us to another characteristic of apocalyptic literature: extensive symbolism.



CHRIST’S COMING IN SYMBOLIC TERMS

“Someone like a son of man... white like wool...like blazing fire...like bronze.”⁵⁶

In accord with its apocalyptic framework, Revelation utilizes many symbols.⁵⁷ Symbolism is well suited to convey supernatural visions, containing more facets of truth than the Seer could articulate in a literal treatise.⁵⁸ We are told, “Jesus sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John.”⁵⁹ The word “signified,” from “sema,” refers to a sign or token, indicating from the outset the symbolic character of the book. To use the vernacular of Revelation, it must be “shown” to the reader.⁶⁰ The agency of angelic messengers also adds to this distinctive nature of the book.

A LITERAL PROBLEM

Revelation is not a historical narrative like the Gospels. In narratives, we ask questions about chronology and timing. But when we read poetry, allegory, parable, or a proverb, we search for meaning beyond the literal words. Words are merely vehicles. Context is always critical to understanding what we read. For example, I read the word ‘rose.’ Does it mean a flower? A color? Is it someone’s name? Is it the past tense of the verb rise? Only the context tells me. Those who interpret passages in Revelation “literally” supply their own context to the passage.

When reading a parable, we do not force a historical context on the story. We understand the context. It is a parable. It is not a historical account. Think of the parable of the Prodigal Son. Did it actually happen? When? What about the father’s name and what were the names of the two sons? Although we cannot answer these questions, the truth of its message remains and that truth is more powerful without the answer to these questions.

We often use non-literal language to express spiritual realities. For example, we say, Jesus “*opened wide the gates of heaven.*” If someone asks, how many gates are there? What are they made of? Which ones are open and when? You explain that your message does not depend on physical, literal gates.⁶¹ The words represent an unseen reality by means of a well-known symbol.


⁵⁶ Rev. 1:12-16 ⁵⁷ Mysteries of the Kingdom, spoken in parables, were often not understood. John also uses many symbols in his Gospel. ⁵⁸ 1 Peter 1:10-11; Rev. 1:20;7:13-14 ⁵⁹ Rev. 1:1 ⁶⁰ (Rev. 1:1) Use of *sema* in John 12:33 and Acts 11:28 ⁶¹ Paul says, “I put this in human terms.” (Rom. 6:19).

SYMBOLISM DEFINED AND EXPLAINED

Symbolism is the representation of qualities and ideas by the use of objects. Symbolic constructions are different from photographs. For example, stars and a serpent in Revelation are not pictures of anyone but symbols, respectively of angels and Satan. The lamb and lion are both symbols of Christ, but never to be understood as pictures of Him. Jesus is the lamb seated on God's throne. As a picture it would be droll, but as a symbol it is full of meaning.

Jesus walks among seven candlesticks and holds the stars in His right hand. These are not literal candlesticks and stars but they represent seven churches and their messengers.⁶² What a far more descriptive way of saying Christ walks among them and is in charge of their ministers. The interpretation of each symbol in Revelation can be found elsewhere in Scripture. Simply use an exhaustive concordance and look up verses related to a particular symbol.

Symbolic names like Babylon and Armageddon are also found in Revelation.⁶³ Symbolic names speak volumes like when Jerusalem is "*figuratively called Sodom and Egypt.*" We know this is a reference to Jerusalem, because John says, "*this is also where their Lord was crucified.*"⁶⁴ The prophet Jeremiah refers to Jerusalem as Sodom too. By use of a figurative name, God more fully conveys and confronts the latest prevailing sin of its inhabitants.⁶⁵ In Revelation, we encounter not only symbolic names but also numbers.

 **CHRIST'S COMING IN NUMEROLOGICAL TERMS**
*"The mystery of the seven stars...seven...seven...seven...seven...seven."*⁶⁶

Numbers in Revelation play a major role. According to a common Middle East practice, they communicate spiritual truth. For example, two speaks of companionship and agreement like when "*the two witnesses*" prophesy for 1260 days.⁶⁷ 'Four' represents the world. There are four winds coming from the Four Corners of the earth where four angels stand; there are four living creatures and four angels bound at the Euphrates. We also have the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse who ride throughout the world.⁶⁸

SEVEN

Seven is the predominant number in the Revelation, occurring 54 times. The number seven is a symbol of a complete number or sequence. It conveys the same truth throughout Scripture.⁶⁹ Here are a few examples from Revelation. The book is addressed to seven churches. There are the seven Spirits of God,

⁶² Rev. 1:16-20 ⁶³ Historical Babylon was nonexistent. ⁶⁴ Rev. 11:8 ⁶⁵ Jer. 23:14; Ezek. 16:46ff; Rev.11:8 ⁶⁶ Rev. 1:20 ⁶⁷ Rev. 11:3 ⁶⁸ Rev. 4:6-8; 7:1-2; 9:13-14; 20:8; Zech. 1:8-11 ⁶⁹ Matt. 18:22

seven stars and seven angels. The book in God's right hand has seven seals. The Lamb has seven eyes and seven horns. Seven angels blow seven trumpets; seven other angels pour out seven bowls of the seven last plagues. There are seven thunders, seven thousand men slain, a beast with seven heads and seven mountains. Again and again the number seven occurs.⁷⁰

Seven can also be found in Revelation in a more hidden manner. For example there are seven blessings pronounced in the book, which open with obedience to the Revelation and close with the faithful entering the Holy City.⁷¹ There are also seven doxologies, which grow in fullness. At first, the doxology ascribes "*glory and dominion.*" The twenty-four elders then ascribe "*glory and honor and power.*" Later all creation ascribes "*blessing, and honor, and glory, and power.*" Before it is over, they offer sevenfold, perfect adoration, saying, "*Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.*"⁷²

THREE AND ONE HALF

Another crucial number for interpreting Revelation is "*three and one half.*" Like seven, we look at this number later in detail. For now it is worth pointing out that $3\frac{1}{2}$ is 7 broken in half. It is thus associated with an imperfect, incomplete time when evil is allowed to test God's people; while restless longings are not yet fulfilled. The number $3\frac{1}{2}$ is also represented as "*a time, times and a half of time.*" As $3\frac{1}{2}$ years it equals 42 months or 1260 days. It is when the woman flees into the wilderness, the outer court of the temple is trampled down and the two witnesses testify. It is the time when the Beast persecutes the saints.⁷³

We will also see why all attempts to calculate $3\frac{1}{2}$ as a literal, chronological length of time is futile. It would be like expecting to find a Godzilla-like creature with seven heads in ancient Babylon with a woman riding on its back and bringing the world to an end by its destructive powers. Revelation shouts at us to think in terms of symbolic meanings instead of literal data as we interpret its prophetic images, names and numbers.

⁷⁰ Rev. 1:4, 12,16; 3:1; 5:1,6; 8:2,6; 10:3; 11:13; 12:2; 13:1; 15:1; 17:9 ⁷¹ 1. "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things which are written therein [1:3]. 2. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord" [14:13]. 3. "Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments lest he walk naked, and they see his shame" [16:15]. 4. "Blessed are they that are bidden to the marriage supper of the Lamb" [19:9]. 5. "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection" [20:6]. 6. "Blessed is he that keepeth the words of the prophecy of this book" [22:7]. 7. "Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have the right to come to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city" [22:14]. ⁷² Rev. 7:12 ⁷³ Rev. 11:2-9; 12:6-14; 13:5

REVIEW AND REQUEST

The Sovereign Lord has revealed to His servants what is at hand. This concerns His Son's soon return. Revealing prophetic trends characteristic of these last days, John received this revelation in the form of visions, which went from the Father to Christ to an Angel to him to the seven churches and now to us. These visions are best understood in apocalyptic terms, with a clear understanding of its symbolic character and typical use of numbers.

The last book in the Bible draws from the entire Bible. When correctly interpreted, it speaks to the entire church throughout history. The many different interpretations of the book are summed up in four views: Futurists, Preterits, Historicals, and Symbolics. Our approach is to look at each major view and present Revelation as an unsealed book. Although the book has fuelled much-debate, we believe it can be understood. We aim to cover the intricate details of the book without missing the big picture. Some passages require humility and willingness at times to frankly say, "Here are the other views. This is mine and why. You decide"

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Whose words have you misinterpreted?
2. What might churches find hard to interpret?
3. Can you give an example of a general or a specific prophecy from the Bible?
4. Why do you think God's sovereignty features so strongly in Revelation?
5. What modern art forms could you compare to apocalyptic literature?
6. What symbols would you use to depict an evil in your country today?
7. What is your favorite number?

Like two men who go down to the beach, one is thrilled by the majestic sweep of the ocean, while the other would like to make a chemical analysis to determine the amount of salt present.

Our vision starts with "the majestic sweep." Christ is coming soon! Then we examine the details in a way

consistent with that message. Our desire is to see the whole forest before we allow the individual trees to block our view.

My prayer is that each of us will keep the prophecy of Revelation by drawing great courage and comfort from its message. May God so help us to know Jesus better and to serve Him until He comes.

NOTES

CHAPTER THREE

ENVISION JESUS

SEVEN FEATURES OF CHRIST IN REVELATION 1:12-20

On Capitol Hill, Paul Harvey watched a private viewing of “The Passion.” He said, “One scene in the film has now been forever etched in my mind. A brutalized, wounded Jesus was soon to fall again under the weight of the cross. His mother had made her way along the Via Delorosa, which means the Way of Sadness. Jesus looked at her with intensely probing and passionately loving eyes (and at all of us through the screen) and said “*Behold I make all things new.*” These are words taken from the Book of Revelation. Suddenly, the purpose of the pain was so clear...They had been borne voluntarily for love.” In this chapter we look at seven features of Jesus in John’s opening vision, beginning with His love. These features reveal to us the genuine person of Jesus so that false Christs and false teachers may not mislead us.



JESUS LOVES WITH A PERFECTLY PURE HEART

“With a golden sash around his chest.”¹

John’s vision begins when he hears a voice that sounds like a loud trumpet.² He turns and sees among the lampstands “*Someone like the Son of Man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash.*”³ Jesus appears to John in priestly garments.⁴ As our great Highpriest, Christ gave Himself for our sins. The golden sash I highlight first, because it speaks well of the bonds of pure love that caused Him to embrace the Cross for us.

We now cling to Christ in love as a sash or a belt clings to a man.⁵ We have a picture of this love from John’s own life. At the Last Supper, John laid his head on Jesus’ chest and listened to Christ’s heartbeat, just hours before it was stilled in death and pierced by a brutal lance. John “knew and believed” in Christ’s love for him. He calls himself “the disciple whom Jesus loved.”⁶ It is this consciousness of being loved that gives life meaning. Such love transformed Mary Magdalene, a prostitute, into the purest of saints. Her love for Christ caused her to come weeping to Jesus’ tomb early on the morning of the resurrection.

¹ Rev. 1:12 ² The trumpet sound is very apt, because trumpets are associated with dramatic events such as the giving of the Law; the inauguration of festivals, the ascension of the Lord as well as His Return and the resurrection of the dead. Trumpets are also related to the gift of prophecy. (Num. 10:10; Ps. 47:5; 1 Cor.15:52 1 Thess. 4:16; 1 Cor. 14:6-8). ³ It has been pointed out that the voice sounding like a trumpet was behind him, because all the symbols and references of Revelation are to be sought for in the OT. ⁴ Rev 1:13; Ex. 28:4-39 ⁵ Jer. 13:11 ⁶ 1 John 4:16 RSV

DIMENSIONS OF LOVE

Do you know how much Jesus loves you? Do you grasp its dimensions?⁷ His love is so deep that He came down from the height of Heaven to take your place at the Cross.⁸ His love is so wide that He was forsaken there so you could be the Father's very own child.⁹ His love is so high that He raised you up to sit on His throne with Him.¹⁰ Jesus' love spans the gulf of your sin and it endures as long as eternity. Having loved you before the creation of the world, He will love you throughout all ages to come. He even promises to show you the surpassing greatness of His love in the world to come.¹¹

David Peterson tells how his little daughter came into his office, asking, "Daddy, can we play?" He answered, "I'm awfully sorry, Sweetheart. I'm in the middle of something. In an hour I can play." She said, "Okay, when you're finished, Daddy, I am going to give you a great big hug." She went to the door but, "Then she did a U-turn and came back and gave me the biggest hug and the sweetest kiss imaginable." I said to her, "Darling, you said you were *going* to give me a hug *after* I finished." She answered, "Daddy, I just wanted you to know what you have to look forward to!"

CONQUERING LOVE COMING AGAIN

Jesus' love, displayed at the Cross, is what we look forward to at His Return. From the outset, John talks of this great love. "*Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us kings and priests.*"¹² The Amplified Bible reads: "*To Him who ever loves us and has once for all loosed and freed us from our sins by His blood.*"¹³

Our testimony, like John's, is described in a three-fold fashion; He loves us, frees us, and makes us. Christ's love removes the defilement of sin. What a costly cleansing; nothing less than "*His own blood.*" He not only cleanses us but He also frees us. And He not only frees us but He makes us kings and priests. This application of blood logically leads to consecration. In Christ, we receive coronation as kings and consecration as priests. His Kingdom and Priesthood are present now with an incomparable future fulfillment.

Here we find three titles of our Lord with a noteworthy link between them: faithful witness, the first begotten of the dead, the prince of the kings of the earth.¹⁴ Each title is dependent upon the one that precedes it and each points to the one that follows it. So the sequence is this: what Jesus did in the past

⁷ Eph. 3:18-19 ⁸ Eph. 4:9; Phil. 2:6-8 outlines how deep. ⁹ Eph. 2:1-10 how wide. ¹⁰ Eph. 1:20-23; 2:6 how high. ¹¹ Eph. 1:4; 2:7 how long. ¹² Rev. 1:4-5 ¹³ AMP captures the ongoing and completed action of the Greek present and aorist (past) verb tenses used here. ¹⁴ Rev. 1:5

gives Him the status in the present that guarantees our future. And here we have an outline of the Gospel. Christ's past sacrifice, His present resurrected life and His future eternal reign are combined at the very start of Revelation. This is the Gospel that the apostles preached.¹⁵

LOVE REIGNS

By dying and rising, Jesus won lordship over the kings of earth. That is a key theme in Revelation.¹⁶ Christ is Lord of emperors, presidents - all earthly rulers. They may appear to be where the action is. But things are not what they appear to be. We can not be forced to accept their premise that they constitute the power of history. They do not. The Savior controls the destiny of all. Jesus said, *"I am He that lives and I was dead and behold I am alive for evermore. And I hold the keys of death and Hades."*¹⁷

Jesus is God's *"faithful witness,"* loyal unto death.¹⁸ Therefore, God exalted Him far above all else.¹⁹ John shows us Jesus' exalted at the beginning and throughout Revelation. He has supreme authority over sin and death and all its power.²⁰ This is the solid ground for bidding your brother to be of good cheer. Do not fear man, for in the end how little he can do.²¹ In many ways Jesus taught this, but mainly by His own death and resurrection.²²



JESUS IS GOD'S WISDOM PERSONIFIED

*"His head and hair were white like wool."*²³

Jesus' head and hair, white like wool, speak of righteous-wisdom. The color white in Scripture signifies righteousness. And "gray hair is a crown of splendor; it is attained by a righteous life."²⁴ Christ's righteous wisdom is the fruit of His sinless life.

Christ is also the Father's eternal wisdom; "a wisdom that has been hidden before time began...None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."²⁵ Through Jesus' death, God wisely dealt with the Devil, defeating him with his own weapon.

Christ's suffering and sovereignty from which we live out a strange mixture, as we experience both, provide an ongoing revelation of God's wisdom.²⁶ Under this tension of death and resurrection, we come to know Christ better, are conformed to His image and thus overcome the Devil.²⁷ "For if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him."²⁸ Jesus' revelation makes this very clear!

¹⁵ Acts 2:32-36 ¹⁶ Rev. 1:5;11:15; 17: 14-15; 19:16 ¹⁷ Rev. 1:18 ¹⁸ Rev. 2:10 ¹⁹ Phil. 2:8 ²⁰ Phil. 2:8-10 ²¹ Matt. 10:28 ²² Eph. 1:21 ²³ Rev. 1:14 ²⁴ Prov. 16:31;20:29; Job 15:10 ²⁵ 1 Cor. 2:6-8 ²⁶ Eph. 3:10-11 ²⁷ Luke 21:19 ²⁸ 2 Tim. 2:12

DANIEL, JOHN - NOW YOU

Daniel's vision of the Ancient of Days matches John's revelation of Jesus.²⁹ "As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool." The similarities continue. Daniel saw, "a man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around his waist, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude."³⁰

Daniel's response also matches John's. Daniel says, "I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground." The Lord told Daniel and John, "Do not be afraid."³¹ Their purposes were akin too. "You, who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you... I have come in response to them to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future."³²

Like Daniel, John was concerned about the future of God's people. The Book of Revelation is Christ's wise and righteous answer to that concern.³³ He reveals to us that we will walk, like He did, through fiery trials before we enter into His glory. It is, therefore, vital that we also, like John and Daniel, have a vision of Jesus before we face our own fiery trials; otherwise, what we are shown could overwhelm us. Either Christ will seize our attention or our environment will captivate us. "

*When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.*³⁴ John illustrates a pattern of death and resurrection. In weakness, John falls. Only to rise in new strength to receive Christ's Revelation. This revelation quickens the Seer to put off the old man and become like the One he beholds. Falling before Christ empowers John to stand in his day. Seeing Christ, as He really is, will do the same for us. It will empower us to face whatever our day may bring. The next feature in the vision reveals that there will fiery trials for us to face.



JESUS WALKS IN THE MIDST OF FIERY TRIALS
"His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace."³⁵

Stands, pillars, and clamps, used in the Holy Place, were made of bronze. They were forged in the fire.³⁶ Bronze in the Bible depicts strength. It was used to support what is precious. Jesus' feet here are like bronze glowing in a furnace, because with sinless strength and stability, He has walked through the temptations and sufferings that he experienced in His earthly life.³⁷ As

²⁹"Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven."³⁰ Dan. 10:6ff ³¹Dan. 10:5-12 ³²Dan. 10:12-14 ³³1Cor. 7:29 AMP ³⁴Rev. 1:17 ³⁵Rev. 1:15 ³⁶Ex. 27:1ff - 29 ³⁷(Isa. 52:7; 60:13) Similar figure

His followers, we find ourselves walking in the furnace of affliction. But the Pioneer of our faith knows how to support us. He allows trials so that our lives can hold Christ-like qualities that are very precious and have eternal value.

Joseph, a type of Christ, became a noble vessel of honor, forged in the fire. He experienced suffering before glory and learnt humility before honor. God worked together for his good what was intended to harm him. Through it all, Joseph became strong as bronze. The Psalmist, in the literal Hebrew, writes, “They hurt with chains his feet, into iron came his soul. Until the time came. The word of Yahweh refined him.”³⁸

CONFORMED TO HIS LIKENESS

God uses fiery ordeals to refine and conform us to Christ’s likeness. This is a basic truth of the Christian walk. Through this process of refinement, we experience the fellowship of His sufferings.³⁹ And we are “changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another.”⁴⁰

On a wall near the entrance to the Alamo is a portrait with this inscription: “James Butler Bonham - no picture of him exists. This portrait is of his nephew, Major James Bonham, deceased; who greatly resembled his uncle. It is placed here by the family that people may know the appearance of the man who died for freedom.” No portrait of Jesus exists either. The likeness of the Son, however, who makes us free can be seen in those who intentionally embrace these features of Christ that John describes for us in his vision.

When missionary Adoniram Judson was told that a newspaper article likened him to the early apostles, Judson replied, “I do not want to be like Paul or any mere man. I want to be like Christ. I want to follow Him only, copy His teachings, and place my feet in His footprints!” Because Adoniram walked with Christ, his feet became like bronze glowing in a furnace. Like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, the Son of God will walk with us too and bring us out of our blazing furnace, when He sees His image reflected in us.⁴¹



JESUS SEES EVERYTHING DOWN TO ITS DEPTH

“His eyes were like blazing fire.”⁴²

The process of refining silver beautifully illustrates how Jesus purges us. Malachi says, “*He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver.*”⁴³ To burn off all the impurities, a silversmith sits, holding the silver, in the middle of the fire. There the flames are the hottest. Keeping his perceptive eyes on the silver, he

of glowing metal is found in Ezekiel 1:13, 27; 8:2; Dan. 10:6. ³⁸ Ps. 105:18-19 LIT ³⁹ 1 John 3:2ff
⁴⁰ 2 Cor. 3:18 RSV ⁴¹ Dan. 3:26 ⁴² Rev. 1:14 ⁴³ Mal. 3:3

watches it closely. He knows that, if the silver is left too long in the flames, it could be destroyed. The way he knows that the silver is fully refined and ready to come out is when he sees his image in it. When you feel the heat of the fire, remember that Christ has His eyes on you, looking for His image in you. He will not leave you in a hot spot a moment too long.

EYE EXAMINATION

Jesus' "*eyes are as a flame of fire.*"⁴⁴ As a symbol, fire in tandem with Jesus' eyes speaks volumes. For fire, as a means of light, exposes, and as energy, it consumes the worthless and refines the precious. The Psalmist says, "He observes the sons of men; His eyes examine them."⁴⁵ Jesus' eyes burn in fiery holiness to examine the hearts and works of man. Every man's heart and "work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work."⁴⁶

The Lamb has seven fiery eyes – fully seeing everything, everywhere.⁴⁷ Immediately, He pierces the outer surface of things, not judging according to outward appearances, but discerning how things really are in His Church. He sees how one church has a great reputation and yet is dead. Another is in poverty and yet they are rich in faith. He sees how one church has lost its first love, and another is faithfully facing death threats. Some change their ways when they see the light, others only change when they feel the heat.

Daniel's parallel vision is also full of fire. "His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him."⁴⁸ John later says, "*With justice He judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire.*"⁴⁹ Jesus is both man's Savior and Judge, the Lamb of God and the Lion of Judah. We see the comforting features of His love and wisdom as well as the austere features of His bronze legs and fiery eyes.



JESUS JUDGES WITH ABSOLUTE AUTHORITY

"Out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword."⁵⁰

In John's vision a doubled-edged sword comes out of Christ's mouth. He tells "*the church in Pergamum these are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.*" The symbolism is clear. "The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit, sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates... it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."⁵¹ God's Word is the standard for all judgment, but not all judgment waits for the Final Judgment.

⁴⁴ Rev. 1:14 The Holy Spirit and Father are also likened to fire. (Acts. 2:3; Heb. 12:29). ⁴⁵ Ps. 11:4

⁴⁶ 1 Cor. 3:13 ⁴⁷ Rev. 5:6 ⁴⁸ Dan. 7:9-14 ⁴⁹ Rev. 19:11-12 ⁵⁰ Rev. 1:15-16 ⁵¹ Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12

Judgment begins in the house of God. That is where Jesus' use of the sword first appears. He pronounces judgment upon each church's life and work. The Lord's corrective discipline keeps us from being condemned with the world.⁵² It is an act of love like a father who disciplines his son.

God's Word can cut to the heart. It is used not only "for teaching," but "rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."⁵³ When Coach Knute Rockne was at Notre Dame, a local sports columnist earned the reputation of being the sharpest, most cutting writer in college football. The anonymous writer even pointed out the mistakes of individual players. It made the players mad. Often they complained to Rockne. He listened with sympathy, but advised them that the best way they could silence their critic was to do better. Later, it became known that the writer of the column was Rockne himself. His cutting column was an ingenuous way to train his players.

FROM THE CHURCH TO HER ENEMIES

The seven letters confirm that Jesus judges His House before He does the lost. "For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?" "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"⁵⁴ Revelation tells us what will become of them. It reveals Christ leading the armies of heaven and striking down the wicked with the sword of His mouth.⁵⁵

Christ also defends His Church, makes war on the Nicolaitans, and puts the wicked to death with a doubled-edged sword.⁵⁶ The sword's two edges indicate that it cuts in two directions. It probes inwardly and devours outwardly. It can cut in a precision manner like a surgeon would use a scalpel to remove a cancerous growth. But it can also cut to pieces like a warrior would use a sword against his enemies. This same sword of the Spirit empowers us to fight the good fight of faith. Spoken by us, God's Word has power to pierce the darkness and expose the hearts of men.



JESUS SHINES WITH THE RADIANCE OF GOD'S GLORY

*"His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance."*⁵⁷

The revelation of this most glorious One caused John to fall "at His feet."⁵⁸ It is noteworthy that during the Great Forty Days, when Jesus appeared to His disciples, we read of no such overwhelming manifestations. On the contrary, Christ is mistaken for the gardener. He stands, unknown upon the shore of

⁵² 2 Cor. 11:28-31 ⁵³ 2 Tim. 3:16-17 ⁵⁴ 1 Peter 4:17-18 ⁵⁵ Rev. 19: 14ff ⁵⁶ Rev. 2:12,16 ⁵⁷ Rev. 1:16 ⁵⁸ Rev. 1:17

Galilee. He joins the disciples on the road to Emmaus as an ordinary traveler. When they saw Him on the mountain in Galilee “some doubted.”⁵⁹ The weight of Christ’s glory was reserved until He was “received up to glory.”⁶⁰

Christ appears to John in His glory as a forewarning of His awesome return. His countenance is likened to “*the sun shining in all its brilliance.*” Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus said the light of the ascended Christ “was above the brightness of the noon day sun.”⁶¹ Christ is “the Sun of Righteousness.” To the moral and spiritual world, He is what the physical sun is to our natural world. For that reason the New Jerusalem requires no sun or moonlight, for the Lamb will provide its light.⁶²

I remember as a boy touring the Mammoth Caves. When my parents, siblings and I reached the deepest point in the cavern, the guide turned off the lights to dramatize how completely dark it is below the earth’s surface. It was so dark you could almost feel it. I was glad to have the lights back on.

LIGHTING THE DARKNESS

John’s opening vision is of a night scene. The world is in gross darkness and the only shining light comes from Christ among His churches. The churches are symbolized by lampstands, which are significant, because they are the medium through which Christ shines out and enlightens the world’s darkness. “I am the light of the world” becomes “You are the light of the world.”⁶³ These seven churches become sources of light in great centers of idolatry.

John sees Christ “*in the midst of the seven candlesticks.*” Jesus is ever *in the midst*. He was hung on that Cross “in the midst of two thieves.” When the disciples gathered, “then came Jesus and stood in the midst of them.” John later sees Christ “*in the midst of the throne, in the midst of the elders, and in the midst of the living creatures.*”⁶⁴ Jesus Himself promised, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst.”⁶⁵

John’s vision of hope centers not in a Christ who is only at God’s right hand. But One who is living “*in the midst*” of His Church. The glorified Christ is not only with His people but in them - in the heart of every believer. He is not only coming bodily at end of this age, but He is with us now by His Spirit. What a keen point! Jesus is now glorified with all power and the ability to be everywhere at once. Although unseen, “Surely,” Jesus says, “I will be with you always, to the very end of the age.”⁶⁶

⁵⁹ John 20:14-15; Matt. 28:17 ⁶⁰ 1 Tim. 3:16; 6:16; Luke 24:26 ⁶¹ Matt. 13:43; 17:2; Rev 10:1 ⁶² 1 John 1:5; Rev. 21:23 ⁶³ John 8:12; Matt 5:14 ⁶⁴ Rev. 5:6 ⁶⁵ John 19:18; 20:19,26; Matt. 18:20; Luke 24:36 ⁶⁶ Matt. 28:20

In the midst of conflict and woe, we find the God-Man is there for us.⁶⁷ Christ is present and powerful in us, in the church, in the world and in history, moving all things in steady progression for the accomplishment of the Father's holy and eternal purposes. He is not enshrined in the past or bound in Heaven. He is our eternal contemporary, let loose in the world where neither man nor demon can stop Him from building His Body. In His commanding presence, men grow strong and the Devil and all his works are brought to naught.



JESUS RULES OVER HEAVEN, EARTH AND HELL

“His right hand seven stars...the keys of death and Hell.”⁶⁸

Christ has in His right hand the seven stars.⁶⁹ He controls the activity of ministering spirits, and the true ministers of His churches. They are held in a place from which no man can pluck them, and “*shine as stars*,” reflecting “the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”⁷⁰ They also show us that Christ actively administers the seven churches. For everything in heaven, earth and under the earth is subject to Him.⁷¹ All angelic administrations come under Christ's Lordship and their many activities are directed from His throne.⁷²

CHRIST'S ACTIVE HEADSHIP

Christ's headship of His Church and right to command her is not questioned. The huge assumption, however, is that He has completely committed the care of His churches to human delegates. And so we now have on earth, not Christ, but men, who are supposed to take charge for Him. To make matters worse, certain church leaders act as if they have the right, as they deem best, to assume His prerogatives.

The history of the Church is a heroic story of men who contended, even died, for the sole administrative rights of Christ over His Church.⁷³ Their conflict took a variety of forms, but in essence it was always the resistance of all-human mediatorship, lordship and control. The Bible teaches Christ's, not man's, headship in the Church. His Word has supreme authority, not human traditions. His Spirit's power fashions the body not church rules and rituals. This is of paramount importance, because we discover in Revelation that a deceiving Beast would sit in the place of Christ.

To usurp Christ's place in His Church is anathema to the Father. Jesus must have the pre-eminence if we are to be His Church. And Christ is not powerless

⁶⁷ Matt. 28:20; John 16:33 ⁶⁸ Rev. 1:16-18 ⁶⁹ Rev. 1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:15, 21 ⁷⁰ 2 Cor. 4:6 ⁷¹ Acts 7:53; Gal.3:19; Heb.2:1-5 ⁷² Eph. 1:22-23 ⁷³ Men also fight for freedom from political tyrants.

as some suppose to rule in His Body. It is not a fact of a bygone age that Jesus once held the stars in His right hand. That He once walked among the candlesticks. It is the truth of today. It is the fact of the hour. Christ alone is mediator between God and man. He powerfully directs men, angels and the seven-fold manifestations of the Holy Spirit to fulfill His authoritative word. Christ will always have the final word in spite of human pretensions.

One final, related point before we see how Christ rules His churches. This is revealed in John's vision of Christ in the midst of seven golden candlesticks. The fact that there are seven candlesticks is vital.

SEVEN CANDLESTICKS

The Hebrew seven-stemmed Menorah is not what we see in John's vision.⁷⁴ A change occurs from a seven-branched candlestick to seven candlesticks. You see there is not merely a church but there are churches. And the seven lampstands or churches stand individually and relate directly to the Lord Himself who walks among them. Their union is in Him and it is through Him that they find their oneness. It is also to Him alone that they are distinctly and individually responsible.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Which of Christ's seven features do you find most comforting? Why?
2. Which one most disturbing? Why?
3. What have you seen in Jesus lately and how has it motivated you?
4. When was the last time you fell to worship at the feet of the Lord Jesus?
5. Which feature of Jesus do you feel most and least acquainted with?
6. What has God taken you through to conform you to Christ's image?
7. How would you say Christ exercises His headship in your church?

There is a counterfeit autonomy, which involves isolation and self-will. In chapters one to three, John, however, presents a true biblical picture of local church autonomy under Christ's headship.⁷⁵

The applications of seven distinct churches are many. An authentic vision of Jesus will

bring each of them clear direction and healthy changes as we will see in the Seven Letters. These churches and letters contain great instructions for us!

⁷⁴ Lampstands are found in Zechariah, where seven bowls are supplied with oil from two nearby olive trees. (Ex. 28:4; Ezek. 9:2,11; Ecclesiasticus 45:8). This vision corresponds later in Revelation to the "two witnesses" that are "the two olive trees" (Rev. 11:3-4). ⁷⁵ The NT has much to say about plurality of ministry and authority in local churches. Nowhere does it sanction an ongoing one-man show. Five-fold ministry, local elders and deacons are to function together under Christ's headship.

PART TWO

CHURCHES

CHAPTER FOUR: SEVEN LETTERS
(Rev. 2:1-3:22)

CHAPTER FIVE: SEVEN CHURCHES
(Rev. 2:1-3:22)

Christ appears to John in a night scene as the Light of the World in the midst of the Seven Candlesticks.



The picture is by an unknown artist who in 1712 illustrated Caspar Luiken's book "Historiae Celebriores Veteris Testamenti Iconibus Representatae."

A Map of the Seven Churches of Asia Minor has also been inserted.

CHAPTER FOUR

SEVEN LETTERS

SEVEN SHARED ELEMENTS IN REVELATION 2:1 - 3:22

The Chicago Bulls were once known as “The Dream Team” of pro basketball. A pastor described what his Dream Church would look like. It came to him as a simple illustration during his sermon. “Our church needs to get back to the basics,” he said, “like a baby learns to get on its knees and crawl. This church needs to crawl before the Lord.” As he paused, from the back of the sanctuary a voice called out, “Let’er crawl preacher, let’er crawl!” Encouraged, the pastor continued, “then we need to study the Bible and strengthen ourselves to where we can stand up strong in our faith. We need to stand in the Lord.” From the back, the voice replied, “Let’er stand preacher, let’er stand.”

More animated, the pastor, who was now acting out his words, declared, “Then let’s take one step at a time, putting one foot in front of the other until we’re walking with the Lord in the Spirit. This church needs to walk with the Lord.” The voice replied, “Let’er walk preacher, let’er walk.” Spurred on, the excited pastor announced, “the church needs to then get into a stride where we can run for God. This will require each of you to make a commitment to tithe, to pray daily and to assemble every time the church doors are open. Then and only then can we run for the Lord.” After a long and thoughtful pause, the voice called out from the back of the sanctuary in a different tone, “Let ‘er crawl preacher.”

In Revelation chapter two and three, Jesus calls His churches to commitment. Imagine the stir at each church, when the scroll of Revelation arrived and they opened it. Consider their interest as the elders announced, “Our beloved John, who used to minister among us, but who is now in exile at Patmos, has been caught up in the Spirit and seen the day of the Lord’s coming. He was told to send us the following letter with our Lord’s instructions for our assembly.” With what deep emotion would its words be heard; yet, once heard what would the response be? What will our response be?

WEIGHTY LETTERS

Many writers only briefly comment on these seven letters. They regard them as a kind of prelude to John’s real message, rushing to expound on the prophecies of the book, which they consider as the weighty part. The prophecy of Revelation, however, is made in relation to these seven letters.

And these letters call for a response as they address the invisible conflict, which rages on between the Lamb and the Dragon, between *'the holy city'* Jerusalem and *'the great city'* Babylon.

The world is in Satan's grip and Satan attacks every church. The Seven Letters are thus a message to the Church in enemy territory. It calls us to endure tribulation, to hold fast to the truth, to resist worldly enticements and to obey Jesus' commands.¹ Two chapters cover the letters and the churches, and help us to understand Satan's war against us. We also see how the seeds of Babylon were sown and the Great Apostate emerged from among the churches.

I will examine the letters as a unit, noting seven elements common to each. I list each of these elements in a word that begins with a "D." We will see that the letters are uniform, observing a systematic pattern in structure. Each begins with an agent to whom the letter is addressed and an actual place where the letter is destined. Each letter then provides a feature of Christ taken from John's opening vision of Jesus. What follows are words to each church of praise and rebuke as appropriate. When specific sins are exposed, there is a call to repentance and a promise to those who take to heart its message.



1 DELIVER: ANGEL TO WHOM THE LETTER IS ADDRESSED
"Unto the Angel of the Church"

Each letter is addressed to *"the angel of the church."* Writing to an angel seems odd. Therefore, many Bible teachers interpret the term 'angel' as messenger, claiming the stars are pastors or overseers. If they are human ministers, they are like stars that lighten the darkness, lead others to righteousness, and keep an appointed course.³ Also like stars, their course is above the world in order to guide people to Christ like the star of Bethlehem was to the Wise Men or like the stars guided the ancient, seagoing travelers home.

PASTOR OR ANGEL

It is likely, however, that each church literally has its own guardian angel. Recall, Peter and Paul had such angels.⁴ After all, angels are ministering spirits for the heirs of salvation, appointed to administer the Lord's protection, provision, deliverance and discipline.⁵ We find them in many roles throughout the Bible. Paul may allude to these *church angels* when he says, in the public assembly, women ought to be covered because of the angels.⁶

¹ John Stott says, "there is much here to call us to repentance and renewal, much to humble and shame us, much to warn us of the malice of our enemy, and much to incite us to fortitude and perseverance!"
² Rev. 2:1, 8,12, 18; 3:1,7,14 ³ Dan. 12:3 Unlike "wandering stars" (Jude 13). ⁴ Acts 12:15;27:23
⁵ (Heb.1:14) Book of Tobit, Raphael says, "I am...one of the seven angels." ⁶ 1 Cor. 11:10

Henry Stanley told of how as a youth in the Confederate Army, he was taken prisoner at the battle of Shiloh and confined at Fort Douglas, Chicago. While playing cards, he felt a blow in the back of his neck. In a moment he was at the bedside of his aunt in faraway Wales. His aunt lay dying and asked him to forgive her for having turned him out into the world at such a tender age.

He was about to take her hand when he ‘came to’ and asked the others what had happened. They were unaware that anything had happened for the vision had been too rapid for them to notice. Soon he received word that his aunt had died and left such a message for him. Stanley believes that the swift vision was brought to him by his guardian angel and that every man has such a spirit, striving to warn, help and encourage its mortal charge.

If there are individual guardian angels, why not such an angel for a church? John champions that view, since angels administer in Revelation what transpires between Heaven and earth.⁷ I think the term ‘angel’ refers to actual *church angels*. I add two reasons:

1. **Greek word for angels** occurs 67 times in Revelation. In every other instance it refers to a supernatural, spirit being.
2. **Angels preside over many things:** inanimate as well as living things such as “the waters” and “children.” God assigned Michael to guard Israel.

Whether a human messenger or a supernatural spirit being, the letters do not stop with them. They are appropriately addressed to a particular church through them. This brings us to the next element common to each letter.



DESTINATION: WHERE THE LETTER WAS SENT “To Ephesus, Smyrna... Laodicea.”⁸

Located in modern day Turkey, these seven churches were in close proximity to each other. The first letter, written to Ephesus, was likely the center of John’s ministry. From there, he had a relationship with these churches before he was exiled. They are named in the order in which a traveler would visit these towns. Archaeologists consider this an ancient postal route, starting at Ephesus and ending with Laodicea. A person could visit all seven in a semicircular sweep of about 100 miles in diameter. Patmos Island, itself, was only 24 miles away from the coast land, easily reached by visitors.

Once received, the seven churches read what Jesus had to say to each of them.⁹ Reading a letter aloud to an assembled congregation and passing it on to the next one was a common practice of the early church.¹⁰ So Sardis might

⁷ Angels administer (Heb. 2:5ff). ⁸ Rev. 2:1,8,12, 18; 3:1,7,14 ⁹ Rev. 2:7; 11, 17; 2:23 ¹⁰ Col 4:16

benefit from the word to Ephesus and vice versa. Notwithstanding, these letters place vividly before each church a specific word from the Lord, which requires their careful attention. Jesus addresses particular circumstances and confronts besetting sins. He also makes explicit promises to those who act on His word; yet, it is understood that just as the sins to be avoided are to be avoided by all, so the separate rewards are promised to all that overcome.

WRITTEN FOR OUR INSTRUCTION

Like the letters in the New Testament, these were written for our instruction. Today's church can learn much from their content. The moral and doctrinal issues they faced parallel what the Church would face throughout her history. They represent the kinds of churches that would exist during the Church age. Today there exist Smyrna churches that are faithfully enduring persecution. Thyatiran churches exist that have the cultic elements of Jezebel in their midst. There are also Sardis churches that are bound in cold, dead religion.

The letters tell us that we are contending with more than just our sinful nature. Every church faces attacks from an angry enemy. The war in Heaven has been won but the battle on earth rages on. Satan *"is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short... Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring - those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus."*¹¹

Revelation teaches that the Devil's assault comes from several directions, and the Dragon employs three associates: the Beast from the sea, the Beast from the earth (the False Prophet) and the Great Prostitute. Yet, Satan's aim is always the same. He seeks to silence the Church's witness. In the Islamic World, there is open hostility to the Gospel. Elsewhere, she wrestles with insidious ideologies that seduce men and hold them in bondage.

A VICTORIOUS MESSAGE

The Church is called to preach the Gospel and make disciples until Christ comes. She is engaged in a serious battle for the souls of men; yet, the message from the Captain of our Salvation is plain. "I have won and am coming soon!" He gives us clear instructions on how we can stand our ground in this evil day. Like the fierce battle that raged during the Civil War at Fort Altoona. Suddenly, those inside the fort received a message from a reflective mirror on top of a nearby mountain. General Sherman encouraged the Union soldiers not to surrender. His famous message - "Hold the fort, for I am coming soon!"

¹¹ Rev 12:12-17

Revelation is meant to bolster the Church in the face of Satan's onslaughts. It is like a city under siege where a strong enemy surrounds the fortifications. Supplies are running low and the citizens are fearful. But in the dark of night, a messenger sneaks through enemy lines. He has rushed to the city to tell the people that in another place the main force of the enemy has been defeated. The people do not need to fear or give up. It is only a matter of time until the besieging troops are overwhelmed and there is an end to the fighting.¹²

We may seem surrounded at times by evil forces – covetousness, heresy, immorality, and death. These forces seem relentless. But the truth is that the enemy has already been defeated. It is only a matter of time until the Victor appears.¹³ Though we wrestle with evil principalities, there is no evil force so strong that we need succumb. Christ can sustain us under any trial. He is the “source of strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate.”¹⁴



DESCRIPTION: OF CHRIST APT TO THE CHURCH'S SITUATION *“Holds the seven stars in his right hand.”¹⁵*

Christ reveals Himself most appropriately, according to the needs and circumstances of each local assembly. Since He actively walks among them and sees their true condition, He knows just what they need. He sees how their candles are burning and does whatever is necessary to trim their light. This knowledge that Christ walks among us should encourage us to take heart and to take heed.

When the Israelites were sick, the Lord revealed himself as Jehovah Rapha, the Lord who heals. When Abraham required a sacrifice, He was Jehovah Jireh. The various names of the Lord reveal aspects of who He is. When Israel went to war, they needed to know that the Lord was a warrior. Also He was a Lawgiver. We must know Him well, since “His divine power has given us everything we need...through our knowledge of Him.”¹⁶

ONGOING REVELATION

Jesus does not always reveal Himself to us in the same way. His is an ongoing revelation through life's experiences. At times His Spirit convicts us and tears freely flow, while on another occasion laughter accompanies His joyful presence. Jesus' personality is vast and deep - in fact infinite!

¹² Richard J. Mouw in “*Uncommon Decency*.” ¹³ 2 Kings 6:16-17 ¹⁴ Isa. 28:6 ¹⁵ “These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand...” (Rev.2:1). “The First and the Last.” (Rev. 2: 8) “Has the sharp, double-edged sword.” (Rev. 2:12) “The Son of God, whose eyes...” (Rev. 2:18) “Holds the seven spirits of God.” (Rev. 3:1) “Holy and true, who holds the key of David...” (Rev. 3:7) ¹⁶ 2 Peter 1:3

He shows up at one church, Philadelphia, with a key, but at Thyatira He arrives with a sharp two-edged sword. The difference in use of these two instruments is great. I once picked up my six-year-old from school and noticed a boy his age in the schoolyard playing with a kitchen knife. That got my full attention; whereas, a pencil in his hand would have been different. What Jesus possesses should get our attention too, because He intends on using it in a very appropriate manner.

The revelation of Jesus Christ is the churches' one foundation. And John's descriptions of Jesus indicate that He does not reveal the totality of who He is all at once. We behold Him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, which is what makes a Christian. No one is added to the Church without that personal revelation. We then grow in grace through an ongoing discovery of the person of Christ. These are awesome disclosures of the Godhead. The Father reveals the Son by the Holy Spirit, and the Son reveals the nature of the Father. Such revelations transform us into Christ-likeness.

In Revelation, we see that Jesus is also the Lion of Judah who treads out the winepress of God's wrath. An ongoing revelation of Him is needed until His Second Coming. Then we shall see Him face to face and fully know Him.¹⁷ Christ-likeness is what will attract us to Him like a magnet at His coming. In contrast, the wicked "*say to the mountains and rocks fall on us and hide us from the face of Him for the day of His wrath has come.*"¹⁸

BUILT UP IN CHRIST

We are called to build our lives on the foundation of Christ and His Word. The story is told of a carpenter who wanted to retire. He informed his long-standing employer of his plans to leave the building business. The contractor asked if he could build just one more house as a favor. The carpenter agreed but it was easy to see that his heart was not in his work. He resorted to shoddy workmanship and used inferior materials. When he finished, the employer came to inspect the house. Afterwards, he handed him the front-door key. "This is my gift to you." The carpenter was shocked! If he had only known he was building his own house, he would have worked at it differently.

So it is with us. We build our lives a day at a time often putting less than our best into the building. Then with a shock we realize it is our house that we have built. If we could do it all over again, we would incorporate only the best materials and craftsmanship. But we cannot relive our choices. You are the carpenter and each day you hammer a nail, place a board, or erect a wall.

¹⁷ 1 Cor. 13:12 ¹⁸ Rev 6:16-17

“Life is a building project.” Our choices today build our house of tomorrow. So let us build wisely with an ongoing revelation of Jesus’ nature.



4 DETAILS: VIRTUES COMMENDED AND FAULTS CONFRONTED
“I know your...perseverance. Yet I hold this against you.”¹⁹

You can be sure He knows. This introductory “*I know*” is in all seven letters.²⁰ Nothing goes unnoticed by Him: our works and words, even our intentions. He is the One with the seven eyes. “*He knows*” is often taken as a negative as though we will be found out for some hidden sin. But Jesus says, “*I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance...I know your afflictions and your poverty - yet you are rich! ...I know where you live - where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name...I know your deeds, your love and faith...I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.*”²¹ All of these things that He knows are good!

GOOD TO KNOW

While on earth, Jesus made a point of commending the virtues He saw. He points out the greatness of a Centurion’s and a Syrophenician woman’s faith. He highlighted the generosity of the widow who gave her last mite and the bright light of John the Baptist. He applauded the commitment of His disciples.²² These kinds of things are what all of us would love to hear from Jesus. So remember He sees all we are doing for His namesake. “And God is not unjust; He will not forget your work and the love you have shown Him as you have helped His people and continue to help them.”²³

Christ begins by applauding a church’s virtues before confronting her faults. What a good approach that is for you and I to follow in our relationships. If you want to correct something bad in a person’s life, you start by acknowledging the good. But if you hit ‘em between the eyes’ with their sins, usually their ears will close. But if you say, “You know you’re doing that so well,” their ears are open wide. And then you can help them to hear how they can improve.

Two churches, namely Sardis and Laodicea, are rebuked strongly, because Christ loves them. Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira are commended as well as confronted. Two other churches, Smyrna and Philadelphia receive only words of acclaim. This does not mean that Smyrna or Philadelphia were without any problems, for no church is perfect. Likewise, there were surely virtues at Sardis and Laodicea, but the Lord dealt with each church out of His concern for their wellbeing and according to what was entrusted to them.

¹⁹ Rev. 3:8,15 ²⁰ Rev. 2:9,13. ²¹ Rev 2:2-3,9,13,19;3:8 ²² Mark 7:26;9:39-41; Luke7:9 ²³ Heb. 6:10

MEASURE OF LOVE

Christ's primary concern is for the wellbeing of His flock. And each congregation is measured by the standard of His life, namely love for God. So the first and major lack in a church is not wrong doctrines but a lack of love. "If anyone does not love the Lord - a curse be on him. Come, O Lord!"²⁴ This lack opens a church to other evil elements, which when not dealt with will subtly and gradually bring forth the whore of Babylon. Of that loveless and lifeless, religious system, God says, "*Come out of her, my people. Do not be partakers of her sins.*"²⁵

Continuing to love Christ is possible since we have the Holy Spirit. By means of a new birth, the Spirit lives in me and has shed His love abroad in my heart. Since the Holy Spirit loves Jesus and will always love Him, He enables me to share in His love and follow Jesus' teachings. "If a man loves me, he will keep my words."²⁶ Such love is expressed by acts of service that the Spirit also gifts me to do. "Peter, do you love me? Feed My sheep."²⁷

The Jacobites of Scotland never met one another on the road, never sat down to eat, without lifting a cup to pledge the return of their king, Charles. In our every celebration of the Lord's Supper, we lift the sacred cup to say that our King shall come soon. Remember the deep import of His words. "As often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, you do show the Lord's death till he come." *Till He come!* When He comes He shall not bring pain and suffering, as did King Charles to unhappy Scotland. But He shall bind up all our wounds, set us at complete liberty and wipe away all our tears.


5 DEMAND: REMEDY CALLED FOR BY CHRIST

*"Remember...Repent."*²⁸

When Christ exposes sin, He offers a clear-cut solution. If we are blind and naked, Jesus offers us eye ointment to see and clean clothes to wear. If we have left our first love, He tells us the way back. Here's another good practice to follow. When uncovering sin, do we provide a way out? When there is something wrong, do we come with a solution that we are willing to help implement? Also the faults that Jesus exposes are neither petty nor general, but very serious and specific. He points them out because He wants what is best for us. Like a good parent, when He reveals changes we need to make, (which He does at stages in life), He helps us bring about those changes.

²⁴ 1 Cor. 16:22 ²⁵ Rev. 18:4 ²⁶ John 14:32 ²⁷ John 21:15ff ²⁸ "Remember the height from which you have fallen" (Rev. 2:5) "Repent therefore" (Rev. 2:16) "Unless they repent" (Rev. 2:22) "Wake up" (Rev. 3:2) "Hold on to what you have" (Rev. 3:11) "I counsel you to buy from me" (Rev. 3:18)

Christ's words minister conviction rather than a dead-end condemnation. And conviction is so very different than condemnation. Condemnation leaves you without hope. That is what the Devil does when he points out your sins. He rubs your nose in it and tells you there is no way out. You will always be the way you are and you can never change. That is true for the Devil. He cannot change, but you and I can. That is what is so wonderful about repentance. I acknowledge that I am wrong. I ask God to forgive me and to help me change. I then trust in His ability to forgive and bring about the necessary change.

REMEMBER, REPENT AND DO

Christ calls us first to remember. "But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after you were illuminated."²⁹ Once you remember where you were, you can repent and then retrace your steps to the same place. Repentance enables you to do your first works. The imperatives are: "*Remember the height...Repent and do.*"³⁰ The key connection between "*remember and do*" is repent. Used seven times by John, the word is literally "*repent out of.*"³¹

Repentance is considered a negative; yet, it is a positive, ongoing activity. Like gardening, it requires that we sow and water what we wish to reap, and regularly weed out the tares before they grow. To do this and not grow weary, we must keep our eyes on the prize at harvest. "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."³² Jesus urges repentance with a promise, "*To him that overcomes will I give.*"³³ Eternal life is worth a lifetime of repenting and doing good.

A gardener of a large estate in northern Italy was conducting a visitor through the well-groomed grounds. The guest complimented him for the beautiful way he kept the gardens. He later asked, "when was the owner last here?" "It was about two years ago," replied the gardener. The surprised visitor asked, "Then why do you keep the gardens in such an immaculate manner?" "Because I expect him to return." The visitor persisted, "Is he coming soon?" "Yes, I expect him soon," said the gardener. He was living in the light of the owner's imminent return. So he was in the garden, busy planting, trimming, mowing and weeding. He was not hanging over the gate, looking down the road to see whether his master was coming.

Very different than what I experienced working in the kitchen at a certain restaurant. Our manager answered the phone and put it down like it was hot and yelled, "He's coming! He's coming!" The ladies ran for their hair nets and the men ran for clean aprons. The boss told me to sweep the floor and

²⁹ Heb. 10:32 ³⁰ Rev. 2:5 ³¹ Rev. 2:21, 22.; 9:20,21, 16:11 and Acts 8:22 ³² Gal. 6:9 ³³ Rev. 2:7

cover all the containers. There was a wild look in his eyes. I thought to myself, “Who on earth is coming?” Suddenly, through the front door entered a man in a suit. I was told that he was the state inspector for the Board of Health and that the local restaurants watched out for each other. The first one to see the inspector coming would call the others. They had a system of warning. Revelation’s call to repentance is the best system of warning for believers.

The Lord gives a wake up call to the whole congregation. Those who did not indulge in these sins were tolerating their practice by certain members. But how can an assembly deal with evil men within its walls? Call them to repentance and faithful living is Jesus’ answer. That is the only way. If they refuse to change, then sterner measures are needed. Although not a popular subject in a lawless time, Church discipline is clearly an imperative feature in a church’s life. Without it, any church imperils its very existence.



DISCERNMENT: NECESSARY FOR ALL OVERCOMERS

“To him who overcomes, I will give.”³⁴

At the close of each letter is a strong charge to overcome.³⁵ The final summons to overcome the congregation’s besetting sin is personalized, not to the church in general, but to the discerning individuals in that assembly who respond. Here, the prophetic doctrine of the remnant comes out. For not all within a given church will discern rightly or choose to turn from sin. The wheat will grow up with the chaff, only to be separated at the harvest time. But Christ will have His remnant and ample rewards await them.

MORE OF CHRIST

In each letter, Jesus promises, “*I will give.*” Rewards await overcomers.³⁶ “*To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the hidden manna...a white stone...a new name...I will make a pillar...I will write upon him the name of my God.*”³⁷ These rewards are spoken of in symbolic terms but that is not to say they are any less real. On the contrary, Christ is the hidden manna and rewards constitute more of Him and what He possesses as the ultimate Overcomer.³⁸ Paul taught this when he wrote, “*May your spiritual experience become richer as you see more clearly and more fully grasp God’s great secret, Christ Himself! For it is in Him, and in Him alone, that men will find all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*”³⁹

³⁴ “the right to eat from the tree of life” (Rev. 2:7) “not be hurt at all by the second death.” (Rev.2:11) “hidden manna.” (Rev. 2:17) “authority over the nations.” (Rev.2:26) “dressed in white.” (Rev. 3:5) “a pillar in the temple of my God.” (Rev.3:12) “right to sit with me on my throne.” (Rev.3:21) ³⁵ Verb to ‘overcome’ is characteristic of John. ³⁶ First three letters the call to listen precedes the promise; in the last four it follows. ³⁷ Rev 2:17; 3:12 ³⁸ Rev 2:26-28; Matt. 19:28 ³⁹ Col. 2:2-3 Phillips

“To the victor, go the spoils.” Rewards and privileges only for those who overcome is not a popular subject in some Christian circles. Such Christians take the milk of the word, which tells us of God’s grace and free gifts, but they reject the meat, which calls us to obedient action.⁴⁰ All of us, however, have challenges to overcome. It is better for us to accept that the Christian life is a series of tests, small and great, so we can bravely face them head on.⁴¹

POWER TO OVERCOME

Christ expects us to ‘overcome’ since He provides power for overcoming. It flows from Him, and thus the victory we gain is a revelation of Him – of what He can do and who we can become in Him. Christ living in us is the only way we can live a victorious Christian life.⁴² He is not only our power source but also our sure pattern. Jesus, the Original Overcomer, was sorely tempted but He persevered through it all.⁴³ We, too, can overcome. *“They overcame him (Satan) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.”*⁴⁴

There is no escapist’s theology in these letters. That would cause us to miss our very purpose for being here – to be trained in overcoming. Jesus did not pray that the Father would take us out of the world, but that He would “keep us from the evil.”⁴⁵ In line with John’s message, these exhortations and promises are spoken in the light of Christ’s soon coming. The call grows more urgent as the letters progress, until He says, “I stand at the door.”⁴⁶

Seven times, Christ calls us to persevere to the End, because perseverance is the key to overcoming. The root of the word “persevere” is the word “severe.” En route to victory, things may get severe, and it is with severe steadfastness and severe loyalty to Christ that we inherit the promises. Thereby, we prove our fitness for larger trusts in a world where struggles are over.



DECISION: TO HEAR AND ACT

*“Let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*⁴⁷

Seven times Christ alerts us to “hear what the Spirit says.” He used the same words when He walked the earth, calling attention to the most important aspects of His teachings.⁴⁸ And since an entire congregation rarely hears, we must never depend on others to do our hearing, any more than they can do our repenting. Each must hear for himself what the Spirit says.

⁴⁰ Heb. 5:13-14 ⁴¹ John 16:33 ⁴² Col. 1:27; 3:3-6 ⁴³ Heb. 2:10; Rev. 3:21 ⁴⁴ Rev 12:11 ⁴⁵ (John 17:15) Evil is “poneros,” malicious harm. Masculine, singular is the Evil One. ⁴⁶ Future active tense (Rev. 2:10,17,23,26,28; 3:8,11,20-21; 6:4;11:14,33; 21:6;22:7,12,20). ⁴⁷ Rev. 2:7,11,17,29 3:6,13,22.

Unlike any of New Testament letters, the Lord Jesus directly dictates these. Unique words indeed! For Christ is the head of each church, making these letters extra weighty. He discerns the exact condition of each one with no need to be *informed* like Paul was by Chloe's household that there were quarrels among them. Nor does Christ, as Paul, write, "In *my opinion*" or "I *think* that I also have the Spirit of God."⁴⁹

A DREAM OR NIGHTMARE CHURCH

If Christ is not obeyed, our Dream Church will become a nightmare instead. The warning of removing the church's candlestick is a reality.⁵⁰ This denotes the taking away from an assembly its means of bearing light. In my brief thirty years as a believer, I have learnt that just because God gives a vision to start a work does not mean that it will come to fulfillment. Visions die and people go off the rails. So do churches.

The Devil will never extinguish the witness of the Body of Christ worldwide.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What stage are you at: crawling, standing, walking, running?
2. What would a church be like if all ran?
3. What revelation of Christ do you feel you currently need to receive?
4. What virtues might Christ call attention to in your life, your church, your city?
5. What faults might Christ confront?
6. What motivates you to overcome?
7. What spoke to you most from this chapter on the seven letters?

Nor can he can overcome those who are faithful to Jesus. But Satan does destroy local churches as well as individuals. It is a fact of history that most of the churches of Revelation have long since ceased to exist. Ephesus, the first of the seven and center of John's ministry became a heap of ruins after more than a thousand

years had passed – such was the Lord's long-suffering. Of the seven, the light of the lamp, representing faithful Smyrna and Philadelphia, do alone still shine. The ruins of the other ancient cities are visible today, and from these, gold and precious stones were removed by Justinian to ornament the church of Sophia in Constantinople. Later, Barbarians pillaged all that emperors had spared. A different kind of treasure, however, still remains for us. These are the lessons we can learn from these churches, recovering as it were gold, silver and precious stones from their ruins. This we will do in the next chapter.

⁴⁸ Later in Revelation 13:9 ⁴⁹ 1 Cor 7:40

CHAPTER FIVE

SEVEN CHURCHES

SEVEN CHURCHES IN REVELATION 2:1 - 3:22

E-mails are replacing letters for good reasons, but this technology can go awry. Consider the man who left the cold streets of Chicago for a vacation in Miami. His wife was scheduled to meet him the next day. From his hotel, he hurried an e-mail to his wife, but left out a letter. It went instead to an elderly preacher's wife, whose husband had died the day before. When the grieving widow checked her e-mails, she let out a piercing scream and fell to the floor. At the sound her family rushed into the room and saw this note on the screen. "Dearest Wife, Just got checked in. Everything prepared for your arrival tomorrow. Your Husband PS. Sure is hot down here!"

Like the internet, God's Word can be misused too. At times, those who are grieving hear words of rebuke while the complacent receive words of succor. "Good preaching," someone said, "comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable." Christ knows what each one needs to hear. In this chapter, we study His Words to the seven churches. They exemplify churches today. We pay special attention to the errors Christ confronts, since they represent the tares of Babylon, sown in the young churches by the Evil One. Later these heresies appear full-grown in the Great Prostitute.



CHURCH OF EPHESUS

*"You have forsaken your first love."*¹

Among Roman cities in Asia, Ephesus ranked as 'first and greatest.' The city stood on high ground near the mouth of the Cayster River beside the Koressos Mountains. With valleys on either side, Ephesus was beautifully scenic. It boasted of a great open-air theatre that could seat 24,000 spectators. Ephesus was the center of worship for the fertility goddess called Artemis in Greek and Diana in Latin.² Thousands of priestesses participated in temple prostitution. Heraclitus, the weeping philosopher, said, "the inhabitants of the city were fit only to be drowned, and that the reason why he could never laugh or smile was because he lived amidst such terrible uncleanness."³

The Church at Ephesus was hard working.⁴ It had a heritage of great servants like Paul, Timothy and John himself.⁵ As a result the Church was doctrinally

¹ Rev. 2:2-6 ² Acts 19:23-35 ³ 6th Century BC. ⁴ Rev. 2:2 ⁵ Acts 18:24-28; 19:1-10; 20:17-38

sound. They understood gift ministries and how the Church functioned. When men arose claiming to be apostles, they were put them to the test and were found to be “false apostles.” Life is a crucial battle against error. Error in chemistry, surgery and mechanics results in disaster. To oppose error is thus a virtue that the Ephesians demonstrated. These self-proclaimed apostles were “tested” in the light of Scripture and genuine apostles like John.

NICOLAITANS

Since false apostles make false claims, they are sure to teach false things: the evil practices of the Nicolaitans. We’re wrong to think the Church always identifies such cunning impostors. Church history reveals otherwise. To alert the churches to their deceptive nature and to cover their many forms throughout history, Christ describes heretical groups by the use of symbolic names: Nicolaitans, Balaam and Jezebel. The name Nicolaitans is from “*Nikao*” meaning “*to conquer*” and “*laos*” which is “*people*.” As “*conquerors of the laity*,” the Nicolaitans lorded it over ordinary believers.⁶

The leaven of the Nicolaitans, just a little at first, leavened the whole lump. It worked its way from a practice at Ephesus into a doctrine at Pergamos.⁷ A priesthood emerged, which negated the priesthood of all believers. The Nicolaitans violated Christ’s Headship over His church and His role as the sole mediator between God and man.⁸ No wonder Christ hated their practices. They justified their practices with the Levitical priesthood, and rationalized that a hierarchy was necessary for maintaining order in the churches. What they really sought was power and prestige - like the Pharisaical system before them.⁹ They also introduced rituals to support their priestly office.¹⁰

A distinct class of men, called clergymen, has damaged the Body of Christ perhaps more than any other practice.¹¹ The Church is meant to grow as every member serves, using their spiritual gifts.¹² Christ sets in the Church real apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Their function is to empower the saints for works of service and not to dominate or usurp them. Every member is a ministering priest. Nowhere in the New Testament do we find a separate priesthood except in the doctrine of the Nicolaitans.

⁶(Acts 6:5) Nicolaitans may have sprang from Nicolas of Antioch, 1 of 7 deacons, a proselyte, who is said to have apostatized. Others point to a later Nicolas. Jesus hates “the works” not the men. Love the sinner, hate the sin. ⁷ Rev 2:15 ⁸ 1 Peter 2:9; 1 Tim. 2:5 ⁹ Nothing new - “the priests rule by their own authority, and my people love it this way.” (Jer. 5:31). ¹⁰ Motivated by vain ambition (2 Cor. 11:5,13; 12:11). ¹¹ “Call no man father on earth.” (Matt. 23:9) ¹² “One who is your Master...you are brethren.” “Rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them... great among you must be your servant.” (Mark 10:42-45; 1 Peter 5:3; 3 John 9). Paul warned “It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness” (2 Cor. 11:5,13,20ff; 12:11; 1 Cor. 9:2).

FIRST LOVE

After commending them for resisting the Nicolaitans, Jesus says, “*I have somewhat against you. You have left your first love.*”¹³ As the Bridegroom, He addresses the Church as His bride.¹⁴ The Lord never forgot Judah’s first love and Christ does not forget His Church’s first love.¹⁵ She left Him as first but there is nothing to which her love can be legitimately transferred. Christ is watchful of our “*first love*” for our own good, because this loss opens a church to every other loss. With time, they’ll become clanging bells, ringing in a steeple. Their very existence is threatened: “*remove your candlestick.*”

How did they come to leave such splendor? Many explanations are given. They were too busy. Some lingering lust reasserted itself. Each one knows for himself. But let us add a caution not to regard every fluctuation of feeling as proof of this loss. While there are some who distress themselves when they should not, there are more who have great need to be distressed, but are not even aware of their loss. The time should not come when you lose your love for Jesus. But if it does, remember what you have lost, quickly repent and carefully retrace your steps to that place where Jesus is loved above all else. Ephesus represents churches that work diligently and are sound doctrinally; yet, their love for Christ “was like the early dew that disappears.”¹⁶



CHURCH OF SMYRNA “*You will suffer persecution.*”¹⁷

Ranking in size with Ephesus, Smyrna had a population of 200,000. The first sight of Smyrna, especially by sea, produced a strong impression. The heights of Mount Pagus and the plain beneath were covered with houses. The “Golden Street” was among its beautiful paved streets traversing it from east to west. Scenic beauty was in stark contrast to life there as a Christian.

PERSECUTED CHURCH

Under Caesar Domitian, emperor worship was forced on threat of death.¹⁸ The Christian’s experience at Smyrna fitted the city’s name. The name comes from aromatic myrrh whose fragrance is released when crushed. Myrrh also has a bitter flavor. The Church tasted the bitter pill of persecution coupled with poverty. They were shunned and disliked; their property was pillaged and they were cast into prison.¹⁹ The temptation to abandon Christ was very strong due to such abuse and disgrace.²⁰

¹³ (Rev. 1:4; 1:14). Emphatic with article repeated: “Your love, your first one.” ¹⁴ Familiar truth to them (Eph. 5:23-33). ¹⁵ Jer. 2:2 ¹⁶ Hos. 6:4 ¹⁷ Rev. 2:9 ¹⁸ Domitian 81-96 AD ¹⁹ Heb. 10:34; 13:3 ²⁰ Jesus knows all: “I know.” Estimates all: “rich.” Foresees all: “tribulation.” Limits all: “Ten days.”

Jesus reveals Himself as He “*who became dead, and lived again.*”²¹ He emphasizes an end to their suffering and their own resurrection. The crown of life, a familiar metaphor in the games at Smyrna, is promised.²² Being faithful until death is the essence of the Christian life.²³ Poor but faithful Smyrna receives only praise without a word of reproach.²⁴ Do not think, however, that there was nothing amiss there. Like individuals, every church has faults. But when persecuted for Christ’s sake, the Lord only commends.²⁵

The source of persecution was religious Jews.²⁶ They viewed the Jewish Christians at Smyrna as heretics of the worst sort, deserving insult and abuse. Religion has ever been the chief and bitterest fountain of persecution. Inquisitions have been constructed, chains have been forged, tortures have been inflicted and martyr-fires kindled.²⁷ At age 86, Polycarp, a friend of John, was numbered the “twelfth martyr in Smyrna.” His last words have echoed through the ages. “Eighty six years have I served Christ and he has never done me wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?”²⁸

SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN

Jesus knows “*the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.*”²⁹ Jews in Smyrna claimed Abraham but rejected Jesus, Abraham’s promised Seed.³⁰ Jesus thus calls their claim profane. Those who refused Jesus as their Messiah were not true to their own Judaism; whereas, Christians who accepted Him were.³¹ “For he is *not* a Jew, which is one outwardly. But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly.”³² Jews at Smyrna were un-Jewish.³³ And John, having long experienced their hostility, became convinced of the widespread character of the national apostasy.³⁴

Today there is still a large population of Christians at Smyrna. In Islam, it is known as “the Infidel City.” Christianity’s lamp was never extinguished in Smyrna because of the blood of the martyrs, which is the most potent seed of the Church.³⁵ Smyrna stands for churches that suffer persecution. Often after the apostolic, Ephesian Church, a time of persecution follows. Something or someone always opposes the Gospel. Smyrna type churches are prevalent today in parts of Africa and Asia. Not rich outwardly - few resources, meagre salaries and poor buildings; yet they’re rich in spiritual life. “Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.”³⁶

²¹ Rev. 2:8 ²² Rev. 2:10 James 1:121 Cor. 9:25; 2 Tim. 4:8 ²³ Promise suited to their temptation. (Rev. 2:11) ²⁴ (James 2:5) Rich in faith they could impart. Smyrna’s poverty is contrasted to the rich, self-satisfied Laodiceans. ²⁵ 1 Peter 2:20 ²⁶ Acts chpts. 23-26 ²⁷ Matt. 23:31 ²⁸ Eusebius Ecclesiastical History 4:15.25 ²⁹ Rev. 2:9 ³⁰ Gal. 3:16, 29 ³¹ Rom. 2:17ff ³² Rom. 2:28-29 ³³ John 8:44; 18:40; Acts 13:5014:4 ³⁴ In John’s Gospel, Jew(s) appear 70 times in contention with the Lord. ³⁵ Only at Smyrna and Philadelphia (where no deficiency is pointed out) are there churches today. ³⁶ Luke 6:20



CHURCH OF PERGAMUM

“You live where Satan has his throne.”³⁷

Pergamum was a political and religious center, fifty miles north of Smyrna. The city had many great buildings, including a library with 200,000 volumes.³⁸ Pliny named Pergamum the most illustrious city of Asia for its many temples. There was a temple to Demeter in the grove Nicephorium, and a great altar to Zeus cut on the Acropolis rock. Nearby was the temple of Asklepios, the god of medicine, worshiped with the image of a snake.³⁹ Athena had a temple as did Dionysus, the gods of royal kings, symbolized by a bull. If that were not enough emperor-worship flourished at Pergamum.⁴⁰

No wonder Jesus refers to Pergamum twice as where Satan’s seat is.⁴¹ To declare oneself a Christian at Pergamum thus provoked strong hostility.⁴² Jesus cites a recent martyr, Antipas.⁴³ He represents those in the Church that stood against emperor-worship and refused to compromise with idolatry. Jesus calls Antipas *“my witness,”* giving him His own title my *“faithful one.”* But not everyone was faithful like Antipas.⁴⁴ Jesus confronts another heretical group: *“those who hold the doctrine of Balaam.”⁴⁵*

DOCTRINE OF BALAAM

With all the idol worship, there was bound to be lots of questions at Pergamum, like those Paul addressed at Corinth. For example, if a non-believing friend invited a Christian to a feast was the convert to go? If he refused, didn’t he cut himself off not only from legitimate enjoyment, but also from an opportunity of being a witness? But if he accepted the invitation could he eat, without sinning, what the host had sacrificed to Zeus?

These were difficult questions and Balaam’s doctrine provided a nice answer. Instead of taking a stand against pagan practices, they advocated compromise. The way to win the people of Pergamum was to become like them. *“When in Rome...”* Balaam’s real motivation, however, was not to win others to God, but to partake of the power and pleasures the culture offered. He also wanted to avoid persecution.

Balaam’s doctrine turned God’s grace into a licence for sin. Balaamites promised others freedom from the law; yet, by lust they were held in

³⁷ Rev. 2:13 -14 ³⁸ Second only to one in Alexandria, Egypt. Parchment derived its name from Pergamum. ³⁹ Symbol of Satan. (Rev. 12:9; 20:2) ⁴⁰ First Asian city with temple to worship Augustus. ⁴¹ God has his throne, so also has Satan. ⁴² Satan is enthroned where false worship and corrupt civil power rule. ⁴³ Antipas may mean *“against all,”* a class of non-compromising Christians. ⁴⁴ Rev.1:5; 3:14 ⁴⁵ (Rev. 2:14-15) Balaam was a gifted orator but used this to pursue a selfish agenda.

bondage.⁴⁶ They represent the false teachers that Jude warned against.⁴⁷ This doctrine was soon applied to every form of idolatry. Missionologist call it syncretism, mixing traditional practices with Christianity. It grows to enormous proportions and is the great religious mix known as Babylon.

Pergamum with all of its glitter was the place for this hazard to emerge. What the Devil could not accomplish from outside the Church by means of persecution, he sought to achieve from within by deception. So the Trojan Horse tactic played itself out in the history of the Church. Jesus promises to do war with the sword of his mouth against those who hold this doctrine. That sword is God's Word; it alone can keep us on the straight and narrow - out of the ditch of legalism on the one hand and worldliness on the other. The sword of the Spirit pierces the thoughts and intents of our fallen Balaamite soul. It is noteworthy that the historical Balaam was met by an angel with a drawn sword.⁴⁸ Balaam, himself, was slain by the 'sword.'⁴⁹

TO HIM WHO OVERCOMES

Jesus promises hidden manna and a white stone to overcomers at Pergamum.⁵⁰ These are an invite to food and lodging. Due to a lack of hotels in John's day, a practice of personal hospitality emerged. On a small white stone the host and guest inscribed their names which ensured help for themselves whenever they traveled again in the same direction. Jesus thus assures them that there is no need to compromise. On their journey, He will supply their every need.

The white stone also speaks of victory over sin.⁵¹ This, too, is in keeping with the culture and temptations faced at Pergamum. A white stone was given to the winner of the Olympic races. "Run in such a way that you may win (and not be disqualified)."⁵² Others believe the white stone is an allusion to the Urim and Thummim.⁵³ The High Priest wore these behind his breastplate and by them determined God's will in difficult questions. Christ our Highpriest causes us to hear His voice in a world of moral conflicts and questions.



CHURCH OF THYATIRA

"Jezebel...the deep things of Satan"⁵⁴

Thyatira was a center of trade known for its dyes, especially royal purple, and excellent bronze-work.⁵⁵ Associated with its commerce was a network of labor unions. Each guild had its own patron deity and festivities that included

⁴⁶ Lawlessness ignores safeguards to liberty. ⁴⁷ "Who have eyes full of adultery and hearts exercised in covetousness... making merchandise out of you, rushing into Balaam's error for the sake of money. (Jude 3-11) ⁴⁸ Num. 22:23 Josh. 13:22 ⁴⁹ Num. 31:8 ⁵⁰ Rev. 2:17 ⁵¹ Black stone meant condemnation.

⁵² 1 Cor. 9:24 ⁵³ Ex. 28:30 ⁵⁴ Rev. 2:20, 24 ⁵⁵ Thyatira home of Lydia. (Acts 16:14ff).

sexual revelries. Christ shows Himself to the church with eyes as a blazing fire to discern and burn away all that is false. His feet like burnished bronze would have caught the attention of the bronze-workers there.

Christ begins by commending the church at Thyatira.⁵⁶ He knows their love and faithfulness. They have grown in good works and have endured tribulation. But there is a perilous danger, creating a crisis of truth and an issue of loyalty in the church. Christ says, “*you suffer that woman Jezebel, which calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce my servants.*”⁵⁷

Archaeology sheds light on this woman at Thyatira. Outside the city walls stood a temple dedicated to a woman who had the gift of prophecy. This temple was said to be Jewish, but also Chaldean and Persian. The inference is that a religion was introduced, which was a mixture of Judaism and paganism.⁵⁸ In order to expose its true character, the heresy is labeled ‘Jezebel’ – the name of the wicked Canaanite wife of Israel’s king Ahab.

JEZEBEL

Historically, Jezebel was the chief patron of every form of idolatry in Israel. In Jewish thought, she embodied all that was false among the nations, which incorporated itself on the vine and began to draw from the life of the vine. Jezebel did this from inside the nation through marriage to King Ahab.⁵⁹ By calling her Jezebel, Jesus exposes her as promoting cultic worship that has incorporated itself into the life of the Church. “*Fornication*” reveals that she honors other gods while her *children* are those who follow her ways.⁶⁰

Jezebel’s teachings involve “*the deep things of Satan.*” In John’s day this is the Gnostic Heresy, which plagued the churches and which John combated in two of his letters.⁶¹ Gnostic teachings varied but shared a basic belief that “matter” was evil and spirit was good. They taught that God could not have become flesh. Gnostic practices went in one of two directions. They either became consumed in mortifying the body through ascetic practices (“touch not, taste not”) or they gave into natural desires, claiming physical activities did not affect the state of their spirit. At Thyatira, it was the latter.⁶²

Christ pledges to judge Jezebel.⁶³ His judgment is due to her refusal to repent in spite of the time to do so. “*Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them*

⁵⁶ Jesus commends much before he confronts. ⁵⁷ “Seduce” used often by John implies serious error. (Rev. 2:20; 12:9; 13:14; 15:20; 20:3,8,10). ⁵⁸ Those who prophesied were often elevated to leadership (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11; Luke 2:36; Acts 21:9; 1 Cor. 11:5). ⁵⁹ Some manuscript, “thy wife” instead of “that woman.” ⁶⁰ Rev. 2:20-23 ⁶¹ 1 John 1:1-2; 4:1-6; 5:6-8; 2 John 7-11 ⁶² Rev. 3:20 ⁶³ Some leaders were too involved with her to recognize or handle her heresy. Others were intimidated because of her strong position there as a prophetess.

commit adultery with her into great tribulation."⁶⁴ Notice that Jezebel's instrument of wrongdoing is made the instrument of her punishment. The bed of sin becomes a bed of suffering. That compares well with the Jezebel of history.⁶⁵ Jesus warns, "*I will kill her children*" which speaks of the same fate that befell Ahab's sons through his union with Jezebel.⁶⁶

"Gentle Jesus, meek and mild," but the Gospels also reveal His holy anger. This is evident in the reiterated "woes" by which He denounced the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. It is seen in His driving the money changers out of the temple. When there is real love there will be a corresponding anger against all that injures the beloved. What is more tender and at the same time fiercer than a mother's love? If Jesus could not hate, He could not love; and because He does so love, therefore is "*the wrath of the Lamb*" so real and terrible a thing.

Jesus lays on the church no other burden.⁶⁷ There are more issues. The same would be true for each of the seven churches, but Jesus guides them step-by-step, telling them only what they can bear at any given time.⁶⁸



CHURCH OF SARDIS

*"You have a reputation... but you are dead."*⁶⁹

Sardis was a strategic city where Roman military roads crossed. The city was situated in a plain watered by the Pactolus River. Its topography was notable for the acropolis. It rose about eight hundred feet above the north section of the city. The temple to Artemis would have equaled in size the famous one in Ephesus, but it was never finished. The city's past splendor and present decay stood side by side, like the church's reputation and present state.

A DEAD CHURCH

To Sardis, Jesus declares, "*you have a name that you live, and are dead.*"⁷⁰ How offensive to the risen Lord is a dead church. The numbness of spiritual death is as bad as the presence of what is morally corrupt. Sardis was reputed to be a living church. Services maintained, numbers steady, and finances gave an outward appearance of an alive church. But these things, plus sound creed (no Nicolaitans, no Balaam, no Jezebel) are no indication of life.⁷¹ Dead religion can provide these. A little storefront church with "*Mission*" written across it may be more alive than a Mega church with its magnificent facilities. It is as "*before God*" everything is to be estimated.⁷²

⁶⁴ Rev. 2:22 ⁶⁵ 1 Kings 21:19; 2 Kings 9:26 ⁶⁶ Rev. 2:23 cp. w. 2 Kings 10:7 ⁶⁷ Burden is baros - carrying a weight. (Acts 15:20ff). ⁶⁸ John 16:12 ⁶⁹ Rev. 3:1,4 ⁷⁰ Rev. 3:1 ⁷¹ Right orthodoxy cannot produce life. ⁷² These churches show that things are not how they appear: white washed tombs, a form of godliness void of power. God looks on heart. (Matt.23:27; 2 Tim.3:5; 1 Sam. 16:7).

Since Sardis lacked spiritual life, her works were also deficient. *"I have not found thy works complete before my God."* A physician tells a man bitten by a cobra, "you are a dead man" But adds, "Unless you take this anti-venom." So not all is yet dead; some things remain, but these too are ready to die. So the Great Physician urges them to take remedial steps. *"Watch, strengthen, remember, hold fast"* are the components of the antidote prescribed.

Watch and strengthen go together. It is like the traveler who crossed the Alps in a snowstorm. He was ready to lie down until he encountered the body of one who had just fallen in the snow. The watchful traveler was alarmed and struck his foot against the slumbering one. By doing so, he too was roused by the contact. While he attempted to awaken the other, he was himself made wakeful; so by ministering to others, we too, are strengthened.

Sardis was not dead due to any opposition. We do not read of persecutions. At Sardis, the more subtle powers of decay were at work. Churches that know little conflict are in grave danger of falling into listlessness. Pressures and difficulties push the soul to exercise spiritual muscles.⁷³ Sardis represents churches that have known years of peace and prosperity. We are disposed to over-estimate such churches. They had nothing of the spirit of the *"two witnesses who tormented them that dwelt in the earth"* by their preaching.⁷⁴ It might have been said of them, as was cynically said of certain ministers. "You would find them well-bred, and you can be certain they would say nothing to you about your soul."

A REMNANT

God deals with us, not according to the condition of our church, but according to that of our own soul. So in this dead church some members are still alive. The Lord has His remnant, which were referred to as *"the rest in Thyatira."* At Sardis they are *"a few names who have not defiled their garments."* A few in contrast to the many are unsoiled. This image of sin as mingling with the dirt of the world is often found in Scripture.⁷⁵ James says, pure and undefiled religion is to "keep oneself unspotted from the world."⁷⁶

"A few names" as Christ "knows his own sheep by name." Their names, *"I will in no wise blot out of the book of life."*⁷⁷ But the names of the dead citizens must be blotted out and those who are dying are in peril of being blotted out.⁷⁸ *"He who overcomes, the same shall be clothed in white raiment."*⁷⁹ White garments represent imputed righteousness as well as the righteous deeds of

⁷³ Jer. 48:11 ⁷⁴ Rev. 11:10 ⁷⁵ Rev. 14:4; 1 Cor 8:7; 2 Cor 7:1; 11:2; Jude 23 ⁷⁶ James 1:27 ⁷⁷ (Ex. 32:32; Rev. 13:8; 21:27) Book of life first occurs in OT and now in Christ's hands. ⁷⁸ Strong double negative: "no, never!" ⁷⁹ Rev. 3:5

the saints.⁸⁰ To the many at Sardis, Christ will come as a thief, unknown and unexpected.⁸¹ Unless they repent, they will be found naked.



CHURCH OF PHILADELPHIA

“See, I have placed before you an open door.”⁸²

Continuing our circuit, Philadelphia is next on the first century Mail Road. Near the city was a great vine-growing district, which, along with textiles, contributed to the city’s prosperity. Jesus reveals Himself to the church as the One who has the ability to open and shut. He tells them that He has opened a door for them, because they have kept His word and not denied His name. Using a common metaphor, a door is opened for fruitful ministry.⁸³

The Philadelphians walked in the truth of Jesus’ headship over God’s house. That Christ has the right to open and admit as well as to close and exclude from His church. When a vast church council sat and delivered Huss’ soul to Satan, Huss confidently commended it to Jesus. Many at Rome or Madrid, walked to the stake, his yellow San Benito all painted over with devils. Those who claimed to represent God had shut them out with extreme curses, but what is all-important is that Christ opened to them a door in Heaven as He did for His first martyr Stephen.

Christ regards His servants as responsible to Him first.⁸⁴ His word and name, however often provoke persecution. Like at Smyrna, the main opposition at Philadelphia came from Jews.⁸⁵ *“They say they are Jews.”*⁸⁶ Jesus promises, *“I will make them to come and worship before thy feet.”*⁸⁷ Those who were disturbing them would be humbled and won over. What event in Philadelphia brought this about we do not know, although we know that the believers rose to prominence there from a minority to a majority. That no doubt would have changed how the Jewish citizens of Philadelphia related to them

PROMISES

Christ not only opens spheres of service and subdues their enemies, but He also promises preservation in their hour of trial. *“I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.”*⁸⁸ Revelation treats this hour in detail.⁸⁹ It is worldwide.⁹⁰ It is future from John’s day: *“coming”*⁹¹ It is called ‘the Great Tribulation.’

⁸⁰ Rev. 3:18; 6:11; 7:9, 13f; 19:7,14 ⁸¹ Analogy of Return (Matt. 24:43; Luke 12:39; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10; Rev. 16:15). ⁸² Rev. 3:8, 10,12 ⁸³ John 10:7-9; Acts 14:27; 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3; Rev. 3:20;4:1 ⁸⁴ Rev. 3:10 ⁸⁵ Ignatius warned them not to listen to “any one propounding Judaism to you.” ⁸⁶ Rev. 3:9 ⁸⁷ Rev. 3:9 ⁸⁸ Rev. 3:10 ⁸⁹ Rev. 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 12:12; 13:8-14 ⁹⁰ Rev. 3:10 ⁹¹ Dan. 12:1; Joel 2:31; Mark 13:14; 2 Thess. 2:1-12; Rev. 14:7

Christ promises to “*keep them from the hour.*” Some argue that the sense is preservation in the midst of tribulation, not removal from it, while others see a pre-tribulation Rapture.⁹³ We examine this question in the next chapter.

Christ adds “*I am coming soon.*” That is the keynote of the book and the church’s motto is hold fast until then so as not to lose your crown.⁹² “*Him who overcomes will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out.*” Philadelphia knew actual earthquakes but Christ promises to set them securely so that no disturbance can ever force them out.

Jesus promises to write three names on the overcomer: “*the name of my God,*” “*the city of my God*” “*and My new name.*” The triple name on their forehead speaks of ownership; it is in stark contrast to the mark of the Beast. Since “*names*” denote character, overcomers are promised Christ-likeness and they are marked for the holy city.⁹⁴ What could be more glorious? ⁹⁵ In ancient Rome names of great warriors were engraved on the pillars of palaces. But good soldiers of Christ shall themselves be memorials of their battles fought on earth with this great difference, those pillars have long since been removed, but the pillars of the Church will remain unspoiled forever.

The Philadelphians endured long after all the surrounding country had succumbed to Muslim control under Turkey. They held out as a Christian populace till 1392 A.D.. Philadelphia typifies revival periods in church history when God begins to work afresh in mighty power. The windows of Heaven open and God pours out showers of blessings and marvellous awakenings that hold to the preciousness of Jesus’ Name and the authority of God’s Word.



CHURCH OF LAODICEA “*You are neither cold nor hot.*”⁹⁶

Laodicea was located on the Lycus River near Colossæ and Hierapolis. The city was known for its large manufacturing and banking operations. Her banking assets were evidenced by the fact that Cicero cashed huge bank drafts there. So wealthy was the city that after the great earthquake in 17 A.D., the people proudly refused imperial help in rebuilding their city. Paul’s letter to Colossæ expresses a concern over Laodicea’s spiritual condition.⁹⁷ For the seducing influence of wealth grew to dangerous dimensions there. Jesus must speak his most cutting words to Laodicea.

⁹² (Rev. 2:22) NT crowns (1 Thess. 2:19; 2 Tim. 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Cor. 9:25; 1 Peter 5:4). A stated requirements for each crown but some claim they are aspects of salvation that await all believers.

⁹³ In John 17:15 Greek meaning ‘keep from’ is not removal. Jesus uses the same word in prayer: “I pray not that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil.” ⁹⁴ 2 Peter 1:4 ⁹⁵Rev. 3:12; 7:3; 14:1; 17:5; 22:4 ⁹⁶ Rev. 3:15,17-18 ⁹⁷ Paul prays for them (Col. 2:1).

LUKEWARM - NO NEEDS

Christ presents Himself as the Amen, emphasizing His credibility.⁹⁸ His witness is that they are neither hot nor cold but lukewarm. This analogy was well understood by the church at Laodicea, because for all its wealth, the city had poor water. Their supply came from Hot Springs in the south along a six-mile aqueduct that cooled it to lukewarm along the way. The city had such insipid water that Jesus uses a common sight of Laodicean citizens spitting out drinking water that was lukewarm. That is how they made Jesus feel⁹⁹

Three spiritual conditions are brought into view: cold, lukewarm, and hot. The word 'hot' is from a verb *zeo*, to boil, which speaks of intense zeal. Lukewarm denotes a lack of earnestness. Cold implies a state of hostility. Jesus wants them hot; but, if not hot then cold, because there is hope for a person in a cold condition. The hostility of a Saul of Tarsus may be diverted into the zeal of an apostle, but what do you do with those who are indifferent? Just as there was more hope of a repentant publican than a self-righteous Pharisee.¹⁰⁰

Those lukewarm are in great peril though they do not realize it. *"And know not that you are wretched."* Like those in the days of Noah who were eating and drinking *"and knew not"* until the Flood overtook them. Blinded by the deceitfulness of their riches, the Laodicians boasted that they had need of nothing. *"I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing."*¹⁰¹ Their life was thought to consist of the abundance of what they possessed.

CONFRONTATION AND COUNSEL

Christ confronts their real state in striking terms: *"blind, poor and naked."* His counsel corresponds to their condition: *"buy of me gold tried in the fire, that you may rich indeed."* But how do they buy? *"He who has no money may come and buy; yes, come, buy without money."*¹⁰² Willingness constitutes heaven's currency. Simply come in faith to receive what is offered. Christ offers white raiment, that is real righteousness, and eye salve to anoint their eyes that they may discern their true condition.¹⁰³

Christ assures the Laodicians of His love. *"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten."*¹⁰⁴ Be zealous and repent is the response that Christ seeks. Zeal is the state in which our Lord ever desires to find us, our hearts all aglow.

⁹⁸ "Amen" also translated 'verily.' ⁹⁹ OT figure of speech. "That the land not spew you out also." (Lev. 18:28;20:22). ¹⁰⁰ Laodiceans learnt compromise in order to do business in that compromising culture. ¹⁰¹ Sardis had a reputation. Philadelphia and Smyrna no boasts at all. ¹⁰² Isa. 55:1 ¹⁰³ At Laodicea, a center for medicines, tablets were crushed to powder and smeared on the eyes as an ointment. ¹⁰⁴ All of God's children are chastised as proof of their sonship. (Heb. 12:6-8)

AT THE DOOR

At the start we saw the Lord standing in the midst of the churches, but now He stands outside at the last one, knocking.¹⁰⁵ Maybe you've seen the painting in which that long-suffering appeal is wonderfully portrayed. He who is the Light of the world stands clothed with the priestly breastplate and bears in His hand the lamp of truth. There, amidst the dew of night on the narrow porch, He bids for entrance at the closed door. In that painting, the door has no outside handle and it is hinged to open only from within. Jesus does not force to enter, but in many ways He knocks.

Often when He knocks, men divert their thoughts to other things, plunging into pleasure or business rather than attending to Him. So the Lord not only knocks, but He also entreats with His voice. *"If any man hear my voice and open."*¹⁰⁶ Jesus will enter to dine with them in sweet fellowship. Friend with friend,

holding free and open conversation.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Which of the seven churches would be your first choice to belong to and why?
2. Which of the seven would be your choice?
3. Which church do you feel is most like the church you attend and why?
4. Which rebuke from Jesus to the churches cuts you the most and why?
5. What do you want to hear Jesus say to you?
6. What would you least like to hear Him say?
7. What changes do you want to make as a result of studying the churches?

'Eating' refers to the main meal of the day, which in Oriental fashion was a special occasion for having a confidential exchange with the closest of associates.¹⁰⁷

This is a most touching picture! Who can remain indifferent under such tender

pleading and so gracious a promise?

MEET YOU AT THE THRONE

The last promise to overcomers is most apt in view of what follows. *"To him who overcomes will I grant to sit with Me in My throne."* This final promise emphasizes the overcomer's abiding victory, enthroned with Christ. This brings us to John's vision of heaven where we see the Lamb and the twenty-four elders, seated on thrones. The Father fully shares His throne with His

¹⁰⁵ (Rev. 3:20) Christ at the door and knocking (Matt. 24:33 James 5:9) Luke 12:35-36 "That when he comes and knocks." ¹⁰⁶ Image of knocking for the Beloved and His Beloved. (Song 5:2). ¹⁰⁷ Christ and the Father come by the Holy Spirit to share with us the deep things of God. (John 14:23).

victorious Son, and the Son in turn shares His throne with His Company of overcoming brethren.

What better transition could one ask for? Can it be sheer coincidence that the next chapter opens with a vision of that throne? There is no discontinuity or break in the movement. The Book of Revelation builds beautifully with transitions that are full of meaning.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸Laodicea follows Philadelphia, one of the best churches. This contradicts the claim of a descending scale of ever-increasing apostasy in the state of the churches from Ephesus to Laodicea up to Christ's Return. (There is always hope for revival as history demonstrates). A similar theory suggests that the seven churches contain a veiled prophecy of the seven periods of church history. (See Index One, Epoch Question at the end of the book). Our position, however, is that these churches were historical churches in the past and they are also typical of churches that are present throughout the church age.

PART THREE

HEAVEN

CHAPTER SIX: RAPTURE QUESTIONS
(Rev. 4:1ff)

CHAPTER SEVEN: ENVISION HEAVEN
(Rev. 4:1-5:14)

In John's vision of Heaven, the twenty-four Elders and an innumerable Host of Angels surround the Father and the enthroned Lamb. A Rainbow, seven Burning Lamps and four Living Creatures also appear before the Throne.



The picture is adopted from works by Albrecht, Durer, 1496, and an unknown artist, who illustrated Caspar Luiken's Writings in 1712, and a work by Nicolas Fontaine 1625 - 1709.

CHAPTER SIX

RAPTURE QUESTIONS

SEVEN QUESTIONS RELATED TO REVELATION 4:1

“Truth is stranger than fiction,” and this one from Arkansas City is strange. The EAP reported that “a Little Rock woman died after leaping through her moving car’s sun roof during an incident described as a mistaken rapture.” Thirteen people were injured in a twenty-car pile up. Georgia Williams, age 28, was sure the Rapture was occurring when she saw people floating up into the air as she passed a man on the road who she thought was Jesus. “She started screaming, “He’s back! He’s back!” Then she climbed right out of the sunroof window and jumped off the roof of the car.” Her husband, Everett Williams, said, “I was slowing down but she wouldn’t wait till I stopped.”

Officer Paul Madison said, “this is the strangest thing I’ve seen since I’ve been on the force.” Madison questioned the man who looked like Jesus and found that he was dressed in mid-eastern garb on his way to a toga costume party. In route, the tarp covering the bed of his pickup truck, came loose and dolls filled with helium, floated up into the air. Ernie Jenkins, age 32, of Fort Smith, has been told that he looks like Jesus. When the tarp came loose, he pulled over. In frustration he lifted his arms. It was then that the Williams’ car passed him and Georgian was sure that Jesus was raising people up.

This could be the first known causality of a Pre-tribulation Rapture Doctrine. That teaching says the Rapture happens here in Revelation 4:1. It links the seven churches to John’s experience of being caught up, and sees embodied in him all believers, taken out of the world. Before we proceed with John to the throne of God, we need to tackle questions related to the Rapture. For many teach that everything after Revelation 4:1 is still future, only occurring after the true church is raptured.¹ That view determines their interpretation of all that follows. The loosening of the Seals, the sounding of the Trumpets and pouring out of the Bowls, they say, occurs during the last 3 ½ or seven years of human history - what many call Daniel’s Seventh Week.²

In this chapter we examine seven questions related to the Rapture. First, we look at what is meant by the term. Then, we look at three views regarding its timing, since this question of when is crucial. Additional related questions are also examined.

¹ Since the word “church” does not appear after Revelation chapter 4, some say, it was raptured out; yet, the word “saints” appears 13 times after chapter 4. ² See Chapter 16 on Prophetic Timeframes.



WHAT IS THE RAPTURE?

“We will be caught up...meet the Lord in the air.”⁴

The Rapture doctrine is found in First Thessalonians.³ “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”⁴

The term rapture refers to a teaching that the church will be taken out of this world before or during a period called the Great Tribulation. In the Rapture, Jesus comes and takes His church back to heaven. This is different than His public coming, seen by all, to end this present evil age. According to the Pre-tribulation Rapture view, Jesus comes down from heaven into the upper atmosphere. He shouts and the bodies of the dead saints are raised. Believers who are alive are also caught up to meet the Lord in the air. This great cloud of witnesses does not come down to the earth at that time. Instead, they go back to heaven with Jesus to celebrate the Wedding Feast of the Lamb.



WHEN DOES THE RAPTURE OCCUR?

“For then shall be great tribulation”⁵

Many believe that the Rapture occurs before or halfway through a period called the Great Tribulation. Tim LaHaye’s “Left Behind” series and certain motion pictures like “A Thief in the Night” have dramatized this period and its rapture. One movie depicts cars going down the highway, which suddenly go off the road because Christians were driving them. Christ came in the Rapture and His saints were taken away. What Christians believe regarding its timing is outlined in three views:

- **Pre-Tribulation: rapture before the Great Tribulation.**
- **Mid-Tribulation: rapture during the Great Tribulation.**
- **Post-Tribulation: rapture after the Great Tribulation.**

The Pre-Tribulation and Mid-Tribulation Rapture are similar. Both teach that all real believers are removed from the world before it ends. (Either before or in the middle of the Great Tribulation). Both of these positions also assert

³ Word “rapture” does not appear in Bible. In 1Thessalonians 4:17 the Greek word harpaz is translated “caught up.” ⁴ 1 Thess. 4: 16-17 ⁵ Passage reads: “For then there will be great distress (NIV)...If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened... For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man... They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.” (Matt. 24:21-31)

that there are two comings of the Lord: one in a secret rapture and another to end this evil age. These two comings are separated by seven or 3½ years - earth time. The Post-Tribulation Rapture, however, is very different. Here the saints remain until the world ends, and their meeting Christ in the clouds is at His one return. The saints go through the Great Tribulation and there is no specific timeframe of seven or 3½ years for the Great Tribulation.

Devout men hold different views on the timing of the rapture. And what we believe about it has no bearing on our salvation. Also, our rapture views should not hinder our fellowship with other Christians, since our fellowship is based on our faith in Jesus. But still and all, what we believe is important. Many Christians have been taught to expect the rapture before the Great Tribulation, but if the Bible doesn't promise it, they'll be disappointed.



WHY TEACH A RAPTURE BEFORE THE TRIBULATION?

“For God did not appoint us to wrath.”⁶

Reasons why many teach a rapture before or in the middle of Tribulation are listed along with a brief Post-Tribulation response to each of these reasons.

1) God has not appointed us to wrath.

God's wrath is spoken of ten times in Revelation. It is released by angels who pour out Bowls on a Christ-rejecting world. Pre and Mid-Tribulationists contend that God's wrath is not for His children. “For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁷

Post-Tribulationists counter, claiming that tribulation is not the same as God's wrath. The Great Tribulation simply refers to extensive troubles, as they are called and to which we are appointed. “For you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation.”⁸ Paul also said, “we must go through much tribulations to enter the kingdom of God.”⁹ Jesus said, “In the world you will have tribulation.”¹⁰

2) God did other raptures in Scripture.

Pre-Tribulation authors present Scriptural examples of other raptures. Enoch, Elijah, the Two Witnesses, Lot and his family are cited as the Biblical pattern. Post-Tribulationists accept that these raptures happened, and that the saints are caught up to meet the Lord in the clouds. But this event does not happen until the end of the world.¹¹ The pattern in Scripture is that God takes us through the fire and water rather than removing us from it.

⁶ 1 Thess. 5:9 ⁷ 1 Thess. 5:9-10 ⁸ 1 Thess. 3:3-4 ⁹ Acts 14:22 ¹⁰ John 16:33 ¹¹ God's wrath is contrasted to our salvation.

3) God removes the church to make way for the Antichrist.

“And now you know what is restraining... only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with...the brightness of His coming.”¹² Pre-Tribulationists claim that the Holy Spirit in the church restrains Antichrist. So the church must be taken out of the way, via the rapture, for him to be revealed. Later, we look at this passage on Antichrist for there are other interpretations of what restrains him.¹³

4) Jesus promised a Pre-Tribulation Rapture.

“Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”¹⁴ Some teach a Pre-tribulation rapture from this verse, but most translations indicate a different sense. “Stay awake, praying at all times for the strength to survive all that is going to happen.”¹⁵ The context is not removal but strength to go through. Like the message to the churches this is not a summons to avoid these things but to overcome them. Post-Tribulationists claim that God promises to take us through rather than deliver us out of tribulation.

5) God uses different words to refer to the two comings of Christ.

Two returns of Christ, a private and a public one, are taught by different New Testament Greek words. ‘Parousia’ is His secret coming and ‘apokalupsis’ refers to His public coming. But the Pre-Tribulation teaching separates an event that the Bible clearly connects as these Greek words are used interchangeably. The word ‘parousia’ is used in the catching up passage of 1 Thessalonians 4:17 as well as in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 when the man of sin is destroyed “with the brightness of His coming (parousia).” The revelation (Greek ‘apokalupsis’) of Christ happens at His coming (parousia).¹⁶ Footnoted are ten Greek words that refer to Christ’s Return.¹⁷

6) God speaks of Rapture as one will be taken and one will be left.

In several New Testament passages, we read that one will be taken while another is left. The Pre-Tribulation rapture claims that Christians are taken

¹² 2 Thess. 2:5-8 ¹³ Reformers taught that the restraining force was the Roman Empire. As Rome succeeded Greece, so Antichrist would seize power in place of the Caesars. Wycliff, Huss, Luther, Calvin, Knox, and Tyndale held this position. ¹⁴ Luke 21:36 ¹⁵ Luke 21:36 JB ¹⁶ 2 Thess. 1:7-10 ¹⁷ NT Greek words that refer to Christ’s Return. No Greek scholar can make them words teach two comings: **1. Parousia**—“The coming of the Lord draweth nigh” (James 5:8). **2. Erchomai** - “Occupy till I come” (Luke 19:13). **3. Apokalupto** - “When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed” (2 Thess. 1:7). **4. Epiphaneia** - “The appearing of our Lord” (1 Tim. 6:14). **5. Phaneroo** - “When the chief Shepherd shall appear” (1 Pet. 5:4). **6. Prosopon** - “From the presence of the Lord” (2 Thess. 1:9). **7. Analuo** - “He will return from the wedding” (Luke 12:36). **8. Hupostrepho**—“To receive... a kingdom, and to return” (Luke 19:12). **9. Ephistimi**—“That day come upon you unawares” (Luke 21:34). **10.**

and unbelievers are left. But the Post-Tribulationists maintain that the wicked are taken out in the judgment when Christ returns.



WHO IS TAKEN OUT AND WHO IS LEFT?
“One will be taken and the other left.”¹⁸

This decisive question requires an entire section. Jesus said, “I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left.” “Where, Lord?” They asked. He replied, “Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather.”¹⁹

The context of Matthew’s parallel account answers the question who is taken. “For as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered in the ark, and they knew not until the flood came and took them all away. So shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. Then shall two be in the field and one shall be taken the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill, the one shall be taken the other left.”²⁰ Noah entered the ark, because he knew the flood was coming. The wicked did not know “until the flood came and took them all away.” Who did the flood take away? It did not take Noah away but “took them all away,” that is the wicked of Noah’s day! Noah rose upon the flood waters while these same waters cleansed the earth of its wicked people. Noah remained after the Deluge of judgment and inherited the New World.

In Matthew, Jesus explains two parables to spell out that the wicked are taken. In the Wheat and Tares Parable, the Master “will say to the Reapers first gather the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them. . . The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of His kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. . . And then the righteous shall shine as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father.”²¹ In the Net in the Sea Parable, Jesus says, “Once again the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the sea and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fisherman pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous.”²²

Heko—“Hold fast till I come” (Rev. 2:25). These words have different shades of meaning and yet overlap. They indicate the *act* of coming and arrival. *Analuio* is a *departure* in order to return, while *hupostrepho* has the idea of returning from a journey. *Apokalupto* stresses appearing, with the idea of revelation. *Epiphaneia* emphasizes the glory that will attend the Savior when He comes. *Phaneroo* involves not only appearing but the thought that the person appearing will be seen in his true character. *Ephistemi*, stresses the thought of its nearness and suddenness. ¹⁸ Luke 17:34 ¹⁹ Luke 17:34-37 ²⁰ Matt. 24:31ff ²¹ Matt. 13:24 - 44 ²² Matt. 13: 47-49

Jesus prayed with this understanding. “I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.”²³ Jesus’ prayer also agrees with who the Old Testament taught would be taken out and who would remain.

OLD AND NEW AGREE

“That He might take the earth by the edges, and shake the wicked out of it?”²⁴ The Psalmist said, “the evil doers shall be destroyed... For yet a little while, and the wicked shall be not: yea, you will diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.”²⁵ Again, “You love evil rather than good... Surely He will snatch you up and tear you from your tent.”²⁶ And again “Early I will destroy all the wicked of the land, that I may cut off all the evildoers from the city of the LORD.”²⁷ “May sinners vanish from the earth and the wicked be no more.”²⁸ “All the wicked of the earth you discard like dross.”²⁹ “They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abides for ever.”³⁰

Proverb says, “For the upright will live in the land, and the blameless will remain in it; but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the unfaithful will be torn from it.”³¹ “The righteous will never be uprooted, but the wicked will not remain in the land.”³² Isaiah wrote, “Wail for the day of the Lord is near; it will come like destruction... destroy the sinners within it.”³³ Ezekiel says, “Slay all who do not have the mark of God... but come not near any who have the mark of God.”³⁴ Malachi ends the Old Testament, saying, “Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble... Not a root or a branch will be left to them. But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in His wings... Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things.”³⁵



WHAT SHOULD YOU EXPECT?

“The simple believes every word.”³⁶

Scriptures tell us who is taken and when they are taken. So why expect to escape the Great Tribulation? It is not a question of God’s ability. God is able to rapture His children out of Great Tribulation. The question is what has God promised in His word to do? Our expectations must be based on Scripture.³⁷

²³ John 17:15 ²⁴ Job 38:13 ²⁵ Ps. 37:1-11 ²⁶ Ps. 52:3-7 ²⁷ Ps. 101:8 ²⁸ Ps. 104:35 ²⁹ Ps. 119:119 ³⁰ Ps. 125:1 ³¹ Prov. 2:21-22 ³² Prov. 10:30 ³³ Isa. 13: 6-10 ³⁴ Ezek. 9:4-6; Rev. 9:4 ³⁵ Mal. 4:1-3 ³⁶ Prov. 14:15 ³⁷ 2 Tim. 3:16-17

God does not want us uninformed. Jesus said the Holy Spirit “will guide you into all truth and He will tell you things to come.”³⁸

CROSS THEN CROWN

God does not promise to take us out, but to see us through troubles. This is confirmed in the mouths of many witnesses, but there is not a single verse that supports an expectation for our removal. Numerous verses tell us that the wicked are taken out in judgment.³⁹ The Blessed Hope is not the disappearance of the saints, but the glorious appearance of our great Savior.⁴⁰

God does not promise escape from tribulation but grace to remain faithful. Peter instructs us, “not to think it strange (“do not be amazed and bewildered”) concerning the fiery trail (the severe testing) which is to try you (prove you), as though some strange thing happened unto you (“something unusual and alien to you and your position were befalling you”). But rejoice, in as much as you are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that when His glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy.”⁴¹ Genuine faith is so precious to God that He allows it to be refined like gold in the fire.

God promises to be with us in trouble. During World War II, a British Colonel, who was a strong Christian, had his men quote Psalm 91 together every day. After six months in combat they hadn’t lost a man. “A thousand fell at their side and ten thousand at their right hand; but it did not come nigh them... because they made the Lord their refuge.”⁴² I heard Colonel Speed Wilson, a former US Marine testify regarding Vietnamese prisoners of war, “Not a single one survived beyond three years without a relationship with Christ.”



WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

“Beware lest you also...fall.”⁴³

God does not always protect us from harm. Righteous men suffer and die. The point is not that God keeps us safe from harm but that we can keep faith. We saw this in the letters to the churches. These letters set the stage for what follows in Revelation. Jesus was not preparing them to escape! Seven times He says, “to him who overcomes.” Christ calls us to faithful endurance, even unto death, because that is how we overcome the Devil. To Laodicea, Jesus counsels them to buy gold tried in the fire, that they may be rich in faith.⁴⁴

A Pre-Tribulation Rapture is not true to Scripture or human experience. In parts of the world, churches are experiencing severe trials and persecution.

³⁸ John 14:26; 16:13 ³⁹ 2 Cor. 13:1 ⁴⁰ Tit. 2:13; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:1 ⁴¹ 1 Peter 4:12-13 Amp. (see Dan. 11:35). ⁴² Ps. 91:1ff ⁴³ 2 Peter 3:17 ⁴⁴ Rev. 2:10; 3:18

Should we teach them to expect a rapture? What if their troubles intensify? And they deny the Lord because we created a wrong expectation in them? If I expect to be raptured out of the great tribulation and yet find myself in it, my heart may fail. Jesus said, many hearts would fail because of fear “for looking after those things that are coming on the face of the earth.”⁴⁵

Worse than heart failure, a person could be part of the great falling away.⁴⁶ The Bible predicts, “Many shall be offended.”⁴⁷ Corrie ten Boom said, “The Rapture doctrine is a false teaching that Jesus warned us to expect in the last days.”⁴⁸ “The prophets keep telling them, ‘You will not see the sword or suffer famine... I did not send them.’”⁴⁹

BLINDING DOCTRINES

A Pre-Tribulation Rapture is a blinding doctrine. It keeps many from realizing the hour in which they live. Many things that we see happening today should not occur, according to this doctrine, until the church is raptured. For example, US News and World Report highlights that more people in our generation have died in wars, famines, pestilence and earthquakes than all preceding generations combined. Also, in our generation more Christians have died for their faith than the sum total of all past martyrs.

Blinding false doctrines can have devastating consequences. Look at the Bible example of the religious leaders of Jesus’ day. They kept people from accepting Jesus of Nazareth because they taught, “When Messiah comes, He will re-establish the geopolitical nation of Israel.” Even Jesus’ disciples were influenced by this doctrine, because it was wallpapered with Scriptures. Blinding doctrines keep people from recognizing what Jesus is saying and doing. They leave us like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus who did not recognize Christ though He walked with them.⁵⁰

Consider how strong blinding doctrines really are. For example, Jesus told His disciples beforehand on several occasions that He would be crucified.⁵¹ These events were also prophesied in their Scriptures. As they made their way to Jerusalem, Jesus again pointed out what awaited Him there. However, right after this, two of His disciples asked (as if they did not hear Jesus) for the right and left-hand positions in His kingdom. The disciples were still prone to this doctrine after the resurrection. Their last question was “will you at this time restore again the kingdom of Israel?”⁵² Therefore, we should not be surprised if we encounter strong blinding doctrines in our day.

⁴⁵ Luke 21:26 ⁴⁶ 2 Th.2:3 ⁴⁷ Matt.24:10-11 ⁴⁸ Logos Journal Nov.-Dec. 1974, pg. 20 ⁴⁹ Jer. 14:13-15

⁵⁰ Luke 24:13ff ⁵¹ Matt. 16:21; 17:22; 20:17-19; Mark 8:31;9:31; Luke 9:22; 18:31-33 ⁵² Acts 1:6

The theory of Evolution illustrates how deceptive teachings operate. Because so-called experts so often repeat them, they are accepted as fact. Worse still, false doctrines are like false religions, whose adherents embrace beliefs without proper evidence, and pass them on to the next generation.



HOW RAPTURE DISTORTS OUR READING OF REVELATION

“If anyone adds anything to them, God will add...plagues.”⁵³

We are warned in the last great book of the Bible not to add to its prophecy. Pre-Tribulation Rapture is an addition. On top of the evidence already presented, consider seven brief closing reasons from Revelation itself.

1. A Pre-Tribulation Rapture violates the prophecy of Revelation.

“Behold, He comes with clouds; and every eye shall see him.”⁵⁴ There is no secret coming of Christ in Revelation. Everyone will observe His coming. Christ also taught His disciples to expect a dramatic, public advent, seen by all. *“At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky...they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky... And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect.”⁵⁵*

2. A Pre-Tribulation Rapture offers false hope.

The Bible tells believers to await *“that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”⁵⁶* Misplaced hopes disappoint and a misplaced emphasis misleads. Prophecy’s main thrust is the extension and triumph of God’s kingdom on earth - not the exit and escape of the Church. The Church is to occupy until Christ comes. She is to busy herself, taking the Gospel to the nations. A Rapture focus detracts from the Church’s mission.

3. A Pre-Tribulation Rapture twists Scriptures.

The phrase *“as a thief in the night”* is twisted to teach a quiet rapture. The thief passages actually teach the opposite. Peter says, *“the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night and the heavens will pass away with a great noise and the elements will melt with fervent heat.”⁵⁷* The thief analogy depicts the sudden shock and upheaval Jesus’ appearance creates. It also teaches that the time is unknown like a night time, break-in.

4. A Pre-Tribulation Rapture violates the gospel of belief.

If a Pre-tribulation Rapture occurred right now, taking every Christian out of this world, would people remain in unbelief for seven years? That’s not only naive, but it is against the Gospel. God calls us to believe without seeing.⁵⁸

⁵³ Rev. 22:18-20 ⁵⁴ Rev.1:7 ⁵⁵ Matt. 24:30ff ⁵⁶ Tit. 2:13 ⁵⁷ 2 Peter 3:4-12

5. A Pre-Tribulation Rapture is not found in a single Bible verse.

John's out-of-body experience in Revelation 4:1 does not teach a Pre-Tribulation Rapture any more than Paul being caught up to the third heaven. Nor does the experience of the two witnesses. For immediately after they are caught up, "*The same hour there was a great earthquake... And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord.*"⁵⁹

6. A Pre-Tribulation Rapture negates John's teaching on Antichrist.

We are advised to count the number of the Beast, reject his mark and refuse his worship. This agrees with Paul's sequence when instructing the Thessalonians regarding the Man of Sin. Christ's Return follows his manifestation. The saints contend with him. They are not taken out of his way; they get in his way.

7. A Pre-Tribulation rapture has trumpets after the last trumpet.

"Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed - in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, *at the last trumpet*. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed."

Paul says our resurrection happens "at the last trumpet."⁶⁰ But how can this be "the *last* trumpet" if this happens in Revelation 4:1. There are still seven more trumpets from Revelation 8:1 to Revelation 11:15. Paul's "last trumpet" clearly corresponds to the seventh trumpet of Revelation. "The seventh angel sounded his trumpet...the time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Describe what is meant by rapture?
2. What are the views on rapture?
3. How do you understand rapture?
4. What difference does your view make?
5. How does it affect studying Revelation?
6. What wrong beliefs have you encountered?
7. Why is an awareness of blinding doctrines so important?

your name, both small and great— and for destroying those who destroy the earth."⁶¹

I hope you are convinced that John's catching up does not teach a Pre-Tribulation Rapture.

We've tarried long enough to clear the

ground of debris. It is time to proceed in our study of Revelation and go with John to the throne of God.

⁵⁸ Rom. 1:17; Heb. 11:1 ⁵⁹ Rev. 11:13-15 ⁶⁰ 1Cor. 15:51-52 ⁶¹ Rev. 11:15ff

CHAPTER SEVEN

ENVISION HEAVEN

SEVENFOLD DESCRIPTION IN REVELATION CHAPTER 4 AND 5

A kindergarten teacher asked a young boy what he was drawing. Without pausing to look up, he said, “God!” The teacher smiled, saying, “But nobody knows what God looks like.” Without putting down his crayon, the boy announced, “After I’m finished they will.”¹ We may not have seen God or heaven, but John’s vision gives us a feel for the Person and the place. Someone said, “People make the place,” and a wise theologian called heaven “A little known region with a well-known inhabitant.”

It is God who makes heaven a wonderful place. And just as John had a vision of Jesus, walking among the seven churches, before recording His letters to them, John now has a vision of Christ in heaven, before he records what must soon come to pass. John sees a Lamb seated upon God’s throne. In His right hand is placed this vital revelation. It is comforting to know, like the young boy who drew a lamb, who it is who reigns over all of human history.

THRONE ROOM

I’ve titled this chapter Envision Heaven. In it, John sketches the Person and the place for us. For God grants us entrance, pulling open the veil lest these things would remain hidden from our sight. He graciously shows us His throne, and “*the One who sat there*” who has a Scroll is in His right hand. The vision quickly moves to the worthy Lamb that was slain. He receives the Scroll, and is now seated on the throne. What was once sealed is lying open in His hand and is the object of His revelation. Before the chapter ends, everything in heaven, on earth and under the earth is under His sway. This powerful vision is the foundation for all that follows in the Revelation.

The frequent interchange between heaven and earth, found in the remainder of Revelation, is introduced here in John’s vision of heaven. The last book of the Bible takes us directly into the realm of the spirit like none other. Such insights are essential to understanding “what on earth is going on.” We find that whatever transpires on earth has its origin and counterpart in heaven. If there is war on earth, it is because there was war in heaven.² Nothing and no one rides across the pages of history unless the Lamb releases it from His throne.

¹ Em Griffin, *The Mindchangers*, Tyndale House, 1976, pg. 16. ² Rev. 6:3-4; 12:7, 17

In this chapter, we behold Seven Heavenly Descriptions. The great purpose of this vision is to contemplate who God is, the victory Christ won, and the revelation that flows from Him to us.



ONE SEATED ON THE THRONE

“Had the appearance of jasper and carnelian.”³

John sees *“a throne set in heaven.”* Thrones are very important in Revelation; it’s a virtual throne book. The word throne appears 45 times as compared with only 15 times in the rest of the entire New Testament. A throne represents government and authority; it is also the place of judgment. This throne in heaven is not a vacant throne. God occupies it. From His throne, He governs the world. The future is not left to chance, for Revelation teaches that God directs the events of history from His sovereign throne.

John’s Gospel says, “no man has seen God at any time.” And no attempt is made in Scripture to portray Him in an earthly form.⁴ Every group in Revelation has its own symbol but God. There is no symbol great enough to express who He is. Images of splendor are the best words can do.

Five year-old Timmy finished his peanut butter sandwich, took a big swallow of milk and asked, “Mom, what does God look like?” “Well, God is a Spirit and we can’t see Him.” “But if we can’t see Him, how do we know what He’s like?” he persisted. “Well, suppose you were blind. Would you be able to see Daddy?” He shook his head no. “But would you know what Daddy is like?” He thought for a moment, then vigorously nodded his head yes. “You’d know what Daddy is like by the things he says. You’d know that he loves you, because he does lots of things for you. And though you couldn’t see Daddy - you could hear his voice and feel his touch. That’s how we know God loves us, too. We hear God’s voice in the Bible and feel Him near in our hearts. And though we can’t see God, we can be certain of what He is like.”

HOLY LOVE

“I know,” Timmy exclaimed, “we don’t see God outside. We see Him inside.” We see with the eyes of our heart that God is Holy Love. In John’s vision, His presence is like a diamond, which most resembles the color of light.⁵ God’s holiness is “as clear as crystal,” untouched, unmarred, undefiled - perfect. The other rare stone is carnelian, which is bright red. It speaks of God’s love.⁶

³ Rev. 4:3 ⁴ John 1:18 ⁵ Purity and brilliance are features that point to the modern diamond. Precious stones in the Bible are not always perfectly identified. (Rev. 21:11). ⁶ Diamond and carnelian (sardis) were on the Highpriest’s breastplate. (Ex. 28:17-20). Rueben, the firstborn, and Benjamin, the last born, were engraved on the jasper and the sardis stone. Their names mean “Behold a Son” and “the

This whole vision of precious stones beyond price and light shining through them speaks of the unique holy, love of God. The emerald rainbow over arching the throne is a symbol of His mercy, reminding us that God is faithful to His covenant in the midst of holy judgments. The rainbow is emerald green in color. Green, like the grass and vegetation, speaks of life, reviving and refreshing.⁷ Of all colors, green is the one that the eye never tires of viewing as we never tire of contemplating God's pure love.

It is not necessary to dissect all the symbolic elements of this grand vision. The vision creates an overall impression of transcendent glory. God's throne is as glorious as the heavens themselves. The prophet says, "Heaven is God's lofty throne - holy and glorious."⁸ Like the little girl who took an evening walk with her father, and who wonderingly, looked up at the stars and exclaimed; "Oh, Daddy, if the wrong side of heaven is so beautiful, what must the right side be like!"⁹ As a boy, I thought of Heaven, as a city with beautiful streets, inhabited by angels. Yet, when my dad died, I stopped thinking of Heaven as merely a celestial city with streets of gold, but as a place full of people that I personally know and love. This brings us to its next description.



TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS AROUND GOD'S THRONE

*"They... had crowns of gold on their heads."*¹⁰

Thoughts of heaven grow as one nears death. John Bradford, less than five months before his martyrdom, wrote to a friend of the glories of heaven he anticipated. "I am assured that though I want here, I have riches there; though I hunger here, I shall have fullness there; though I faint here, I shall be refreshed there; and though I be accounted here as a dead man, I shall there live in perpetual glory."

Twenty-four elders on thrones answer to Jesus' last promise to the churches. *"To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne."*¹¹ Jesus does not make his faithful among the churches wait long. Like the thief on the cross, "Today you will be with me in paradise."¹² Christ, the Captain of our salvation, came to bring many sons to glory. The twenty-four elders, like Jesus, once walked the earth and were tested. They overcame and now sit with Christ. Sitting denotes victory, authority and restful waiting.

This triumphant, general assembly in heaven is immersed in the worship of God and the government of Christ. Paul taught that believers are raised up

Son of my right hand." They point to God's Beloved Son. Stones appear in the New Jerusalem. (Rev. 21:19-20) ⁷ Emerald was for Judah who speaks of "Praise" surrounding the throne. ⁸ Isa.63:15; 66:1; Ps. 103:19 ⁹ C. Allen in Home Fires. ¹⁰ Rev. 4:4 ¹¹ Rev. 3:21-22 ¹² Luke 23:42-43

and enthroned with Christ in Heaven.¹³ If that is so now while our bodies yet walk the earth, how much more when we are absent from the body? Then we will be present with the Lord, seated on thrones in fulfillment of His promise. Christ *“has made us kings and priests unto God and his Father.”*¹⁴ Here we see that royal priesthood in Heaven, worshiping and reigning.¹⁵

PRIEST AND KINGS - OLD AND NEW

Twelve represents God’s people.¹⁶ The twenty-four elders is a double twelve. These two sets of twelve stand for both the New and Old Testament saints.¹⁷ The Old had the twelve tribes of Israel and the New has the twelve apostles. Together they represent the redeemed community.¹⁸ They sing *“the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.”*¹⁹ Also, the 144,000, not an exact literal number, is twelve multiplied by twelve, raised to a thousand. It signifies God’s old and new redeemed remnant from Israel.²⁰

As the precious stones high lighted two aspects of God’s nature (holy love), so the throne vision highlights two aspects of the elders. There is the aspect of purity represented by the priestly robes of purest white, since they have overcome the world, the flesh and the devil. And that qualifies them to wear the golden crowns, which is their righteous reward. The joint theme of the saints’ righteousness and heavenly reign is often emphasized in Revelation.

What a dominion the saints now enjoy. Before Christ’s death and resurrection, however, no man was able to enter heaven.²¹ In Revelation chapter twelve, John envisions the Manchild ascending to God’s throne, bringing into heaven *“the salvation, and the power and the Kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ.”*²² Satan and his angels were cast out of heaven and lost their place before God’s throne.²³ John now sees the saints before God’s throne with no Devil there to accuse them.²⁴



SEVEN SPIRITS AND FOUR LIVING CREATURES

*“Seven lamps were blazing.”*²⁵

Next we are shown seven lamps, which *“are the seven spirits of God.”*²⁶ In the greetings of chapter one, the book *“from the seven spirits before His*

¹³ Eph. 2:6 ¹⁴ Rev. 1:6 ¹⁵ 1 Peter 2:5-10 ¹⁶ Twelve represents God’s people and what they possess; twelve gates to the Holy City, its twelve foundation stones, twelve manners of fruit (Rev. 21:12-14; 22:2). ¹⁷ Term ‘church’ is too narrow, since OT saints are also part of the heavenly assembly. ¹⁸ King David appointed 24 elders to represent the entire Levitical priesthood (1 Chron. 24:1ff; Luke 22:30; Luke 1:5). ¹⁹ Rev. 15:3 ²⁰ Whenever a number is multiplied by a thousand, it emphasises the totality of that which it symbolically represents. (Rev. 7:4ff) ²¹ (Eph. 4:8; Jn. 3:13). ²² Rev. 12:5-12 ²³ *“The Cleansing of the Heavens”* provides a chronology of Satan and the timing of his removal from heaven. ²⁴ Rom. 8:33-34 ²⁵ Rev. 4:5-7 ²⁶ Flashes also from the throne (Rev. 4:5;8:5; 11:19;16:8).

*throne.*²⁷ Blazing lamps are an appropriate representation of the Holy Spirit for He provides energy, warmth and light. Positioned before God's throne, these Spirits are readily dispensed as the Father and Christ see fit.²⁸ Seven stems of the Spirit are also outlined by Isaiah. "The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him - the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD."²⁹

John saw "*what looked like sea of glass,*" which was before the throne. Though seas normally move, this one is in a fixed state, and though usually dark and murky, this one is crystal clear. It would look like a sheet of ice, and would act like a mirror to reflect the throne's brilliant light and colors, adding to the throne's magnificence. It also reminds us of the Sea of Brass in Solomon's temple, which indicated the need for purity for all who enter.³⁰ This stable heavenly sea shows, however, that there is no need for heaven's priest to ever wash again. Having entered by a new and living way, they are forever holy, consecrated once and for all by Christ's one sacrifice.³¹ And so there is nothing uncertain about their standing before God's throne.

LIVING CREATURES

*"The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, and the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings, was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings."*³²

Around the throne are four strange creatures, but we've seen their kind before in Scripture.³³ And remember John's visions do not constitute a literal, portrait, as a physical body would appear in a photograph. They are symbolic. (Like the seven lamps for the Holy Spirit and the stars for angels, they signify unseen realities). Their many eyes show they are ever wakeful and watchful, looking every way, seeing everything. Their several wings speak of their ability to move in any direction. They stand for, taken as a whole in respect to their design, the all pervading power, providence and government of God, who uses everything in creation as His instruments.³⁴

²⁷ (Rev. 1:4) The Spirit is a person just as the Father and Son. ²⁸ 1 Cor. 12:4-11 ²⁹ Isa. 11:2 ³⁰ 1 Kings 7:23ff ³¹ Heb. 10:14-22 ³² Four beasts translated living "creatures" or "ones." Word for "beast" is very different to the Dragon's beast (Rev. 4:6-8). ³³ Here the Greek "zoon" gives us zoo. Satan's beasts are "therion" or wild, vicious beasts. ³⁴ Similar ones in Ezekiel and Isaiah. ³⁴ Some say they represent divine attributes, others angelic, human or even animal. God has a variety of types of creatures also among angels. Since these four are chief of their species, they have characteristics that reveal what Christ is like: an ox depicts His service portrayed in Mark's Gospel; a lion equals kingly power as in Matthew: a man translates to Son of Man as in Luke, and the eagle to soaring like John's Christ.

CREATED ORDER

Four is the number of creation, and we have the created order represented.³⁵ Although distorted in animism, they testify to the invisible side of creation. All things fulfil their proper office, waiting upon God, acting upon His will and showing forth His glory.³⁶ We see these four creatures throughout Revelation. They announce each of the four horsemen to ride in the earth and broadcast various judgments, which end in the transformation of creation. Paul taught, “the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.”³⁷

“What shall we do in heaven?” James Packer asks. “Not lounge around but worship, work, think, and communicate, enjoying activity, beauty, people, and especially God.”³⁸ Alexander Maclaren adds “the caricature of heaven as an eternity of idleness has no basis in Scripture... But remember that if there is to be service in heaven, the exercising ground is here on earth.”³⁹


WORSHIP OF THE ONE ON THE THRONE

*“THEY NEVER STOP SAYING: “HOLY, HOLY, HOLY.”*⁴⁰

The “*Living Ones*” worship God because He is holy - His essential attribute. In Isaiah’s visions, they also cry, “*Holy, holy, holy*” in groups of three, because there are three co-eternal personalities in the Godhead, whose persons are the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.⁴¹ What pure words of worship they utter, which never grow old nor do they grow tired of saying them. Their hearts are ever aglow with a sense of God holiness, sovereignty and eternity. “*The Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.*”⁴² With every utterance they and those that hear gain a new depth of insight into God’s attributes and nature. Each time, their hearts are enlarged with new emotions and fresh energy.

WHY WORSHIP?

We can learn much from their worship. They worship God not only because He is Holy but also because He is the Creator. “You did create all things.”⁴³ Franz Joseph Haydn was present at the Vienna Music Hall when his oratorio “The Creation” was performed. Weakened by age, the great composer was

³⁵ “Four angels standing at the four corners of the earth... four winds of the earth” and “four angels... at the great river Euphrates.” (Rev. 7:1; 9:14-15) ³⁶ “{You} created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.” (Rev. 4:11) ³⁷ Rom. 8:21-22 ³⁸ James Packer, *Your Father Loves You* ³⁹ Alexander Maclaren, *Liberating Ministry From The Success Syndrome*. ⁴⁰ Rev. 4:8-11 ⁴¹ Matt. 28:19 ⁴² Rev. 4:8 ⁴³ (Rev. 4:9-11) Chapter 4 does not take us beyond the OT revelation of God as

confined to a wheelchair. As the majestic work moved along, the audience was caught up with tremendous emotion. At the passage, “And there was light,” the chorus and orchestra burst forth in such power that the crowd could no longer restrain its enthusiasm. The vast assembly rose in spontaneous applause. Haydn struggled to stand and motioned for silence. With his hand pointed toward heaven, he said, “No, no, not from me, but from thence comes all.” Having given the glory to the Creator, he fell back into his chair.⁴⁴

Haydn knew that God is the glorious object of worship and only real worship satisfies our total personality. We must not settle for man-made substitutes. William Temple makes this clear in his masterful definition. “For worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by His holiness; the nourishment of mind with His truth; the purifying of imagination by His beauty; the opening of the heart to His love; the surrender of will to His purpose - and all of this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable and therefore the chief remedy for that self-centeredness which is the source of our original sin.”⁴⁵

“*Holy, holy, holy*” is the first of five worshipful utterances before the throne. The first two are addressed to the Father, the next two to the Son, and the last to both. There is a gradual enlargement of the worshipers as “*every living creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth*” sing their song to “*Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb*.”⁴⁶ Heaven gives God glory as Creator and then as Redeemer, starting with the Old Testament confession of God and moving to that of the New Testament. In chapter four, we see God’s power as Creator; in chapter five, His love as Redeemer. Chapter four says, “You believe in God.” Chapter five adds “Believe in Me (Jesus) also.”⁴⁷



SCROLL IN THE RIGHT HAND OF HIM

“Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?”⁴⁸

The description here is that of a heavenly counsel in the very act of being held. With John we observe a disclosure in heaven beyond its ordinary proceedings. This agenda begins with a Scroll in God’s right hand, which depicts His authority over it and His readiness to act on the Scroll. It is written on the inside and outside. But written by whom? We are left to conclude that the writing was that of God, for it’s in His hand. In addition, although the Scroll is full of words, its contents are sealed with seven seals. In Biblical times, scrolls were sealed with wax impressed with a signet ring to guarantee the

Holy Creator. Only the Lamb (chapter 5) brings us to the NT revelation of God as Holy Lover. ⁴⁴ Franz Haydn (1732-1809) as reported in *Daily Bread*, Sept. 20, 1992. ⁴⁵ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Integrity Crisis*, pg. 119. ⁴⁶ Rev. 5:13 also Rev. 4:8,11; 5:9-12; 7:12, 15-17; 11:15-18; 12:10-12; 15:3-4; 16:5-7; 18:2-8; 19:2-6 ⁴⁷ John 14:1 ⁴⁸ Rev. 5:1-5

integrity of the document.⁴⁹ Seals also have the effect like an envelope of hiding its contents until they are broken.⁵⁰ When the first seal is removed that part of the document is revealed and so on through all seven.

The fact that God has a Scroll indicates that His counsel and will are resolved. They are certain, ordered and settled. The psalmist says, “Your word is forever settled in heaven.”⁵¹ But as with the ancient practice, only the owner or who his signet designated could open the document. This tells us that the Scroll’s contents are known to none but to Him who sits on the throne. “Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world.”⁵² No creature is able to either explain or execute it. None of the magicians or soothsayers can interpret the writing let alone bring it to pass.⁵³ “God’s ways are past finding out.”⁵⁴ It is His glory to conceal and later reveal the matter as He pleases.

CONTENTS OF THE SCROLL

What in particular does the Scroll record and contain?⁵⁵ Some allege the Scroll is the title deed for mankind’s dominion over the earth, which was forfeited by Adam’s sin in Genesis. For this interpretation, Jeremiah is cited, because the prophet had a title deed sealed. Only later was it opened after God delivered His people from captivity.⁵⁶ Typologically, what Jeremiah did by right of redemption over a piece of land was needed for his nation.

In fact, redemption is needed for the entire world. Along these lines, the Scroll contains the terms of man’s legal redemption. Man sold himself to sin. How is man’s redemption accomplished? The Bible tells us that by dying on our behalf, Christ won the authority to redeem man from sin and reclaim the earth. Christ took on our humanity in order to take dominion back from Satan. The Bible reveals that Christ is the rightful heir. He has “title to claim the world.” For that reason it is noted that the One on the throne will not open the Scroll, but rather someone who was “*worthy*” must be found among men. This explains why there was a great conflict ere the book could be opened.

WORTHINESS TO OPEN

A great call is made in heaven. “*Who is worthy to open the Scroll?*” No one is found. It might be asked, “Why Adam do you not come forward and claim your property?” Adam says, “I am not worthy, for I forfeited my inheritance.” Well then “is there an angel who can step up and claim title to the earth?” The elect angels reply “we have no claim to the earth except administrative.”

⁴⁹ A Testimony or Will was sealed until the time it was to be made public. ⁵⁰ Isa. 29:11 ⁵¹ Ps. 119:89
⁵² Acts 15:17 ⁵³ Dan. 5:5-28 ⁵⁴ Rom. 11:33 ⁵⁵ Is it the Bible, future judgments, final things, or the record of the church’s struggles? ⁵⁶ Jer. 32:8-11

What of Satan, can he claim the Scroll? Since Eden, the earth has been full of his contentions and allegations. But contrary to his claim, Satan is a thief and a liar. He deceived and defrauded Adam of his inheritance.⁵⁷ God allows Satan the power he exercises for a reason and a season.⁵⁸

The Scroll is firmly in God's hand for He possesses title deeds to the earth. For "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof."⁵⁹ And understood by God are all the terms of creation's redemption. The One seated on the throne will therefore give the Scroll only to One who is truly worthy. Under God's Old Testament law, a man's inheritance was not lost forever if there was a kinsman willing to redeem the lost inheritance.⁶⁰ The kinsman redeemer did four things: he redeemed people from slavery, regained forfeited property, married the widow, and avenged all wrongs. Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of the Kinsman Redeemer as the vision reveals.

A PROPHECIC SCROLL

The Scroll also contains prophecies of woeful judgments. Many point to Ezekiel's scroll, since it contained "words of lament and mourning and woe."⁶¹ Revelation predicts such judgments, but these are not incompatible with the terms of our redemption. Recall the plagues upon Egypt as a pattern. They fell because God had come to redeem His people. Israel could not enter her promised inheritance until she was delivered from slavery. Their deliverance necessitated Egypt's demise (a type of the world), because Pharaoh (a type of Satan), would not let them go to worship God until his kingdom was overthrown.⁶² The NIV Study Bible says, "References to the Egyptian plagues suggest that in Revelation we have the final exodus of God's people from the bondage of a world controlled by hostile powers."⁶³

The Scroll reveals soon judgments and our inheritance in God's Kingdom.⁶⁴ It includes the book of Revelation, which in John's vision is now unsealed before us by Christ. He alone ransomed all and He is the revealer and executor of God's will for all. Jesus shows His servants in the last book of the Bible what must soon happen and what they will inherit. "*He who overcomes will inherit all this.*"⁶⁵ This revelation informs and inspires steadfast faith, because destinies of all are in His hands.

⁵⁷ Luke 4:6 ⁵⁸ Satan knows his time is short before he is forcibly removed from the earth just as from Heaven. Creation will be redeemed from the curse! ⁵⁹ Ps. 24:1 ⁶⁰ Lev. 25:23-25 Ruth 2:20 ⁶¹ Ezek. 2:9-10 cp. w. Rev. 8:13 "woe, woe, woe..." ⁶² (2 Cor. 4:4 cp. w. Rev. 16:10) Many parallels in Revelation's judgments with the plagues upon Egypt. (Cp. Rev. 8:7 w. Ex. 9:13-25; Rev. 8:8 w. Ex. 7:20-21; Rev. 8:12 w. Ex. 10:21-23; Rev. 9:3 w. Ex. 10:1-20; Rev. 16:2 w. Ex. 9:9-11). ⁶³ 10th Anniversary Edition Copyright 1995, Zondervan, pg 1934. ⁶⁴ Coming judgment also consists of both. (Rev. 11:18). ⁶⁵ Rev. 21:7

My wife had a dream concerning her destiny. Pat was next in a prayer line. An attractive woman before her received many blessings, and Pat continued to watch her move on. But when Pat looked up, the One who was to pray for her was Jesus Himself. Tears were streaming down his face and He had a scroll in his right hand. Without uttering a word she knew His thoughts. "If only you knew, my daughter, the things I have for you." She knew those things were recorded in the scroll and that she should look to Him alone to receive all that He had purposed for her.

JOHN WEPT

John too wanted to know what was recorded in the Scroll. He says, "*I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside.*"⁶⁶ "*No one found worthy*" expresses man's complete moral inability to redeem himself as well as his utter lack to know what a day has in store. One of the elders brings John good news saying, "*See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed.*"⁶⁷ The prophets predicted that the Redeemer would come from the tribe of Judah in the line of David.⁶⁸

John then looks to see the mighty Lion, a David-like warrior king, conquering Rome and the entire world. But what does he see? Not the lion in all His strength; no, instead the feeble figure of a young lamb "*as though he had been newly slain.*"⁶⁹ It is OK to think of the Book of Revelation as strange as long as you identify where it is strange, and nowhere is it stranger than when John looks for the Lion and sees a Lamb. God's thoughts and ways are contrary to ours and this brings us to the very heart of the Gospel.

THE LION IS A LAMB

It is not that Christ switches roles, sometimes taking the role of lamb and other times the role of lion. No, it is the Lamb's sacrificial love that makes Him the mighty Lion of Judah. Yes, the Lamb is the Lion. Used twenty-six times in Revelation, the Lamb metaphor dominates the rest of the book as the controlling symbol for Christ. And what could be more opposite than a lion and a lamb? A lamb represents innocence, meekness, dependence, vulnerability and sacrifice. If that were not enough in the Greek here John uses a word for lamb ('arnion') which could be translated lambkin – a small, little lamb.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Rev. 5:4 ⁶⁷ (Rev. 5:5) Jesus' well-known Messianic titles. ⁶⁸ Gen. 49:9-10; Isa. 11:1,10; Jer. 23:5;33:8; Luke 1:32-33 (Throne of his father David) Rev. 22:16. ⁶⁹ (Rev. 5:6) "As though He had been newly slain" shows this soon follows the ascension. It also links the Messiah to the Passover Lamb. (Ex.12:5ff; Isa.53:7 Rev. 6:1ff;7:9;12:11;13:8;21:9). ⁷⁰ John uses the Greek word "amnos" for lamb elsewhere in Revelation and in his Gospel.

God sent His little Lambkin into the world against the powerful Dragon. The Lambkin's sacrificial love is what wins the victory. In and through His 'lambness,' He overcomes the Dragon. How else would you expect God do it? The One on the throne works in history for the salvation of humanity through the Lamb. "We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called... Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."⁷¹

The story is told of a man who worked at a slaughterhouse. It was his job to cut the throats of the animals. The company had not slaughtered sheep, but one day they began to work with sheep. The man put his knife to the first lamb that came through the line and slit its throat. The animal saw the blood on the man's hand looked up at him, and then licked the blood off his hand. I'm told the man quit his job. The humble lamb had overcome him.

In our world, without a revelation of the Lamb, men revere wealth and power. They serve money and as their god they trust in it. People even joke that the "golden rule" is who owns the gold makes the rules. In a similar vein they affirm, "Do unto others before they do unto you." But Jesus has proved them all wrong. For those like John who were undergoing persecution and martyrdom, they needed to see the Lamb in the midst of the throne.⁷²

"The Lamb has seven horns and seven eyes." His horns and eyes signify His complete power and perfect vision to govern.⁷³ Great painters, as Van Eyck, have tried to portray His seven horns and eyes, but they have lessened rather than enlarged our conceptions of the truths that these symbols so vividly set forth. Here as elsewhere in this book, it is the truths, and not the forms that symbolize them, which are of great consequence.



WORTHY LAMB TAKES THE SCROLL TO OPEN IT

"He came and took the scroll."

The scene in heaven gives way to an almighty transaction. The One on the throne delegates what He possesses to the Lamb. The Scroll goes from the Father to Jesus. *"The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him."*⁷⁵ When the Son takes it, He also takes the attention of heaven. The whole movement of the vision focuses on Jesus' exaltation to God's right hand where He receives all authority in heaven and in earth. Christ is the center of revelation and heavenly adoration. He is the center of the purposes and

⁷¹ 1 Cor. 1:23-25 ⁷² Rev. 12:11 ⁷³ Seven means complete. ⁷⁴ Rev. 5:6-7 ⁷⁵ (Rev. 1:1) Jesus did not wait until the final seven years of history to receive and open the Scroll. He takes the Scroll like a newly inaugurated Head of State receives his portfolio.

administration of God by His death and resurrection. Oswald Chambers said, “all heaven is interested in the cross of Christ, all hell is terribly afraid of it, while earthlings are the only beings who more or less ignore its meaning.”

HE TOOK THE SCROLL

The Lamb lives to take the Scroll, but the marks of the nails are still there.⁷⁶ Thomas knew Him by His wounds, and when we get to heaven we will have no difficulty in recognizing Him. We will not mistake Him for another, because His body will tell for all eternity our redemption. All history, personal and corporate, is in the hands that were pierced at Calvary. No Seal can be broken, not a single event can be brought into actuality, except under the guiding hand of Christ. “The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in His hands.”⁷⁷

The Lamb has broken the effects of man’s fall and restored our inheritance. Like the story of a man who was traveling in Germany. He saw a church tower with the carved figure of a lamb. He was told that when the church was being built, a workman fell from a high scaffold on the tower. Those working below quickly reached him, expecting to find his broken, dead body. To their great surprise, he was unharmed. He had fallen on a lamb, belonging to a nearby flock. The lamb was crushed to death but the man was unharmed. The carved figure was placed on the tower, not only to commemorate the event, but also to remind everyone of the Lamb who died to save fallen sinners.

THE LAMB AS LION

Aspects of Revelation, which describe Christ’s Return, seem like a Lion.⁷⁷ But Christ’s character does not change with the times. He is the same today as He was yesterday in the Gospel accounts. And He will be the same when He comes again.⁷⁸ There is room, however, in Jesus of Nazareth for judgment, and in Revelation this room is fully revealed. The Wrath of the Lamb against evil is based upon the fact that He hates wickedness and loves righteousness. And on the fact that He fought the completely decisive battle against wickedness, when he submitted to the cross and was obedient unto death. God confirmed His victory by His resurrection, enthronement and reception of the Scroll. Nothing can undo His victory at Calvary. There lies the turning point of history; all that went before was prologue, all that follows’ is an epilogue. The Lamb occupies the throne of the Lion who will devour every form of evil.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Habakkuk saw Him with “bright beams coming out of His sides, and there was the hiding of His power.” (3:4 Lit.) ⁷⁷ John 3:35 ⁷⁸ Heb. 13:8 ⁷⁹ John does not present a final showdown between Christ and Satan, but the logical conclusion, the outcome of the victory that has already been won.



WORSHIP OF THE LAMB AND HIM ON THE THRONE
“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb”

John sees the Living Ones and Elders fall down and worship the Lamb. They worship Him just like they had done earlier for the One on the throne. Thus, they fully affirm the Deity of Jesus Christ.⁸⁰ In fact, the actions of all heaven’s occupants are described in terms of worship directed to the Lamb. Three worship hymns follow.⁸¹ The songs of the ransomed of the Lord, which return to Zion with everlasting joy. We learn these songs when we experience the forgiveness of our sins. They are learnt not by the head but with the heart.⁸² Someone said, “You have got to strike the note today to be able to sing it tomorrow. You get into tune now or you will be out of tune yonder.”

A NEW HARP AND BOWL SONG

Like the Old Testament Highpriest had many helpers in the earthly tabernacle, Jesus our great Highpriest has many assistants in the heavenly sanctuary. Unfortunately, most people have the notion that nothing real happens in heaven. But although Revelation deals in symbolic figures, it does not deal in fiction. There is a reality in all that is described here as going on there.⁸³ We see the ministry of elders as each of them has a golden harp and bowl. Harps speak of praise and bowls speak of prayer. These go together.

Peter MacKenzie was a Durham coal miner and a Wesleyan minister, who gathered crowds for others to preach to them. One day he had large crowd but the preacher did not arrive. The crowd urged Peter to preach and he said, “if I must preach give me my subject.” “Preach on what they do in heaven,” someone asked. “One thing I know they do. They sing! And I expect to come face to face with David worshipping on his harp. I also expect that I will get to pick out a song for all to sing. It is #49 in the Wesleyan Hymn Book: “My God and Father, While I Stray.” But when I do someone there is sure to cry out, “But Peter you are in heaven now and you cannot stray.” Well, what about #651? “Though Waves and Storms Beat Over My Head.” Then they will all shout, “Peter MacKenzie you are in heaven and there are no waves and storms here.” Then I will stand in wonder and say “What then shall we sing?” And then from the innumerable multitude will come the cry “Sing a new song!” Then all the redeemed in heaven will sing to Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood.”

⁸⁰ Rev. 5:8 ⁸¹ Rev. 5:9-10 “A New Song.” Rev. 5:12 “Worthy is the Lamb” Rev. 5:13 “To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.” ⁸² Rev. 14:3 ⁸³ This reality never infringes upon Christ’s position as sole Mediator between God and man. Prayers and praise are never directed to anyone except to the Triune God.

The redeemed will sing “You are worthy,” which means, “You are deserving.” The qualifications of the Lamb and His worthiness are based on His loving sacrifice on the cross, “*because you were slain.*” “*By your blood you purchased men for God.*” Yes, Christ is worthy by rank, by ability, by character and by action. All men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father.⁸⁴ We cannot honor Christ too much for His redemptive work.

Throughout the centuries men cried out to God for deliverance. Christ came and answered their cry. It is therefore the right time to sing a new song, because the Lord has recently died to redeem mankind. So there was never any song like it before heard in heaven. It is the song of redemption.⁸⁵ “Twas great to speak a world from naught” “Twas greater to redeem.” The redeemed sing, “You *have* redeemed us.” The redeemed do not sing in anticipation of redemption for it is a finished, eternal act that has already been accomplished.

Four terms are also used to emphasize the universality of mankind’s redemption. “*Every tribe, tongue, people and nation.*” The number of singers increases from the twenty-four elders and four creatures to everyone in all of creation. A doxology begun by the saints is carried on by angels and echoed throughout the universe.⁸⁶

TEN THOUSAND TIMES TEN THOUSAND

We have little conception of the magnitude of heaven. How big it must be when we consider the number of its occupants? The imagery of “thousands upon thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand” angels surrounding the throne is not meant to reveal the actual size of heaven but rather the infinite power and worthiness of the One who is at the center of it all.⁸⁷ More people will be in heaven than will be lost in hell. Think of all the stillborn babies and a vast number who were miscarried before birth. All those who died in infancy will be there. Mothers shall be reunited with their children. What a sight awaits us? It is grand beyond our imagination.

John saw these things, but sadly for most the Bible remains a sealed book. And it will only open when they behold the slain Lamb, standing in the midst of the throne. John told the truth of what he saw and heard. He reminds me of Marco Polo, the famous Venetian traveler of the 13th century. When he

⁸⁴ John 5:23 ⁸⁵ For a new song in the OT (Ps. 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 144:9; 149:1; Isa. 42:10). ⁸⁶ Angels join in and why not? If angels rejoice over one sinner that repents, imagine how much they must have rejoiced in light of man’s redemption? The praise of every thing in heaven, earth, and under the earth agrees with what Paul teaches. “God exalted him to the highest place...every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess.” (Phil. 2:10). ⁸⁷ Rev. 5:11-12

lay dying, he was urged by his detractors to withdraw the stories he had told about China and the lands of the Far East. But he refused, saying, “I have not told half of what I saw.”

Taken into heaven, John shows us man’s final frontier, reminding me also of Valladolid, Spain, where Christopher Columbus died in 1506. There stands a monument commemorating the great discoverer. The most interesting feature of the memorial is a statue of a lion destroying one of the Latin words that had been part of Spain’s motto for centuries. Before Columbus made his voyages, the Spaniards thought they had reached the outer limits of earth. Their motto was “Ne Plus Ultra,” which means

“No More Beyond.” The word being torn away by the lion is “ne” or “no” making it read “Plus Ultra.” Columbus had proven that there was indeed “more beyond.”

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Whose face(s) do you see in Heaven?
2. How do the songs we sing today compare with those in Revelation?
3. What are the characteristics of a good Christian worship song?
4. What are the most essential elements in worship?
5. When last did you personally “stand in awe” of God? Was it in corporate worship or just you and God?
6. How would you explain that the Lamb is the Lion or vice a versa?
7. How do chapters four and five set the stage for what follows in the book?

This chapter does not end until perfect, seven-fold praise is heard in heaven. It rings out like the sound from a huge bell: “power...wealth...wisdom...strength...honor...glory...and

praise.” Such worship takes us up in the Spirit with John to receive ever-increasing vistas of God’s holy love and sovereign power. Such worship also opens us up to prophetic visions.

John’s visions reveal “more beyond” all we have seen. With the loosing of the Seals in our next chapter, we are shown what is to come. I hope that this august vision of heaven has prepared you, as it did John, for such disclosures so that you will look at them with deep interest.

NOTES

PART FOUR

SERIES

CHAPTER EIGHT: SERIES QUESTIONS
(Rev. 6:1-16:21)

CHAPTER NINE: SEVEN SEALS
(Rev. 6:1-8:1)

CHAPTER TEN: SERVANTS SEALED
(Rev. 7:1-17)

CHAPTER ELEVEN: SEVEN TRUMPETS
(Rev. 8:1-11:19)

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse ride forth and the Seven Trumpets sound to warn men of the coming of the End.



The picture is compiled from two works by Nicolas Fontaine 1625 -1709.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SERIES QUESTIONS

SEVEN OBSERVATIONS IN REVELATION 6:1-16:21

Between flights at the airport, a lady bought a small packet of cookies, and sat down in a lounge to read her newspaper. She later heard rustling sounds and was shocked to see a well dressed man helping himself to a cookie. Not wanting to make a scene, she leaned over and took one herself, hoping he would get the message. A minute later, more rustling as he helped himself to another one. She was too flabbergasted to say anything. Then, he broke the last cookie in two, pushed half across to her and left. Still angry when her flight was announced, she opened her handbag to get her Boarding Pass. To her horror and embarrassment, there she found her pack of unopened cookies.

Like the woman, we will draw a wrong conclusion, if we are unaware that there are more than one of the same items. If the man had two of his own packs on the chair between them, she would have caught herself before making a wrong assumption. The Seals, Trumpets and Bowls present a similar issue. And before we focus on them separately, we must establish how they relate to one another. In this chapter, we examine them side by side, making seven essential points in order to interpret them correctly.



JOSEPH'S METHOD OF INTERPRETING DREAMS IS A KEY

“The dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms.”¹

The Seals, Trumpets and Bowls are given in a language of visions and dreams. A key biblical principle for interpreting them is Pharaoh's two dreams. Pharaoh saw seven fat cows come up out of the Nile. Then he saw seven hungry cows come up and eat the fat ones. In his second dream, he saw seven full stalks of grain, but seven lean ones also appeared and swallowed up the healthy ones. Although his magicians could not explain the dream to Pharaoh, the key to Joseph's interpretation is to recognise that the two dreams run parallel. Both dreams predict the same series of events.

CORN AND COWS

The seven fat cows and seven full stalks predict seven years of plenty. While the seven lean stalks and seven thin cows forecast seven years of drought. If Joseph did not realize that the corn and cows foretold the same events, he

¹ Gen. 41:32

could have thought that Egypt was going to have seven years of plenty, then seven years of drought, followed by seven more years of plenty and another seven years of drought. Altogether that would call for twenty-eight years. In a similar vein, some assume that the Seals, Trumpets and Bowls cover twenty-one consecutive events in a chronological order. They do not realize that the Seals, Trumpets and Bowls cover a parallel period.² Pharaoh's two dreams parallel one another. "The dream is one," and the dream was "doubled unto Pharaoh twice because:"

- **"The thing is established by God"**
- **"And God will shortly bring it to pass."**³

I believe the vision of Seals, Trumpets and Bowls was tripled to John, because God established these as the last things, which He will soon bring to pass.

THREE TIMES

The apostle Peter had a vision in which God revealed to him that the Gentiles were accepted by God on the basis of faith in Christ. "The voice spoke to him a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.'" Luke writes that "this happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven. While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, men sent by Cornelius arrived at Simon's house and stopped at the gate."⁴

To include the Gentiles in God's covenant was a major revelation to the Jews. So vital, God repeated Himself three times in the same vision to Peter, and then brought the event to pass quickly. He did not want men to misinterpret the fact that the Gentiles were heirs with the Jews. When the Jews at Jerusalem questioned Peter about all this, he repeated the whole matter to them.⁵



SEALS AND TRUMPETS FOLLOW A DEFINITE PATTERN

"Don't you understand this parable? How then... any parable?"⁶

There is a distinct pattern between the Seals and Trumpets. An overview of that pattern follows:

- **First four are a quick kind of quartet**

The first four Seals are loosed and the first four Trumpets are blown in rapid succession. Only one verse introduces and one verse describes each of these four Seals and Trumpets.⁷ They are swift to indicate the fast pace at which the world is moving towards the Day of Judgment.

² Seals, Trumpets (Rev. 11:15ff.) and Bowls (Rev. 16:17ff) take us to the End indicating parallelism.

³ Gen. 41:26,32 ⁴ Acts 10:15-17 ⁵ (Gal. 3:28; Eph.2:14) ⁶ Mark. 4:13 ⁷ Rev. 6:1-8; 8:7-12

- **Fifth slows the pace and provides more details**

After a flurry of earthly trouble and prophetic fulfillment in the first four, there is a slow down with the fifth Seal and fifth Trumpet. More words are used to describe the fifth. Men are unaware, however, of what is happening, because the fifth Seal and Trumpet deal with occurrences in the unseen realm. With the fifth Seal, John says, *“I saw under the alter the souls of them.”*⁸ With the fifth Trumpet, *“to him was given the key to the bottomless pit.”*⁹ Martyrs cry out for justice and demonic hordes are let loose, while men reassure themselves that *“all things continue as they were.”*¹⁰ The seeming lull in the action is the proverbial calm before the storm; unseen forces gather momentum as God graciously allows time for men to repent.

- **Sixth increases commotion as a definite prelude to the End**

The sixth Seal and the sixth Trumpet bring us back to this world, as there is a noticeable, intensified upheaval in nature and among men. It is as if the voltage is stacked up. Suddenly we seem to come to the End itself.¹¹ John says, *“I watched as he opened the sixth Seal. There was a great earthquake... the stars in the sky fell to earth...The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place...For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”*¹² Six is always a prelude to the End.¹³ It looks like the world cannot continue any longer.

- **After Six, there is an interlude**

Instead of it being the End, there is a pause after the sixth Seal and Trumpet. These interludes, or parentheses, stand outside the flow of the sequence. After the sixth Seal, the question is raised, *“Who can stand?”* An entire chapter answers the question, revealing to us that the seventh Seal will not be broken until God marks all His children. In part one of this interlude, John observes the marking of the 144,000 and then sees a great multitude in Heaven that no one could number. After the sixth Trumpet, a pause also follows. John eats a little Scroll, measures a Temple and observes Two Witnesses. Both the Seal and Trumpet ‘pauses’ answer vital questions concerning God’s people. They fill in details as to why the End, seven in our sequence, has not yet arrived.¹⁴ These interludes also set the stage for the climactic seventh.

- **Seven brings us to the end**

Seven is always the end of the sequence. The top of the next page provides an outlined sketch of this pattern.

⁸ Rev. 6:9-11 ⁹ Rev. 9:2 ¹⁰ God “is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to repent.” (2 Peter 3:4; John 6:37-39). ¹¹ Rev. 6:12ff; 9:13ff ¹² Rev. 6:12-17 ¹³ Rev. 9:13-10:7) War, a prelude to the end, is addressed later. ¹⁴ 2 Peter 3:8

A linear outline of the pattern in the Seals and Trumpets

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 / 5 / 6 / Interlude Parts A & B / 7

Quick Quartet More Details Intensification Explanations The End!

This pattern in the Seals and Trumpets gives the reader the sense that we are just on the verge of the End. Their ingenious design gives the book an amazing sense of urgency. Their overall impact creates expectancy in the faithful, as they wait for what will bring the Return of Christ.



THE BOWLS PARALLEL THE TRUMPETS

“On the earth... sea...rivers...sun...beast...Euphrates... finished.”¹⁵

We also note a clear parallel exists between the Trumpets and Bowls. Each item in the sequence of seven uses the similar wording for the areas effected. Those words are highlighted in the right hand column. The evidence that these verses constitute a parallel is obvious. See the outlined chart below to confirm that the vision of the Trumpets and Bowls is one.

1 st Trumpet	Rev. 8:7	1 st Bowl	Rev. 16:2	“On the earth”
2 nd Trumpet	Rev. 8:8-9	2 nd Bowl	Rev. 16:3	“the sea”
3 rd Trumpet	Rev. 8:10-11	3 rd Bowl	Rev. 16:4-7	“Rivers and fountains”
4 th Trumpet	Rev. 8:12-13	4 th Bowl	Rev. 16:8-9	“Sun ... moon ... stars.”
5 th Trumpet	Rev. 9:1-12	5 th Bowl	Rev. 16:10-11	“Seat of beast...pit.”
6 th Trumpet	Rev. 9:13-21	6 th Bowl	Rev. 16:12-14	“Euphrates.”
7 th Trumpet	Rev. 10:7; 11:15	7 th Bowl	Rev. 16:17-21	“It is finished (done).”

God often repeats His message in the Bible for emphasis. He does not want us to miss what He tells us. The more important the message, the more reiteration we can expect. So a message as pertinent as the end of the world is sure to be driven home by various restatements. God also repeats to communicate imminence and nearness. Like Pharaoh’s dream or Peter’s vision, “the thing is established by God and He will shortly bring it to pass.”¹⁶

To catch a person’s attention, to impress urgency and heart-felt feeling, a Hebrew idiom is to use repetition. When God calls to Abraham at Mount Moriah, as he is about to plunge the knife into the breast of his only son Isaac, He says, “Abraham, Abraham.” When God encourages Jacob in his old age to go down to Egypt, He says, “Jacob, Jacob.”¹⁷ Remember the classic call of Moses from the burning bush, “Moses, Moses.” How about young Samuel’s call from God in the night, “Samuel, Samuel.” Consider David’s

¹⁵ Rev. 8:7-13; 9:1-21; 10:7; 11:15-19; 16:2-21 ¹⁶ Compare Gen. 41:26,32 with Rev. 1:1,3; 22:6-7, 10,12,20 ¹⁷ Gen. 22:11, 46:2

cry of agony, “Absalom, Absalom.” Or Jesus’ agonising cry of desolation on the cross, “My God, My God.”¹⁸

The Seals, Trumpets and Bowls refer to the same period of time between Christ’s ascension and return. These three series give us a definite and clear understanding of the things that must come to pass before His Return. They use an apocalyptic method to deliver and stress their weighty message. They also use what one might call a ‘spiral approach,’ circling back as a good teacher does to fill in and fill out a concept by coming at it in different ways. Revelation by its very nature is full of parenthetical thoughts, adding via digressions, expansions and details. This brings us to our fourth key.

④ SEALS, TRUMPETS AND BOWLS ARE NOT CHRONOLOGICAL
“Seal up what the seven thunders have said.”¹⁹

To properly interpret Revelation, we must recognize how it is structured. Otherwise, we will end up befuddled like my friend at Newport Prison. Over a two-year period, I visited inmates there every Sunday morning. A small group of us would preach, pray and leave them Bibles. A lot of conversations I’ve forgotten, but there is one that I’ll never forget. We had left a New Testament with an inmate on the previous Sunday. As suggested, he started reading through the New Testament, beginning with Matthew’s Gospel.

The following Sunday, he was keen to ask us a question. “I began to read through that book you left me, but there is something I don’t understand.” He continued a little nervously, “I read how they crucified Jesus and He rose from the dead, but then they crucified Him again.” Having read through Matthew and most of Mark, he did not realize that Mark’s account covered the same timeframe. We explained that he read two different accounts of Jesus’ life as Christ only died once. There are four accounts in the New Testament of Jesus’ death and resurrection. It is like reading a news event from different newspapers. It then all made sense to him and everything fell into place.

Often Bible narratives retell the same events.²⁰ Our Western mindset, however, is pre-occupied with chronology. But that is not the case in the Middle East where the Bible originated. And it is obviously not the case in the Book of Revelation. John does not follow a strict chronology from start to finish. For instance, he relates the breaking of the sixth Seal, which describes the

¹⁸ (Ex. 3:4; 1 Sam. 3:10; 2 Sam. 18:33; Matt. 27:46) Used when Jesus comforted Martha, when He warned Peter, and when He wept over Jerusalem (Luke 10:41; 22:31; Matt. 23:37). Many claim a deep relationship with Christ, saying, “Lord, Lord” but it’s not borne out in their lives. ¹⁹ Rev. 10:4

²⁰ Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Ezra, Nehemiah, First and Second Samuel, First and Second Kings, First and Second Chronicles, the Major and Minor Prophets do this.

stars falling from the sky, before he records the first Trumpet; and yet, the first Trumpet cannot literally happen after the sixth Seal. John's vision of the Dragon cast out of heaven is related in chapter twelve but that does not mean it actually happens after the seventh Trumpet recorded in chapter eleven.

Revelation utilizes flashbacks, re-explaining outcomes and revisiting prophetic trends in greater detail. The flow of the book is like a telephone conversation. When sharing an involved story, one starts filling in the blanks with more information the longer they talk. They will go back over things already said, repeating key features to help the other party grasp what has transpired. Sometimes, one provides information that runs ahead in the story and at other times they back up to enlarge on pertinent points. Questions are also raised in order to clarify points. Invariably, when it is a serious, complex issue, a person will share more than one perspective and explanation, because several dynamics are at work and more than one party is involved.

SEVEN THUNDERS

Revelation's apocalyptic genre demolishes all attempts to establish a chronology of twenty-one events in the seven Seals, Trumpets and Bowls. If the lack of chronology is not obvious in its parallels, it becomes definite when Seven Thunders utter their voice. Why? Because when they utter their voice, between the Trumpets and the Bowls, John is told not to record what they uttered but to seal those items. *"And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices I was about to write and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, "Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered and write them not."*²¹ If permitted, John would have recorded a fourth series of seven, like the seven Seals, Trumpets and Bowls.²² How then can you reckon that the seventh Trumpet is event fourteen and the first Bowl is event fifteen?

Interpreters, who view the seven Seals, Trumpets and Bowls as twenty-one specific events in order, arrive at an impasse with the seven Thunders. Their omission breaks the possibility of establishing a chronology of events from Seals to Trumpets to Bowls. In view of this, how can anyone hold to a timeframe chronology between the other three series? By realizing, however, that these are not twenty-one events, the dilemma disappears. Like the joke my six-year-old recently told me. "Dad, imagine you are in a concrete room with no doors or windows. How do you get out?" "I don't know son? Do I dig out?" "No, dad, imagine the floors are concrete too?" "I guess I'm stuck – tell me how to get out?" "Stop imagining, dad! That's how you get out!"

²¹ Rev.10:4 ²² No one knows what the seven Thunders said. They are the only part of the Scroll that was re-sealed and unrecorded by John, because of the command of the voice from Heaven.

If we knew what the seven Thunders uttered, they would only add to what we already have in the Seals, Trumpets and Bowls.²³ For what we have in them are not separate, new events, but like Pharaoh's two dreams they predict one scenario. The seven Thunders uttered thunderous revelations of the things that must shortly come to pass. When the Seals are broken, the Scroll is brought to light. Thunder signals a voice from heaven announcing God's thoughts. For example, in John's Gospel, Jesus prays "Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him."²⁴

PROPHETIC PROFILES NOT ROAD MAP ESCHATOLOGY

The seven Thunders serve to confirm that the other three series are not chronological. Chronological events require an unbroken continuation, which Seals, Trumpets and Bowls cannot provide. They are not three sets of seven specific events. The concept of specific events bespeaks of a onetime occurrence, a literal, historical happening. That is an erroneous designation for the Seals and Trumpets. We said the type of prophecy we find in Revelation is an endtime trend or kind of events. Jesus predicted wars, martyrs, natural disasters, famines, diseases, false Messiahs and earthquakes in the Mount Olive discourse. That is what we find in the Seals and Trumpets.²⁵ I call them Prophetic Profiles, a good designation of what must shortly come to pass.

Prophetic Profiles stand in contrast to what I would call Event Chronology. Many interpreters look for events to establish a road map of chronological events. These are thought to serve as signposts to arrive at the time Christ will return. Road map Eschatology not only interprets the Seals, Trumpets and Bowls as literal events, but it also interpret the 1260 days, and 42 months literally. Suppose then a literal chronology and timeframe could be established. That would create several questions and an obvious contradiction:

1. **Could we not then predict the actual day of Christ's return?**
2. **If Christ Returns 1260 days after an event, could we not set a date?**
3. **Doesn't God want us ready every day and not just one certain day?**
4. **Revelation is unsealed so then why look to figure out the day?**
5. **But if God hid the day in Revelation for a clever interpreter to discover, then has He not contradicted Jesus who said no one knows the day?**
6. **Why look for what God already said He has not revealed?**
7. **Doesn't Road map Eschatology go against John's prophetic message?**

²³ The Thunders parallel the Seals like the Bowls parallel the Trumpets. ²⁴ (John 12: 28-31) Ps. 29:3-9 the Lord speaks in a sevenfold voice as a thunderstorm upon the sea. ²⁵ (Matt 24:1ff; Mark 13:1ff; Luke 21:5ff) We cover the variation in the Bowls since they are the last judgments on the earth.

When we realize the Seals, Trumpets and Bowls are not twenty-one chronological events, we are ready to consider a different kind of relationship between them, which brings us to our fifth essential point.



SEALS REVEAL, TRUMPETS ANNOUNCE AND BOWLS RELEASE
“The seven seals...the seven trumpets...the seven bowls.”²⁶

The Seals are basic to the opening of the Scroll. They have the effect of hiding its contents till they are broken. When the first Seal was opened a certain portion of the book was exposed to view. So it is with each Seal. When Christ looses all seven Seals, the entire revelation is unveiled. After the seventh Seal, we read of seven Trumpets. The Trumpets blown signify the prophetic announcements of what the Scroll contains. And the Bowls poured out indicate their release.²⁷ We outline the relationship as follows:

Seals = unsealed revelation of what is coming upon the earth.

Trumpets = prophetic announcement of what is coming on the earth.

Bowls = pouring out in full what is coming on the earth.

The relationship between the Seals, Trumpets and Bowls could be illustrated in a manner familiar to John’s readers and Heaven’s theocracy.

- **Seals are first Broken: Revelation of What is to come**

King Jesus, the Worthy One, takes the Scroll from Him who sits on the throne. This scene, in Heaven’s palace, envisions Christ enthroned with His Father, opening the Seals in order to reveal what is written in the Scroll. There are thunderous revelations and voices as the words of the Scroll are made known. To a watchful audience of saints and angels, He makes known what is decreed, even the consummation determined upon the whole earth. It is revealed so that it can be announced to His citizens both near and far.

- **Trumpets are then Blown: Announcement of What is to come**

After King Jesus has loosed the seals of the Scroll, angelic attendants in the heavenly court receive Trumpets to announce these things to all of creation. The Trumpets are the prophetic announcement of the revelation given to Jesus. The Trumpets do not make an uncertain sound, for they clearly announce what is recorded, and forewarn God’s servants to prepare for the final conflict.²⁸

The revelation, which was given to Jesus by the Father, is given to His angel to give to John. He *“sent and signified it by His angel unto his servant John.”*²⁹ This is enacted in Revelation chapter ten when John takes the Scroll. *“Then*

²⁶ Rev. 6:1; 8:6; 16:1 ²⁷ “The seventh seal...angels...were given seven trumpets” (8:1-2). Bowls are called the “last plagues.” ²⁸ 1 Cor. 14:8 ²⁹ (Rev. 1:1) John uses the word “saw” 50 times.

the voice I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more; Go take the Scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel.” The angel tells John to eat the Scroll, and that *“he must prophesy again about many people, nations, languages and kings.”*³⁰ Revelation’s prophecy speaks “again” and is “about many...” throughout history not just those in John’s day or at the end of the age.

- **Finally Bowls are Poured Out: Release of What is to come**

What was supernaturally revealed and prophetically announced is released. What a striking image. Judgment falls from heaven like rainfall.³¹ Lightening and thunder precede the downpour, as isolated, big drops first fall to the ground. Seals made known and the Trumpets forewarned of a down pour. Seals affect a quarter and Trumpets “a third,” revealing partial judgements, mixed with mercy. Those who heed the warnings take cover and are marked for salvation. Bowls are then poured out in a flood of fiery judgment, undelayed and undiluted, which climax as the world ends.³²



SEALS TRANSITION TO TRUMPETS TO BOWLS

*“And I saw the seven angels...given seven trumpets.”*³³

Flowing out of John’s vision of Heaven in chapters four and five, the Seals, Trumpets and Bowls all form one continuous vision. They are interconnected as each series transitions into the next series. They present one vision like Pharaoh’s dream, revealing what must soon come to pass. The interludes in the Seals and Trumpets simply let us know why the End has not yet come.

- **Seals transition to Trumpets**

Once the seventh Seal is opened, no immediate episode follows. An image of the End was revealed in the sixth Seal and the seventh introduces the Trumpet series. *“When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets.”*³⁴ The Trumpets announce judgment on the unrepentant according to what the Seals revealed.

- **Trumpets transition to Bowls**

When the seventh Trumpet sounds, the End is announced, and John takes us back to Heaven where the Seals originated. *“The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever...”* God’s temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant.³⁵

³⁰ Rev. 10:8-11 ³¹ Matt. 5:45; 7:25-27 ³² Bowls therefore deal with Beast and Babylon with no pause in the sixth and seventh Bowls. ³³ Rev. 8:2 ³⁴ Rev. 8:1-2ff ³⁵ Rev. 11:14-17, 19

The Ark in heaven links the Trumpets to Bowls. For John is shown the tabernacle again when seven angels prepare to pour out the seven last plagues. *“I looked and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened. Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues.... Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever.”*³⁶ The angels pour out these Bowls upon the earth because men refuse to repent.³⁷

LIVING ORACLES

Revelation’s vision is not static. Like the rest of God’s Word, it is dynamic, alive and ever current. Its images draw from many places in the Bible, and have a way of exposing our lack of Bible knowledge. That lack was illustrated by a new pastor who was asked to teach Sunday School. He decided to see what the class knew, so he asked them who knocked down the walls of Jericho. All the kids denied having done it, and he was appalled by their ignorance of basic Bible stories. At the next Deacons’ Meeting he lamented, “not one of them knew who knocked down the walls of Jericho.” The group was silent until finally one seasoned veteran of disputes spoke up. “Preacher, this appears to be bothering you a lot. But I’ve known those kids for years. If they said they don’t know, I believe them. Let’s just take some money out of the repair and maintenance fund, fix those class walls, and let it go at that.”

Ed Farley asks, “Why do bankers, lawyers, farmers, homemakers...and skilled people who carry out all kinds of complicated tasks in their work and home, remain in a literalist, elementary school level in their religious understanding? How is it that High School age members of the Church move easily and quickly into the complex world of computers, foreign languages, DNA and calculus, and cannot even make a beginning in historical-critical interpretation of a single text of Scripture?”³⁸ Part of the answer is that most Christians do not regularly read the Bible. Another reason is that they quickly detach a text from its context and read their own meaning into it. You cannot do that with a computer program.³⁹



The number seven indicates completeness.

*“When the seventh...trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished.”*⁴⁰

Seven churches, seven Spirits, seven eyes and horns, seven Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls. Seven speaks of completion. So each of these series of seven takes us with the number seven all the way to the End. With the seventh Seal, every star falls, every mountain is removed and God’s day of wrath arrives.

³⁶ Rev. 15:5-7 ³⁷ Rev. 16:1-17 ³⁸ “Can Church Education Be Theological Education,” *Theology Today*, July 1985. ³⁹ Revelation has often suffered such misuse. ⁴⁰ Rev. 10:7

So it is with the Trumpets. When we get to the seventh Trumpet, the mystery of God is complete. Time is no more! Relevant verses are outline below:

Six–Seventh Seal *“They called to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come.”* (Revelation 6:16-17).

Seventh Trumpet: *“The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.”* (Revelation 11:15).

Seventh Bowl: *“The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘It is done!’* (Revelation 16:17).

Synopsis

Seven stands for a complete sequence. The Seals, Trumpets and Bowls do not constitute a straight-line sequence of events, but Prophetic

REVIEW DISCUSSIONS

1. How did Joseph know Pharaoh’s two dreams were one?
2. When has God told you the same thing as He did Peter three times?
3. Why do you think our Western mind is so concerned with chronology?
4. What speaks to you most about the pattern in the Seals and Trumpets?
5. Why might God have sealed up what the seven Thunders uttered?
6. Why do some Christians gravitate towards Road Map Eschatology?
7. Why do skilled people struggle to interpret a Scripture?

Profiles. They provide three perspectives: revelatory, prophetic and executive. Each forecast takes us from Jesus’ ascension until His Return. Their relationship is not one of temporal succession. They are synchronous, offering different points of reference that build to a climax.

John’s vision is the stuff from which poetry, and not a Travel Guide, is made. God is the

Master of imagery and symbolism, and we can only understand the Book of Revelation if we examine the Old Testament source of its images and symbols. Since every symbol in Revelation is explained or alluded to somewhere else in the Bible, we can confidently proceed to the Seals, in our next chapter, interpreting Scripture with Scripture.

NOTES

CHAPTER NINE

SEVEN SEALS

SEVEN SEALS LOOSE IN REVELATION 6:1-17 AND 8:1-2

Private Jones was assigned to the Army Induction Center. His job was to advise new recruits about their benefits, especially Serviceman's Life Insurance (SLI), which could be upgraded for an annual premium. It wasn't long before his Officer noticed that Jones had a near 100% sales record. This had never happened before. So his Officer decided to listen in. Jones explained SLI's basic coverage to the recruits, and then said, "If you have SLI Upgrade and go into battle and are killed, the government has to pay \$70,000 to your beneficiaries. If you don't, they only pay \$6,000." "Now," he concluded, "which ones do you think they are going to send into battle first?"

In Revelation chapters two and three, we saw things in the churches. In four and five, we saw things in heaven. Now from chapter six onwards, Christ shows *"His servants the things that must soon take place."*² These are the things in the Seals, Trumpets and Bowls, the prophetic content of Revelation. The Seals begin with the famous 'Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse' who ride into battle. But who do you think rides into battle first? Who is the White Horse Rider? That is a big question for interpreting the Seals. Interpreters go, like horses, in different directions to answer.



1 WHITE HORSE RIDER OVERCOME

*"He that sat on him had a bow and he went forth...to conquer."*¹

*"And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer."*³

Who the White Horse rider represents is a matter of debate. The Preterit, Historical, and Symbolic interpreters see Christ and His Gospel riding forth victoriously.⁴ But Futurists argue this cannot be Christ due to the other riders who follow. How could war, famine and death follow Christ? This must be the false, Antichrist, who rides forth at the start of the Great Tribulation.⁵

¹ Rev. 6:2 ²"The things which shall be hereafter." (NIV "what will take place later.") "Come up hither and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter." (Rev. 1:1, 19; 4:1) ³ Rev. 6:1-2 ⁴ Augustine like many saw the first Seal representing Christ's first coming. ⁵ Futurists say Great Tribulation starts at Seal One. Church is raptured and Antichrist is revealed.

From the outset of the prophecy, without all the horses even out of the gates, we find drastically different interpretations - from Christ to Antichrist. From the text and Scripture, I list seven good reasons why the rider is Christ.

1. The context of the passage points to Christ.

The Scroll was given to Christ. It is His revelation. He is the One who tears away not only the first Seal but all seven. So whoever rides, He has first initiated it from Heaven. Christ is the first, the Alpha.⁶

2. The content of the book of Revelation points to Christ.

Christ Returns on a White Horse at the Armageddon, as the Omega.⁷ His circuit will soon be completed, when gathered around God's throne will be the redeemed from every tribe.⁸ "For this gospel...will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the End will come."⁹

3. The rider's conquest points to Christ.

Jesus prevailed, which enabled Him to loose the Seals of the Scroll. "The Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book"¹⁰ Used ten times, the Greek word for this rider is one of John's favorite. It is normally translated "overcome."¹¹ Vine's Dictionary says, "its usual meaning is to overcome, and is translated "conquering and to conquer" in Revelation 6:2."¹²

Christ's gospel will triumph because Jesus has triumphed. He prefaced His Great Commission saying, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations."¹³ Revelation predicts the progressive advance of the Gospel throughout the world. And in the End Christ will leave no foe unvanquished. This fierce charge into battle you will never get to see on the evening news.

4. The color of the horse signifies Christ.

The color white is used seventeen times by John. Invariably it stands for what belongs to God and is righteous. Christ's hair is white. He sits on a white cloud, a white throne, and gives out white stones and garments.¹⁴ The horse's white color speaks of Christ's righteous victory.¹⁵

Statistics from "The AD 2000 and Beyond Movement" tell us that the Church worldwide has grown dramatically in the last twenty years. Many feel the fulfillment of the Great Commission is a reachable goal within a generation.¹⁶ Others see this as a far off goal. Consider Coke a Cola's goal, though, to place "a Coke in the hand of every person on earth." If reaching the world with a soft drink is not too adventuresome for a company, what is our problem?

⁶ Rev. 1:11,17; 2:8; 22:13 ⁷ From, through and to Him are all things. (Rom. 11:36). ⁸ Rev. 5:9; 14:6 ⁹ Matt. 24:14 ¹⁰ Rev. 5:5 ¹¹ Word used by Jesus to the churches. ¹² Nikao "to overcome" ¹³ Matt. 28:18-19 ¹⁴ Rev. 1:14; 2:17; 3:4,5,18; 4:4; 6:2,11; 7:9,13-14; 14:14; 19:11,14; 20:11 ¹⁵ Symbol in John's day. ¹⁶ Of 12,000 distinct cultures, 10,000 have a church-planting movement.

5. The rider's crown reveals Christ.

The White Horse rider has a golden crown.¹⁷ John soon sees “*one like a son of man with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand.*”¹⁸ All agree that Christ is envisioned by the latter, so why not be consistent?

6. The rider's bow points to Christ.

The White Horse rider has a bow. Comparing Scriptures, we find the same image in Habakkuk. God rides forth on a horse with a bow and plagues accompany Him as He rides to save His people. “God came from Teman... pestilence followed his steps. He stood, and shook the earth... when you rode with your horses and your victorious chariots? You uncovered your bow, you called for many arrows.”¹⁹

7. The New Testament confirms these other horses follow the gospel.

The Gospel did not inaugurate a reign of earthly peace. Jesus “came not to send peace, but a sword.”²⁰ He predicted wars, diseases, famines and natural disasters.²¹ He told us to expect these others riders to follow.²²



2 RED HORSE RIDER TAKES PEACE FROM THE EARTH

*“That they should kill one another...given a great sword.”*²³

Each of the Four Living Creatures calls a different Horseman to ride, saying, “Come and see.”²⁴ The Living Creature with the Lion’s face introduced the first rider. He said, “Come.” And John sees the White Horse Rider, which is the Lion of the tribe of Judah who prevails.²⁵ The second Living Creature is the Ox or Steer. The Ox is the appropriate creature to call the Red Horse rider whose red color speaks of bloodshed.²⁶

*“When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, ‘Come!’ Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other. To him was given a large sword.”*²⁷

Horses are excellent symbols for forces that swiftly move through the earth. They represent how certain events, like a war, can quickly overtake us.²⁸ Like other calamities, wars suddenly breakout and leave untold devastation in their wake. Historians estimate that, since Christ’s birth, the world has known only 200 years of peace. During this period, 14,351 wars, large and

¹⁷ Beast has no golden crowns. ¹⁸ Rev 14:14 ¹⁹ (Hab. 3:3-15) When God shows up, two things happen: redemption and judgment (Nah. 1:5; Judg. 5:4-5; Ps. 18:7; 144:5). ²⁰ Matt. 10:34 ²¹ Mark 13:7-10 ²² This seven-fold proof helps us move forward on a Biblical basis. ²³ Rev. 6:3-4 ²⁴ Come is a call to the rider. Word Pictures in the N. T. by A. T. Robertson (John 12:29). The word call “erchou” is also used for Christ (Rev. 22:17, 20). ²⁵ Some claim both the “come” and “see” are directed to John. ²⁶ 2 Kings. 3:22-23 ²⁷ Rev. 6:3-4 ²⁸ Red Horse is a fitting emblem for war. “The horse is prepared against the day of battle.” (Job 39:21-22; Ps. 76:6; Prov. 21:31).

small, have been fought, in which 3.64 billion people have been killed. The value of property destroyed is equal to a golden belt around the world 97.2 miles wide and 33 feet thick.

Since the time of John, the pace of the Red Horse rider, like that of the White Horse, seems to have picked up. For in the past 100 years the numbers are estimated at 12 times higher than the previous 100. In World War II alone, “the sword” killed 17 million military, 30 million civilians, including 6 million Jews who died in the Holocaust. Wars will not cease until the Red Horse rider gallops through to his bloody end at the battle of Armageddon. There he meets his end at the hands of the victorious White Horse Rider.

WHY WAR?

War is the result of sin. God tolerates war in order that men may see the consequences of sin. Through war, they realize more clearly than they would otherwise, how destructive sin really is.²⁹ All this, in turn, is meant for the redemptive purpose of leading men back to God. Like the saying goes, there are no atheists in foxholes. When the Red Horse rider mounts, Christ beckons men to pray and sinners to repent. Satan was defeated by his own weapon when Jesus died on the cross. So the Gospel teaches us that what Satan would use to destroy men is intended by God to bring them to salvation.

Habakkuk says, “In wrath You strode through the earth and in anger you threshed the nations. You came out to deliver your people, to save your anointed one. You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness, you stripped him from head to foot. Selah. *With his own spear* you pierced his head.”³⁰ Scripture is full of images of the Lord riding forth to deliver His people. “Gird your sword upon your side, O mighty one; clothe yourself with splendor and majesty. In your majesty ride forth victoriously...Let your sharp arrows pierce the hearts of the king’s enemies; let the nations fall beneath your feet.”³¹

PROPHETIC PATTERN

History proves the pattern John predicted in the four Horsemen of his Apocalypse. These circuit riders are observed time and again. Christ’s Gospel goes forth, but with it come wars and various distresses. That was the case when the Gospel began in Jerusalem. Great distress followed with the Jewish-Roman wars until Jerusalem was destroyed. So the rider of war goes wherever the Gospel goes. Whether we talk of the Americas, Africa, Europe or Asia, the advance of the Gospel is accompanied by many troubles.

²⁹ James 4:1 ³⁰ Hab. 3:3-15 ³¹ Ps. 45:3-5; Isa. 63:1-6

The parable of the Sower illustrates this prophetic pattern. After the Word is sown, “the birds of the air immediately come to devour the seed.” Troubles and cares come for the sake of the Word in an attempt to snatch it away.³² These things not only come because men often reject God’s grace, which opens themselves to the law of retribution, but they also come because the rulers of the darkness of this world seek to stop the Gospel.



BLACK HORSE RIDER BRINGS FAMINE

*“A quart of wheat for a day’s wages and do not damage....”*³³

*“When the Lamb opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, “Come!” I looked, and there before me was a black horse! Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand. Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, “A quart of wheat for a day’s wages, and three quarts of barley for a day’s wages....”*³⁴

The scene switches back and forth from Seals loosed in heaven to what breaks forth upon the earth. What is loosed in heaven is loosed on earth. Only then can the horses be ridden. After the warhorse, John sees a Black Horse rider of famine, who brings despair due a lack of food.³⁵ Wheat and barley were the staple foods in Palestine. A full day’s wage now buys only enough wheat to make one meal. If barley is bought, one can buy three meals.

WHY FAMINE?

For many reasons famine logically follows warfare. Unsettled conditions do not permit farming in war torn areas, and war discourages planting for fear of crops being ruined or confiscated by government. Drought is the other major cause of famine. Either way, when supply no longer meets demands, costs escalate. The rider carries “*a pair of scales*” so each grain can be carefully weighed as something precious. “They shall deliver you your bread again by weight.”³⁶

During the Cold War arms race, Dwight Eisenhower said, “Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. This is not a way of life at all in any true sense. Under the clouds of war, it is humanity hanging on a cross of iron.”³⁷

³² Matt. 13:3-23 ³³ Rev. 6:6 ³⁴ (Rev. 6:5-6) Christ communicates the Scroll to John in a three-dimensional manner. ³⁵ Vincent notes that “mournfully” in OT means literally “in black. (Jer. 4:28; 8:21; Mal. 3:14). ³⁶ Lev. 26:23-26 ³⁷ Global military costs run one million dollars a minute.

RICH UNTOUCHED

The phrase *“hurt not the oil and the wine”* portray the luxuries of the rich. Wheat and barley were all the poor could afford. But for those who have lots of money, there is always plenty of food. Some understand the oil and wine as showing the literal extent of the famine. A drought affecting wheat was not severe enough to hurt vines and trees.³⁸ Others spiritualize these to say that faith is scarce.³⁹ Historical scholars match this Horse with a particular famine. Futurists take it as a prediction of economic collapse during the Great Tribulation. I see the Black Horse of famine like the Red Horse of war. Both appear in many places, at different times, in varying degrees of severity.

John predicts that famines will occur until the end of this age. Each is an ongoing fulfillment of the Black Horse rider. In the past century, Africa has had more of the Black Horse rider than other lands. It is estimated that 11 million people, mostly children starve to death each year. Many go hungry continually. As I write, Zimbabweans face hard times. Inflation is over 1000% and unemployment stands at 80% in 2006. Many live on one meal a day.



4 PALE HORSE RIDES AS DEATH AND HELL FOLLOW

*“Power... over the fourth part of the earth to kill.”*⁴⁰

*“When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, “Come!” I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.”*⁴¹

War and famine beckon the fourth rider. Representing death, the Pale Horse is a yellowish, green color like that of a sick person with severe jaundice.⁴² Another rider, named Hades, follows closely behind to gather up its victims.⁴³ As I write, I cannot help but think of the enormous graveyard outside Harare. It has mushroomed in the past ten years due to the AIDS pandemic. The average life expectancy of Zimbabweans is now a mere 36 years.

GENERAL PROPHECIES

Sword, famine, pestilence and wild beasts appear together in Scripture. John’s selected list is found in the Old Testament judgments that list each of these.⁴⁴ Such a list, however, is not an exhaustive catalogue. They are simply typical

³⁸ Some claim oil and wine are also staples in the East (Deut. 7:13; Hos. 2:8,22). ³⁹ 300 AD, a forewarning of the Arius heresy. ⁴⁰ Rev. 6:8 ⁴¹ Rev. 6:7-8 ⁴² Greek “chloros” root of English word chlorophyll. ⁴³ Ps. 49:14; Isa. 14:9 ⁴⁴ Lev. 26:23-26; 2 Sam. 24:13; Ezek. 14:21

of all sorrows. Interpreters of Revelation have observed these riders in the break-up of the Roman Empire. Others saw them in the French Revolution. Nevertheless, the list of historical events that portray these riders is virtually endless until, of course, we get to the End.

Every war, famine and upheaval to this day and to the day of Christ's Return illustrates these horsemen. Pick up any history book to follow their tracks. The tendency, therefore, to limit each horseman with a onetime event is wrong. These are kinds of events, not single, consecutive ones. Consequently, we cannot assign a definite time to them, since they continue to the end of time. The four horses are among the things that must shortly come to pass.⁴⁵

Questions on what will happen before the End have always been popular.⁴⁶ When asked by His disciples, Jesus said, "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars... There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains."⁴⁷ History confirms the accuracy of Jesus' words. Christ was no false visionary promising an earthly utopia. Nor did His followers like John make wrong claims. Destructive forces will ride across the pages of history until the End.

We must not fear the Pale Horse, for Christ has the keys of death and hell. Jesus foresaw the martyrs and said, "Do not fear them that can kill the body."⁴⁸ "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death."⁴⁹ This brings us to the fifth Seal.



THE SOULS UNDER THE ALTAR CRY FOR VINDICATION

"It was said to them that they should rest ... little season."⁵⁰

"And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony they held."⁵¹

With the opening of the fifth Seal, the scene reverts back to Heaven, and John is shown the results in Heaven of the Four Horseman - the martyrs. Jesus calls His saints to be faithful unto death and promises them a crown of life. That promise is as real as the dangers they face. The martyrs need to see where they are headed. They're not left in the Caesar's arena, but arrive at the very center of the throne where the sacrificial Lamb is already seated.

⁴⁵ "Fourth part" only here (Rev. 6:8), "one third" in Trumpets (Rev. 8:7,8,10,12), "complete" in Bowls (Rev. 15:1). We see a mounting death toll until it's complete in the Bowls. ⁴⁶ Matt. 24:3; Mark 13:4; Luke 21:7 Compare Lord's prophecies with the Seals. Note "the beginning of sorrows," literally "labor pains," commenced in 1st Century. ⁴⁷ Matt. 24:6-8 ⁴⁸ Matt 24:1ff; Mark 13:1ff; Luke 21:1ff ⁴⁹ Matt. 24:9 ⁵⁰ Rev. 6:11 ⁵¹ (Rev. 6:9) Testimony is "martyria," literal martyr-witness. Their souls are "under the altar." (Rev 8:3,5; 9:13; 11:1; 14:18; 16:7).

The martyrs offered themselves up as living sacrifices, laying down their lives. Like in olden times the lifeblood of such offerings was poured out at the foot of the altar.⁵² Paul uses the same imagery. “For I am now ready to be offered (‘to be poured out as a libation’) and the time of my departure is at hand.”⁵³ God’s servants are not promised an easy escape, and the early martyrs did not arrive in Heaven by a secret rapture but by public execution.

HOW LONG?

The pace slows down with the fifth Seal.⁵⁴ God wants His saints to know their death is precious to Him and that He has prepared much for them. He knows that suffering creates questions.⁵⁵ The martyrs know why they died, but they also want to know more. They “*called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?”*”⁵⁶ They are told to rest “*a little while.*” This “*little while,*” in Revelation, is time as heaven measures it.⁵⁷ “For in just a very little while, He who is coming will come and will not delay.”⁵⁸

By asking “*how long?*” we note that these souls did not lose their interest in the earth’s fate. God’s response to them also informs us that a known number must follow in their footsteps. “*Then each of them was given a white robes... until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.*”⁵⁹ John foresees more persecution. A long line of martyrs followed with the Neronian and Domitian persecutions.⁶⁰

Throughout history men like the Bohemian reformer John Hus have laid down their lives for Christ. Hus died at the stake in Constance, Germany, on his forty-second birthday. He refused a final plea to renounce his belief in the supreme authority of Scripture. Hus’ last words were, “*What I taught with my lips, I seal with my blood.*” Our generation has had a great number of martyrs, and with each one their full number moves closer to completion.⁶¹

LORD’S VENGEANCE

The martyrs are not earthly wimps or doormats. That is clear when we hear them ask God to “*avenge*” their deaths. Just retribution is taught throughout the Bible, and it reaches its climax on Judgment Day. Stephen, the Church’s first martyr, cried out on earth words of forgiveness as the Gospel age

⁵² Lev. 4:7 ⁵³ 2 Tim. 4:6; Phil. 2:17 ⁵⁴ More on fifth Seal and Trumpet than first four. ⁵⁵ Question “how long” asked again in Revelation and in OT and NT. (Rev.19:2; Hos. 10:8; Luke 18:7ff). ⁵⁶ Rev. 6:10 ⁵⁷ “A little time” compared to eternity. (Rev. 1:1; 20:3; 12:12; Hag. 2:6,7). ⁵⁸ Heb. 10:37 ⁵⁹ (Rev. 6:11) White robe for martyrs (Rev. 3:4ff; 4:4;7:9,13;19:14) as wedding garments (Matt. 22:11-12). ⁶⁰ Rev. 2:10;3:10 ⁶¹ “Dragon is filled with anger, because he knows his time is short. (Rev. 12:12)

commenced, but before its end the martyrs cry out in Heaven for God's judgment.⁶² Their cry is not for personal vengeance but that God might vindicate their deaths.⁶³ God vindicates His martyrs by raising their bodies, rewarding them with thrones as He did His Son and punishing evil doers.⁶⁴

George Atley was martyred while serving with the Central African Mission. Evidence indicates that Atley was confronted by a band of hostile tribesmen. Although he was carrying a fully-loaded, 10-chamber Winchester rifle, he chose not to use it. When his body was later found in a stream, his rifle was lying nearby with all 10 chambers still loaded. It was evident that he sought to reason with his attackers rather than run the risk of negating his Gospel efforts. George chose to make the supreme sacrifice. As a result, many came to know Christ. Woe to those, however, who rejected George's Savior.

As we move from the fifth to the sixth Seal, we note Revelation's use of symmetry. First the "saints" give us a picture of the very best of mankind, people of real faith – of whom the world was not worthy. With the sixth Seal we are shown the very worst, that is "the kings of the earth" who were often responsible for the saints' deaths. Martyred saints are at the one extreme and the kings of the earth who did the martyring are at the other. With the sixth Seal, God answers the martyrs' cry as the Great Day of Wrath comes.



THE EARTH AND THE HEAVENS ARE MOVED
"For the great day of his wrath is come."⁶⁵

"I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black...whole moon turned red...the stars in the sky fell to earth...Then the kings of the earth... hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"⁶⁶

The opening of the sixth Seal takes us to the great and terrible day of the Lord. Here is all the apocalyptic imagery of the End found elsewhere in Scripture. The motif of sun, moon and stars signal total upheaval in the created order. It represents the final shaking and breaking up of the world and all the terrors associated with the coming judgment. We find the same images elsewhere in Scripture regarding Christ's Second Coming and the world's end.⁶⁷

⁶² Acts 7:60 ⁶³ Saints acknowledge God's right, not their own, to avenge. "It is mine to avenge, I will repay," says the Lord." (Luke 18:7ff; 2 Thess. 1:8). ⁶⁴ Martyrs do not yet experience full bliss; but they do have white overcoming robes and rest from their labors, but not from uttering this cry of "how long?" ⁶⁵ Rev. 6:17 ⁶⁶ Rev. 6:12-17 ⁶⁷ Joel 2:31; Matt. 24:29; Mark 13:24; Luke 21:25; Acts 2:20; Rev. 8:12; 9:2

GREAT EARTHQUAKE

As in the Trumpets and Bowls, a great earthquake announces the End. Earthquakes illustrate judgment for three good reasons: the rumblings that warn, the panic that ensues, and the devastation that follows. The swift and terrible destruction that wiped out the City of Pompeii illustrates all three elements. The explosion was so abrupt the residents were killed while in their daily routine. Men and women were at the market, the rich in their luxurious baths and the slaves at toil. They died amid volcanic ash and superheated gasses.⁶⁸ It is sad to think that they did not have to die that way. Scientists confirm what ancient Roman writers record – weeks of rumblings preceded the actual explosion. If only they had been able to read Vesuvius’s warning. There are similar rumblings today. People need not be caught unaware.⁶⁹

Recently, California’s \$3-billion-a-year pornographic industry was hit by an earthquake, centered in the cities of Northridge, Shatsworth, and Canoga Park, which are home to the U.S. porn industry. A total of around seventy companies suffered damage. Headquarters of VCA Pictures, the largest, collapsed, destroying equipment and master copies of several films.

High-level studio executives and actors became edgy. An executive at World Modeling, a San Fernando Valley agency supplying models to the porn industry, said, “Our clients have a definite lack of motivation. I’m telling you, it’s enough to give you an attack of religion.” Jack Hayford, pastor of Church on the Way in Van Nuys said, “It seems as though the earthquake forced these people to get honest. It has stirred many to the deepest point of introspection, and if just one of them is turned away from the filth they’re involved in, it is a major victory.”⁷⁰

Earthquakes stand for all kinds of natural disaster: hurricanes, typhoons, tornadoes, tsunamis, fires - you name it.⁷¹ Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf of Mexico.⁷² Gambling Casinos along the coast were destroyed and New Orleans lay under water. Pictures of the wreckage of buildings and boats, and crowds of people stranded without food, amid reports of looting and lawlessness conveyed ire apocalyptic feelings.

⁶⁸ May 1984 National Geographic ⁶⁹ *Down to Earth*, by John Lawrence tells of Messina, Sicily’s newspaper that dared God on December 25, 1908 to send an earthquake. Three days later, the city was devastated by a terrible quake that killed thousands. (Today in the Word, October, 1997, pg. 25).

⁷⁰ Hayford asked lawmakers to eliminate child pornography.” (Christianity Today, March 7, 1994, pg. 57). ⁷¹ Judgments as floodwaters are part of man’s psyche from the time of the Great Deluge. But floods no longer equate with a final judgment since God promised not to destroy the earth again by a flood. Floods do however still speak of temporal judgments that occur before the end. (Isa. 59:18-20).

⁷² Name Katrina which struck New Orleans is from a German name that means “pure, virginal.”

When we watch the coverage of natural disasters on CNN like the terrible Tsunami in 2004, never think that those who perished were worse sinners than the rest of us. Jesus taught otherwise. “Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans... Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them - do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”⁷³

ALARM AND DREAD

Apocalyptic images often include celestial phenomena following earthquakes, as the cataclysm extends to all of creation.⁷⁴ The enumeration of upheaval is sevenfold, portraying the all inclusive nature of God’s judgment. “*Earthquake, sun, moon, stars, mighty wind, heaven departed... And every mountain and island... moved.*” Can the world abide a day longer? The cry of the martyrs is answered. Judgment time has come and the people of the world know it. We can see it in our mind’s eye as we imagine the ensuing panic. Mankind’s response is outlined by Isaiah. “And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he arises to shake terribly the earth.”⁷⁵

Mankind’s fear of judgment began in Genesis. “I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid.”⁷⁶ It climaxes in the last book of the Bible when Jesus Returns.⁷⁷ It is the day to settle all scores and the world responds in great fear, for “it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”⁷⁸ It is so dreadful that the ungodly would rather have the mountains fall on them than face Him. Luke uses the same image. “Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, “Fall on us: and to the hills, cover us.”⁷⁹ Were the mountains to fall on them their bodies would be crushed, but there is something worse than such a death. The material universe cannot crush a soul, but the weight of guilt can. Jesus said, “Whoever falls on this Stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed to powder.”⁸⁰

LAMB’S WRATH

These men have, no doubt, faced hard times, but the lost cannot face the End. What makes this so terrible? Revelation describes it as “*the wrath of the Lamb*” and “*the great day of His wrath.*”⁸¹ Wrath alone can be terrible

⁷³ Luke 13:1-5 ⁷⁴ Rev. 6:12-14; 8:5ff; 11:13-19; 16:18ff ⁷⁵ Isa. 2:19 ⁷⁶ Gen. 3:10 ⁷⁷ Rev. 1:7 ⁷⁸ Heb. 10:31 ⁷⁹ Luke 23:30 ⁸⁰ Matt. 21:44 AMP. ⁸¹ (Rev. 6:16) A Lamb, symbol of gentleness, in wrath, creates unexampled strangeness. Whatever is more strange is more terrifying.

but the longer in exciting wrath in a person the more terrible when it appears. The wrath of the Lamb, therefore, implies a most terrible provocation. To openly reject the Lamb's loving sacrifice is to provoke immeasurable wrath. The face of Him that is altogether lovely is a distressing sight to the sinner who rejects the Son of God. He who loves with perfect purity of heart brings untold dread to their souls. For by fighting against the Lord all their lives, the ungodly have treasured up "wrath against the day of wrath."⁸²

"When Sunnie Gets Angry" is the story of a woman with an unusual nickname. Sunnie drove a London ambulance in the Blitz during the Battle for Britain. Wanting to bring sunshine to others, she persuaded London's famous Dorchester Hotel to offer free lunches to wounded soldiers. She was having lunch with a group of young soldiers who had been badly burned, when the headwaiter came with a complaint from a table of wealthy patrons. "Their meal," they said, "was being ruined by such repulsive burns." In tones that belied her nickname, Sunnie responded by furiously demanding to know how they could complain about boys who had been burned fighting to save their very lives. "Because they have burned faces, you can't enjoy your dinner?" she cried. "Well, too damned bad!" And with that, she picked up a glass of water and threw it in their faces.

We will not understand Revelation unless we read it in the context of God's judgment upon a world that has rejected His Son and persecuted His children. And a world that has run out of time. But those who have accepted Christ do not need to fear. They can calmly look forward to that day, not shrinking back in terror like many others. In fact, saints will be drawn to Jesus like a magnet to meet Him at His coming. John's vision also helps one face death. Like Stephen, they see heaven open and the Son of God standing to receive them. John's vision tells every believer "your trials and crosses, disappointments and losses will not hinder Christ's good purposes for you."



SEVEN ANGELS GIVEN SEVEN TRUMPETS

"And I saw the seven angels and to them were given seven trumpets."⁸³

The seventh Seal, we said, transitions John's vision to the seven Trumpets.⁸⁴ *"When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven... And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets."⁸⁵* Although one might expect the opening of the seventh Seal to follow the sixth, the first interlude comes instead, prompted by a crucial question. *"Who shall be able to stand?"* The prophet Malachi closed the Old Testament with that same question but added the phrase, *"When He appears?"⁸⁶*

⁸² Wrath is righteous indignation against evil. ⁸³ Rev. 8:2 ⁸⁴ Rev. 8:6ff ⁸⁵ Rev. 8:1-2 ⁸⁶ Mal. 3:2

WHO CAN STAND?

The question of “*who can stand*” introduces a long pause before Seal seven. During this intervening period, God answers that question. Next chapter we see that only those who are sealed can stand in the Day of Judgment. This period between the sixth and seventh Seal is a time when God seals men unto the day of redemption. This answers not only the question of “*who can stand*,” but also the martyrs’ earlier question of “*how long?*” It will take as long as it takes to seal the saints: “*until the number of their fellow servants.*” In other words, the End will only come once all of God’s children are redeemed.

Most apocalyptic works exhibit a similar teaching. God affords a special kind of protection when he executes judgment on this evil world. Some literature claims that by prayer and fidelity, tribulation is minimized. Others say that by discerning the signs, believers can beat a hasty exit from affected areas like the First Century Jews who got of Jerusalem before the Roman army laid siege or like those who fled Nazi Germany when they could leave. Still other writings promise that the time of suffering would be shortened.⁸⁷

War, famine and disease affect righteous believers as well as unbelievers. And yet, God does make a difference between them. The plagues that fell on Egypt did not affect the Israelites, God’s covenant people, in the same way it did the Egyptians. Yes, it does rain on the just and the unjust, but the Lord knows how to morally and spiritually rescue godly men, and to hold the unrighteous accountable until the Day of Judgment.⁸⁸ From 1999-2007, I witnessed a mass exodus of three million people from Zimbabwe. Those who remained shared remarkable testimonies of how God cared for them during that time. God always makes a difference in life and in death.

Summary

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse ride: each with his own color, weapon, and function. But what in the past, present or future do they characterize? The Futurists say we haven’t seen anything like them yet; it must be something still to come. The Historical School points to specific wars, famines, and plagues in history. Both would narrow their significance to a when and a where, dating them. I have argued, however, that these things will never go out of date until Christ comes. We can not confine them to localized events in a passing moment of history. The Horsemen are ever current. There are African, Asian and every other land versions of these Horsemen. It is easy to document their presence today; any CNN newscast will serve.

⁸⁷ Mark 13:14-1-20 ⁸⁸ 2 Peter 2:9

The Seals began with the going forth of the Gospel and include the various forces that ride across the stage of history. They take us to the saints in glory and the end of the age.⁸⁹ They portray the general character of the period stretching from Christ's resurrection to His return. The sixth Seal features the final upheavals mentioned elsewhere in Scripture that bring us to the great day of God's wrath. The ongoing experience of war, famine and death itself are a forewarning of that day, meant to promote repentance in sinners and a supernatural courage in the saints.

"Casualties of War" is a true story of a squad of soldiers that fought in Vietnam. Michael J. Fox plays Private Erikson. He learns of the abduction and rape of a young Vietnamese girl that fellow soldiers committed. As he struggles with what has happened, he says to the other men in his squad, "Just because each of us might at any second be blown away, we're acting like we can

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Who do you think is the first rider?
2. Why do the other riders follow?
3. How do you understand general prophecies in relation to the Seals?
4. What strikes you most about the cry of the martyrs?
5. Why do you consider the wrath of the Lamb to be so dreadful?
6. When you read Revelation chapter six what strikes you the most?
7. What do the Seals tell us of tomorrow?

do anything we want, as though it doesn't matter what we do. I'm thinking it's just the opposite. Because we might be dead in the next split second, maybe we gotta be extra careful what we do. Because maybe it matters more. Maybe it matters more than we ever know."

⁸⁹ Rev. 6:1-2,12-17;7:9-17

CHAPTER TEN

SERVANTS SEALED SEVEN FACETS IN REVELATION 7:1-17

“The World’s Worst Predictions” catalogues history’s great forecasting blunders. In 1773, King George II said, “the American colonies have little stomach for revolution.” An official declared “the Titanic unsinkable.” And just days before the attack on Pearl Harbor, U.S. Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox said, “whatever happens, the Navy will not be caught napping!”

When it comes to foretelling the day Christ will return, results are no better. As early as 53 A .D., the Thessalonians were troubled by rumors that the day had arrived.¹ Although Jesus taught against date setting, it is still done.² Not long ago, Harold Whisenant wrote, “88 Reasons Why Christ Will Come Back in 1988.” His book sold six million copies that year. Although Christ did not return, that did not keep Harold from coming out the following year with a new book called, “89 Reasons Why the Rapture is in 1989.”

Someone called this “the Wolf, wolf factor!” You know the story. The boy cried, “wolf!” He sent the herdsmen running time and again. When a real wolf did come prowling, no one responded to his cries. In a similar way, date-setting discourages men from anticipating and proclaiming Jesus’ Return.³

BILLIONS OF REASONS

In response to Whisenant’s prediction, Bob Hoskins published a book with a catchy title. “UNFINISHED: 2.7 Billion Reasons Jesus Didn’t Come in 1988.” Bob’s point was the Gospel must be preached “in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the End will come.”⁴

Revelation chapter seven is the Bible’s answer as to why the End tarries. The End only comes after God has ‘sealed’ His own. This vital act of sealing answers two questions raised in chapter six. “*Who can stand? and “How long?”* Those sealed can stand and that Judgment Day only comes when the full number of Jewish and Gentile believers are sealed. In the first half of chapter seven, we see the sealing of the Jewish remnant: “A hundred and forty-four thousand.” In the second half, the Gentile converts: “A great

¹ 2 Thess. 2:1-3 ² W. Miller and Seventh-day Adventists, J. Smith and Mormons, H. W. Armstrong and the World-wide Church of God all set wrong dates for the Lord’s Return. ³ Date-setting arises from a misconception that Revelation contains a chronological road map to the End. ⁴ Matt. 24:14

multitude, which no man could number.”⁵ Seven great truths on the sealing of God’s servants follow.



THE END AWAITS THE SEALING OF GOD’S SERVANTS
“Hold back... until we put a seal on the servants.”⁶

“After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: “Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.”⁷

FOUR WINDS AND FOUR HORSES

What do the four winds represent? From the text and other passages, they signify powerful, destructive, forces.⁸ Angels restrain and at times release these forces.⁹ These Four Winds are a similar image to the Four Horsemen. Zechariah also uses both images together. “During the night I had a vision... a man riding a red horse... I asked, “What are these, my lord... They are the ones the LORD has sent to go throughout the earth.”¹⁰ “These are the four winds of heaven, going out from standing in the presence of the Lord... When the powerful horses went out, they were straining to go throughout the earth.”¹¹ Zechariah’s horses match John’s. Plus, in both, the Lord has a bow.¹²

Angels are told to hold back the four winds until God’s servants are sealed. “Do not harm...until.” Destructive forces cannot ride like the wind to the north, south, east and west until God’s servants are sealed.¹³ There are many examples of this in Scripture. In Ezekiel, the Lord tells an angel to set a mark on the foreheads of the men of Jerusalem who grieve because of the wickedness in the city.¹⁴ Afterwards, angels slaughter everyone who is not marked. The Israelites Passover in Egypt also provides a fitting example. God gave His people time to sprinkle the doorposts of their houses with the blood of the Paschal lamb before the destroying angels struck the land of Egypt.¹⁵ First-born Israelites were thus able to stand during that last deadly plague.

⁵ Rev. 7:4,9 ⁶ Rev. 7:1 ⁷ Rev 7:1-3 ⁸ “Upon Elam will I bring the four winds... I will bring evil upon them.” (Jer. 49:36,37). Four winds connected with judgment. (1 Kings 19:11; Job 1:19; 21:18; 30:15; Ps. 1:4; 117:18; Isa. 11:15; 27:8; 32:2; 41:16; Jer. 22:22; Dan. 2:35; 7:2). ⁹ God acts through various agencies everywhere in the universe. (Hos. 2:21,22; Rev. 7:1-3; 8:2). ¹⁰ Zech. 1:8-10 ¹¹ Zech. 6:1-7 ¹² Zech. 9:13ff ¹³ Noah’s Ark had to be built before the Deluge. ¹⁴ Ezek. 9:3ff ¹⁵ Hebrew word translated “mark” in Ezekiel is tav, which is the last letter of their alphabet. It is reminiscent of the blood sprinkled on the doorposts. As the letters of the Arabic alphabet developed, the tav became our “T,” which resembles a cross, reminding us how the Spirit uses Christ’s blood to shield us.

Sodom's ruin was also delayed. The wrath of God was ready to burst forth on the wicked cities of the plain, but it was restrained until one righteous man was safe.¹⁶ The landowner in Jesus' parable applies a similar practice. His workers must wait until harvest to pull up the weeds so as not to unwittingly uproot the wheat with them.¹⁷

NONE LOST

The restraint of the wind until God's own are sealed tells us that God's redemptive purposes have priority in human history. Everything that happens including the End itself is subservient to the salvation of God's very last child. For that reason this Gospel must be preached everywhere. And everyone who has been given to Christ must come to Him. He gives them eternal life and nothing can snatch them out of His hand.¹⁸ Jesus drives home this point in John's Gospel. "All that the Father gives me will come to me. . . . And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day."¹⁹

Everyone who belongs to Christ has not come to Him; yet, given a little more time, they will. Peter said, "Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation."²⁰ "Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains."²¹ From the time of Christ's ascension until His Return, the Holy Spirit brings people to Christ and seals every single one of them. Thank God predictions of the End on a certain day have been wrong. If the world had ended a hundred years ago, where would you and I be? "Praise be to God! He chose us before the creation."²²



THE HOLY SPIRIT IS GOD'S SEAL

"You were marked in him with a seal, promised Holy Spirit."²³

John saw "those who were sealed" by God's Holy Spirit.²⁴ "You also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth...Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit."²⁵ Revelation could not have utilized a better symbol for salvation than that of a Seal. It's such a fitting image and it speaks volumes concerning our salvation. Although the sealing begins with a Jewish remnant, it includes all of Christ's servants.²⁶ God's seal is a major doctrine and one of the most comforting ones in the Bible. No other doctrine makes the believer's security so vivid and undeniable.

¹⁶ "I cannot do anything till thou be come thither." (Gen. 19:22). ¹⁷ Matt 13:29-30 ¹⁸ John 10:27-29 ¹⁹ John 6:37-39 ²⁰ 2 Peter 3:15; James 5:7-8; John 6:37 ²¹ John 10:16 ²² Eph. 1:3-5 ²³ Eph. 1:13 ²⁴ Rev. 7: 4 ²⁵ Eph. 1:13 ²⁶ Being sealed is not the same as being filled with the Spirit. God calls us to be "filled" but there is no exhortation to seek to be sealed. (Eph. 5:18).

Beginning with the letter ‘A,’ I outline seven facets of Seals, explaining *what* sealing means, *why* it is so comforting and *how* it applies to our salvation.

(1) Agreement: a seal is evidence of agreement - a signed contract

Christ died for the sins of the whole world and offers salvation to “whoever believes;” yet, the Spirit seals the transaction individually once we believe. The believer has “set to his seal (certified) that God is true.”²⁷ So God signs, as it were, His name on our hearts by His Spirit. God gave Abraham circumcision as an outward “seal” of that covenant.²⁸ The New Covenant seal, though, is inward upon our heart.²⁹ It is a work that God, not man, performs.³⁰

(2) Acquisition: a seal shows absolute ownership - a title deed

“You are not your own; you were bought at a price.”³¹ “God anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts.”³² When Jeremiah bought land, the deed to the land was signed and sealed. The seal established him as the new owner.³³ In a similar fashion, Jesus purchased us with His blood and the Spirit is His seal of ownership. It is like a branding mark on livestock – baaaa! But “if any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.”³⁴ Occurring the moment we believe, this seal is invisible, and yet it is evident to angels and demons that we belong to God.

(3) Authenticity: a seal indicates genuineness - a notary’s stamp

The Holy Spirit’s seal proves you are the genuine article and prevents fraud. “God’s solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: “The Lord knows those who are his,” and, “Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.”³⁵ Those whom God has purchased and marked as His own, He certifies as bona fide. The Spirit testifies by bearing witness with our spirit that we are God’s children.³⁶ No one can successfully challenge what we are or to whom we belong. It is like when a king sealed a letter with his “signet” to establish his authorship.³⁷ The hearts of the believers at Corinth showed that they were real letters from King Jesus.³⁸

(4) Assurance: a seal is a guarantee of workmanship - a warranty

Guarantees are important to us, especially on major purchases. They indicate that the manufacturer stands behind his product, since workmanship is at times unreliable. However, God workmanship is as reliable as Jesus. “On Jesus the Father has placed his seal of approval.”³⁹ And the Bible says, we are God’s workmanship created in Christ. The Holy Spirit thus ensures that God will complete the good work of salvation that He began in us. Like God’s oath to Abraham, God guarantees our defects will be fixed.⁴⁰

²⁷ John 3:33 ²⁸ Rom. 4:11 ²⁹ Col. 2:11 ³⁰ Song 8:6 “Place me like a seal over your heart.” ³¹ 1 Cor. 6:19-20 ³² 2 Cor. 1:21-22 ³³ Jer. 32:10ff ³⁴ Rom. 8:9 ³⁵ 2 Tim. 2:19 ³⁶ 1 John 4:13 ³⁷ 1 Kings 21:8
³⁸ “You are a letter of Christ... written by the Spirit.” (2 Cor. 3:3) ³⁹ John 6:27 ⁴⁰ Heb. 6:13-18

(5) Account deposit: a seal is a pledge or promise to confirm - a ring

A pledge in Bible times was someone's seal. When Judah asked Tamar, "what pledge should I give you," she quickly asked for his "seal."⁴¹ God's pledge is the Holy Spirit. He is like the down payment you make on a house. As God's temples, the Spirit dwells inside our heart, assuring us that there is more to come. Ultimately our bodies will be transformed at the resurrection – which is full redemption.⁴² The Holy Spirit is "a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession."⁴³

(6) Alarm: a seal is a protective device - an alarm

Treasures, Jesus' tomb, and a young woman's virginity are said to be sealed.⁴⁴ We are said 'to seal' our valuables in a safe to protect them from theft. We also place a seal on medicine bottles to protect against and detect tampering. The label reads, "Do not use if the seal is broken." To say the Holy Spirit seals us for the day of redemption is to say He guards and protects us so that neither Satan nor any power in creation can separate us from Jesus. And yet, we need to cooperate with this protective seal of the Spirit. "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."⁴⁵ Although the Spirit's seal is extremely durable and designed to last,⁴⁶ Paul does list things that deeply grieve Him.

The seal of the Spirit is also designed to impress upon us Christ's image.⁴⁷ The ancient process of applying a seal serves to illustrate this process. As wax was heated, a signet ring was impressed upon an object creating a seal. Christ is our signet and we are being conformed to His image. During our earthly life, we remain in contact with Him, allowing the imprint of the fine lines of His character. During fiery trials, His image sets itself deeply in us. His image will solidify in us and be permanent through the ages of eternity.

(7) Authority: a seal is delegated authority - a signet ring

When Daniel was thrown into the lions' den, King Darius put his seal on the stone that was placed over its entrance. Due to the king's seal, Daniel's situation could not be changed.⁴⁸ If anyone broke it, they faced the wrath of Darius' kingdom. Jesus' tomb also had the seal of the Roman Government placed at its entrance. Guards too were positioned to stop anyone who would try. Seals stand for delegated authority. Queen Esther used the king's seal to issue a decree for the Jews to defend themselves.⁴⁹ Pharaoh gave Joseph his seal to rule on his behalf.⁵⁰ The point is that when the Holy Spirit seals us, we have God-given authority in Jesus' name and on the basis of His word.

⁴¹ Gen. 38:18 ⁴² Eph. 2:10; 2 Cor. 5:5 ⁴³ Eph. 1:14 ⁴⁴ Deut. 32:34; Matt. 27:66; Isa. 29:11; Song 4:12
⁴⁵ Eph. 4:30 ⁴⁶ Some teach the Spirit's seal can be broken. Others that it is impossible. ⁴⁷ Christ's image in us begins when we are sealed. Scriptures do however teach that there is an ongoing bearing of Christ's image from glory to glory. ⁴⁸ Dan. 6:17 ⁴⁹ Est. 3:8ff; 8:2 ⁵⁰ Gen. 41:42

The Father is the Sealer, the Spirit is the Seal, and the believer is the Sealed. Sealing means agreement, acquisition, and authenticity. It provides us with blessed assurance. I do not know of a more vivid image that God could have used in Revelation. Our salvation is assured by God before He dismantles His first creation. And He has put His signature to the New Creation. That seal guarantees more to come, a promise that His resemblance will be completed in us. By it we exercise authority.

The seal is visible to no human eye, graven by no man and accompanied by no physical sensations. The writing is by the finger of God. Whatever sweeps over the world, those sealed will never be lost in the crowd. This sealing is held in stark contrast to the mark of the Beast. As everywhere in this mighty book, stark contrasts are drawn. In the final analysis, people will either bear the seal of God or the mark of the Beast.



A JEWISH REMNANT IS FIRST SEALED

“Though the number....Only the remnant will be saved.”⁵¹

“And I heard the number.”⁵² “From all the tribes of Israel,” a number is sealed.⁵³ The sealing begins with a Jewish remnant because the Jew is first in God’s economy. It is a fact. The gospel came first to the Jews and therefore in John’s vision it follows that they are initially sealed. Paul understood this gospel principle. “It is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: *first* for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”⁵⁴ Paul also applies this principle to the judgments of God. “There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: *first* for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”⁵⁵

Jews are God’s covenant people to whom promises were made. The witness of the Gospel began with them in Jerusalem. “Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”⁵⁶ Jesus reiterates this sequence. “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”⁵⁷ With “God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven” in Jerusalem on Pentecost, the Gospel quickly went to the Diaspora. And we read of Jews “telling the message only to Jews.”⁵⁸ The early church was thus predominantly Jewish.

A REMNANT

John’s vision of an inaugural sealing of a remnant of Israelites fits history. But before long, the gospel went to the nations. “Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “We had to speak the word of God to you *first*. Since you reject

⁵¹ Rom. 9:27 ⁵² Rev. 7: 5 ⁵³ Rev. 7:3-4 ⁵⁴ Rom. 1:16 ⁵⁵ Rom. 2:9 ⁵⁶ Luke 24:27

it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles... and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.”⁵⁹ By the time John wrote Revelation, Jews of the Diaspora had heard the Gospel and many were hardened against it. The Book of Acts ends with Paul confronting this hardness and indicating that the Gospel was now sent to the nations. “For this people’s heart has become calloused... Therefore I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!”⁶⁰

A Jewish remnant, sealed at the outset, becomes the first fruits of the Gospel. But they number only a 144,000. That number is further broken down as 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes. Limiting the sealed of Israel illustrates the age-old doctrine of a Jewish remnant. The 144,000 stand for a complete number of the physical descendants of Abraham who believed in Jesus. The Messiah came to His own but His own did not receive Him. Paul agonized over his Jewish kinsmen, because they had rejected their Lord. He also understood them, because he had once persecuted the Church in unbelief. For Paul and his fellow Jewish brothers like John, the apostasy of Israel created a big question. What about God’s covenant relationship to Israel? The inspired answer to the Jewish apostasy was multi-faceted, revealing God’s manifold wisdom. I outline seven facets of that answer given by Paul in Romans.

1. God saves a remnant of Israelites.

“I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin... And what was God’s answer to him? “I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.”⁶¹

2. For not every natural Israelite is a child of promise.

“They are not all Israel, which are of Israel.” Abraham’s children came through Sarah. Isaac, not Ishmael, was the promised child. The same was true of Isaac’s offspring. Jacob born of Rebecca, not Esau, received the blessings of his father’s birthright.⁶²

3. Israel’s Salvation is by God’s gracious promise and not human effort.

“It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.”⁶³ “Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the “stumbling stone.”⁶⁴

4. Blindness in part happened to natural Israel for a season.

“God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day... Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all!”⁶⁵

⁵⁷ Acts 1:8 ⁵⁸ Acts 11:19 ⁵⁹ Acts 13:46-49 ⁶⁰ Acts 28:27-28 ⁶¹ Rom. 11:1-5 ⁶² Rom. 9:6-13 ⁶³ Rom. 9:6 ⁶⁴ Rom. 9:32; 11: 6-7 ⁶⁵ Rom. 11:8-11

5. Israel's blindness opened salvation to the Gentiles.

“Because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.” “The fall of Israel means riches to the nations.”⁶⁶

6. Blindness is due to unbelief but they can still believe.

Paul compares Israel to a cultivated olive tree and Gentiles to a wild olive tree. God can graft Israel back into the olive tree. “If they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.”⁶⁷

7. A time is coming when natural Israel will believe and be saved.

God will fulfill his covenant promises to Abraham. “For the gifts and callings of God are without repentance.”⁶⁸ “Blindness in part is happened in Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles come in. So all of Israel shall be saved.”

In our day many Jews are coming to faith in Jesus as the Messiah. It is like the story of a Jewish man who wanted his son to understand his faith; so he sent him to the Holy Land. His son returned, saying, “Father, it was very enlightening, but I must confess that while there I became a Messianic Jew.” In the tradition of the patriarchs, the father went to his best friend to seek advice. “It is amazing that you should come to me,” stated his friend, “I too sent my son to Israel and he returned a Jew for Jesus.” So they went to their Rabbi. “It is amazing that you should come to me,” said the Rabbi. “I too sent my son to Israel and he returned ‘born again.’ Brothers, we must go to God.” As they prayed the clouds above them opened and a mighty voice stated, “Amazing that you should come to Me. I, too, sent *My Son* to Israel and He returned....”

God's New Covenant seal began with the Jews and will end with the Jews. Before Jesus returns, we can expect many Jews to receive Him as the Messiah. For the Father sent His Son to save Israel. Paul thus warns Gentile believers against pride and presumption. Restoration is coming for them. We pick up this theme in Revelation chapter thirteen when John measures the temple.



SEALED ARE 144,000 – 12,000 FROM EACH TRIBE.

“Then I heard the number sealed: 144,000 from all...of Israel.”⁶⁹

“Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel. From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000 ...Asher 12,000, ...Naphtali 12,000, ...Manasseh 12,000, ...Simeon 12,000, ...Levi 12,000, ...Issachar 12,000, ...Zebulun 12,000, ...Joseph 12,000, ...Benjamin 12,000.”⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Rom. 11:11-15 ⁶⁷ Rom. 11:19-24 ⁶⁸ Rom. 11:25 ⁶⁹ Rev. 7:4 ⁷⁰ Rev. 7:4-8

The sealing of the 144,000 is an interlude between the sixth and seventh Seal. The End is delayed until God places a protective seal on His servants. He begins by sealing His Jewish remnant. Each tribe is listed as having 12,000 sealed. Two related questions often arise from this passage. Is the number of 144,000 literal or symbolic and why the tribal breakdown?

CONFLICTING THEORIES

Do the 144,000 represent Jewish believers in the First Century?⁷¹ Do they stand also for all Christians or something else? Futurists teach that these are Jews who will come to Christ during the Great Tribulation. The 144,000 serve God as evangelists to the nations for 3 ½ years. There are also sects, whose leaders consider their own peculiar followers as constituting the 144,000.⁷² If you meet such people, you might ask them, “Which tribe, please?” Invariably, they are put to confusion for want of an answer.

What does the 144,000 actually signify? Since twelve is the number of discipleship, and we have twelve times twelve to make 144,000, I maintain that the number represents a full remnant of believing Jews. They are part of the class who is emphatically termed by Paul “a remnant” chosen by God’s gracious election.⁷³ Jeremiah prophesied of this election: “I will choose you - one from a town and two from a clan- and bring you to Zion.”⁷⁴ The 12 times 12, making 144 is then multiplied by a 1000 to equal 144,000. We saw when a number is multiplied by a 1000, it signifies a total number.

TRIBAL QUESTION

Tribal divisions were basic to Israel’s life in the period prior to the monarchy, but by John’s day the scattered tribes had lost their identity.⁷⁵ This list is not intended as an historical reconstruction of the lost tribes of Israel. It is much more basic.⁷⁶ ‘Tribes’ merely fixes attention upon the actual descendants of the patriarchs. It indicates a total number of literal descendants of Abraham, from “all” the tribes of Israel are sealed. Judah is rightfully the first tribe sealed.⁷⁷ For Jesus, the Messiah, came from Judah.⁷⁸

⁷¹ The 144,000 has a dual use like the term Jew. Paul defines a Jew not outwardly, “after the flesh,” but inwardly by the new birth “after the spirit.” (Rom. 1:16). ⁷² The 144 000 appear again (Rev.14:1). Another parallel - not another 144,000. They are described as being virgins. Jehovah Witnesses take the number literally but not the term virgins. ⁷³ Rom. 9:27; 11:5,6; Isa. 10: 20-22; 65:8-9 ⁷⁴ Jer. 3:14 ⁷⁵ “And I will scatter you among the nations” (Lev. 26:33; Ja. 1:1). “Yet shall not the least [kernel] fall upon the earth.” (Amos 9:8-9). ⁷⁶ Paul uses the terms Jew and Israelite interchangeably, calling himself both (Acts 21:39; 22:3; Rom. 11:1; 2 Cor. 11:22), and Peter a “Jew” though from Galilee (Gal. 2:14). Ezra calls the remnant Jews (8 times) and Israel (40 times). Nehemiah Jews (11 times) and Israel (22 times). British-Israelites claim that these terms can never be used interchangeably; they teach that 10 tribes migrated westward and became ancestors of the Saxons. God says “I will sift the house of Israel among all nations” not just into Great Britain (Amos 9:9). ⁷⁷ Rev. 5:5 ⁷⁸ John 6:27

Since the sealed come from all twelve tribes, not just some, it is said that all sections of the church are represented.⁷⁹ Such an application of the text is merely illustrative. It counters sectarian exclusiveness, which has often reared its head in the churches. Not only are cults prone to sectarianism, but any group who claims ‘they are it.’ Such groups display the dynamics of a closed system, speaking and acting as if they have a monopoly on God. They contradict the fact that God, not man, seals His servants.



FULL NUMBER OF GENTILES ARE SEALED.

“Full number of the Gentiles.”⁸⁰

“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”⁸¹

A great host of people from all nations, which no one could number, are sealed. So that among God’s elect there will be a complete thought limited number of faithful Israelites in contrast to an innumerable multitude of Gentiles.

This is a similar scene to what we saw when John was caught up to Heaven. John’s vision of a vast throng tells us that Heaven is not an unpeopled place. The crowd stretched beyond what John’s eyes could see, numbers far too great for human calculation. This great crowd is “the full number of the Gentiles.” Paul also uses that inspired phrase. “Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.”⁸² Scripture tells us that this number is from every race, clan, ethnic and linguistic group. And only God knows when that number is complete.

AMEN TO SALVATION

Our friends in heaven have reached that sacred ground by a common redemption – our Lord’s atoning sacrifice. The multitude thus cries with a loud voice. *“Salvation belongs to our God...and unto the Lamb.”* They also cry, *“forever and ever. Amen!”* “Let all the people say, Amen.” Amen is one of two universal words that all strangers have in common, regardless of their language. “Hallelujah” is the other word. By “amen” the redeemed shout, “Lord, I mean this.” In Heaven, as in Scripture, it means that this is absolutely true and can be fully trusted.

⁷⁹ Tribe of Dan omitted here. Some say because Dan first went into idolatry. Two tribes from Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim. ⁸⁰ Rom. 1:16; 11:25 ⁸¹ Rev. 7: 9-12 ⁸² Rom. 11:25

The celestial multitudes have no doubt that *“salvation belongs to God.”* More than a billion *“amens”* affirm it. And when anyone utters a real amen to God’s salvation, God responds with a Holy Spirit seal. That seal produces a genuine *“hallelujah!”* And when the last sincere salvation amen is uttered, it signals the end of this age and a full choir to sing the Hallelujah Chorus.

Revelation answers us on why the End has not come and how long till then. *“Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.”*⁸³ George Mueller wrote in his journal, *“when it pleased God in July, 1829, to reveal to my heart the truth of the personal return of the Lord Jesus... I was stirred up to feel compassion for perishing sinners, and for the slumbering world around me lying in the Wicked One and considered, ‘Ought I not to do what I can for the Lord Jesus while He tarries, and to rouse a slumbering church?’”*

Peter calls us to *“look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.”*⁸⁴ Eva Hart understands this relationship between anticipation and activity. On the night of April 15, 1912, she was on board the Titanic before it plunged 12,000 feet to the bottom of the ocean. Only twenty lifeboats were launched and many only partly filled. Once in the water most of these boats moved off for fear of being swamped by too many passengers. They saved no one while awaiting the ocean liner’s descent. However, one boat, Number Fourteen, rowed back alone and went after the cries for help from the icy waters. As a result, they were able to save several that would have perished that night.



MULTITUDES ENTER GLORY VIA GREAT TRIBULATION

*“These are they who have come out of the great tribulation.”*⁸⁵

*“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb... Then one of the elders asked me, ‘These in white robes - who are they, and where did they come from?’ I answered, ‘Sir, you know.’ And he said, ‘These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’”*⁸⁶

VIA DEATH’S DOOR

Some allege that this vast crowd was removed from earth by a Rapture. They claim that is how the multitude arrived before God’s throne. John, however, clearly teaches that they came out via death’s door. The victors of the heavenly church gained their victories by passing through the great ordeal and not

⁸³ Joel 3:14 ⁸⁴ 2 Peter 3:12 ⁸⁵ Rev. 7:14 ⁸⁶ Rev. 7:9,13-14

detouring around it. They passed through ‘many dangers, toils and snares’ during their life on earth, including physical death. Through trouble they made their way to rest and through conflict to triumph. Just as the martyrs we read about who cried “*how long?*” To whom the Lord said, “*Wait a little while until the others should die in like manner.*” If this multitude had escaped the tribulation, why would God promise them that they would not hunger, thirst or experience burning heat any more?⁸⁷

NOT ALL AT ONCE

This vast multitude came out of great troubles but not all at once. The present active tense of the Greek verb is best translated: “*these are they which are coming out of the tribulation, the great one.*” It is not “*these are they which came,*” as if all were past. Nor is it, “*these are they which will come,*” as if all were future. But “*these are they which are coming.*” There is a continuous departure of them from the world of care to the realm of peace. And this will continue till Christ comes at the end of the age.⁸⁸ Part of the Church is still coming out while part has come out and is in Heaven.⁸⁹ The first part is kept while in the midst of evil; the second part is raised above it to the perfect calm that abides there.⁹⁰



SAINTS IN GLORY EXPERIENCE GOD’S COMPLETE COMFORT
“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”⁹¹

“They are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”⁹²

Notice the heavenly multitude await the End with “palms in their hands.” These palms connect John’s vision with the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles since a chief feature of the celebration was this carrying of palm branches.⁹³ The idea of this Jewish feast is carried on in the verse that follows with the words, “shall spread His tabernacle (tent) over them.”⁹⁴

⁸⁷ God promises to wipe away all tears from their eyes. Revelation teaches “Blessed are they that die in the Lord, their works do follow.” (Rev. 14:13) ⁸⁸ Believers who are on earth when Christ comes will meet this crowd in the air. ⁸⁹ Those in heaven have not yet received their glorified bodies. (He. 12:22-26). ⁹⁰ 1 Cor. 15:51-52 ⁹¹ Rev. 7: 17 ⁹² Rev. 7:15-17 ⁹³ 2 Macc. 10:6,7; Ps. 118:25; John 7:13;12:13; Neh. 8:14-17; John 7:8ff;12:13ff ⁹⁴ Rev.7:16 R.V.

The Feast of Tabernacles was the most joyous of all Israel's holy days. The Jews said, "He did not know joy who knew not the Feast of Tabernacles." The feast was held at the close of the year and with it a season of rest began. The feast celebrated "all that was safely gathered in the harvest." Tabernacles were set up with branches, reminding Israel of her wilderness days, and celebrating God's abundant supply, now harvested in the Promised Land ⁹⁵

The joy that will surprise us when we arrive in Heaven is illustrated in the story of a millionaire bachelor. He wanted to marry but thought, "If I marry one of the girls who knows me, I am afraid she would marry me for my money and not because she loves me." So he decided to relocate for a season and take employment as a laborer in a large factory that employed young women. It was not long before he fell in love with a beautiful working girl and was married.

He then said to her, "I want you to go out west and visit my people." She was thrilled to go on a honeymoon trip, although she wondered how they would afford the expense. When they reached his home city, a new limousine, driven by a uniformed chauffeur, awaited them. She wondered at this but said nothing. The car was whisked down a splendid avenue and pulled up

before a great mansion. "Here is where we will stop." Her heart almost stopped, for she thought how short their stay must be at so expensive a place. After he had closed the door behind them, he told her all the truth that this was his home and now her home. She was amazed beyond words and oh how amazed we will be when we view the beauty of our eternal home.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why has the world not yet ended?
2. What facet of the seven seals of the Holy Spirit do you like best and why?
3. How do you understand the 144,000?
4. How would you answer someone who asked you "what about the Jews?"
5. When should we expect the full of number of Gentile converts?
6. How do you think the great multitude entered Heaven?
7. Who are you praying for God to seal?

⁹⁵ John provides a description of the true Promised Land in Revelation chapter 21, connected by the tender thought of God wiping away every tear from our eyes. Troubles befall the Church because of the world; and the troubles which fall on the world are because of its treatment of Israel, the Church and their own inhabitants.

NOTES

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SEVEN TRUMPETS

JUDGMENT AND MERCY IN REVELATION 8:6 -10:7

Two men in a small village had a big dispute, which they could not resolve. So each decided to talk to the town sage. The first man told him his version of the story. When he finished, the sage said, “You’re absolutely right.” The next night, the second man called on the sage and gave his account. The sage responded, “You’re absolutely right.” The sage’s wife chided her husband. “Those men told you different stories and you told them they were both right. That’s impossible - they can’t both be right.” The sage turned to his wife and said, “You’re absolutely right.”

I felt that way when I began hearing different views on Revelation. Each version sounded right, but part of me kept saying, “that’s impossible – both can’t be right.” Well, I am glad to say that I am now sure that the Trumpets, like the Seals, foretell kinds of events and not literal, historical one time events. Once that is accepted, their prophetic import can be appreciated.

QUIET TIME BEFORE TRUMPETS

Well-established in Scripture, loud trumpets represent Endtime disclosures.¹ They alert God’s people of war with the Beast and warn the world of impending judgment.² Just like Jericho fell at the sound of the seventh trumpet, this old world is going to fall at the sound of the seventh Trump.³

Before the angels blow their Trumpets, we read of “*silence in heaven for about half an hour.*”⁴ After all the vocal worship just witnessed in Heaven, this silence is an awesome thing. It is like the hush that comes over an audience when the house lights go down. All expectancy is focussed on the raising of the curtain that will bring to them the climactic scene of the story. This kind of silence is more than a meditative reflection, like the “Selah” pause in the Psalms.⁵ It is the silence before the storm of judgment, the quiet before the cry of the dreadful plagues.⁶

¹ “I appointed watchmen over you and said, ‘Listen to the sound of the trumpet!’” (Jer. 6:17). Trumpets catch our attention. In Israel, they sounded the alarm of war, and announced Feasts and Sabbaths.

² The Trumpets are not fulfilled by any single, particular event. They signal judgments in store for the ungodly of all ages. ³ Rev. 8:1-2 ⁴ (Rev. 8:1) Jewish tradition says, God’s original creation was preceded by a period of complete silence. Before God’s deconstruction of creation, there is a sober silence. ⁵ “The LORD is in his holy temple. . .be silent before him.” (Hab. 2:20) ⁶ “Be still before the LORD. . .because he has roused himself from his holy dwelling.” (Zec. 2:13 see also Rom. 2:13)

“Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel’s hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.”⁸

Silence, followed by prayer, is a marvellous transition to the Trumpets. Judgment is not executed until those marked by God’s Spirit have offered up their prayers. Every just intercession will be answered, having been mixed with the sweet-smelling fragrance of incense. Our incomplete prayers are made acceptable to God, cleansed of selfishness, formalism and haste.⁷ Our prayers exert a powerful influence in Heaven; for prayer moves the hand that rules all things. The flow of thought is one of cause and effect. Prayers go up and are sprinkled earthward, showing their effects on mankind.



HAIL AND FIRE MIXED WITH BLOOD BURN A THIRD OF EARTH

“Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them. The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down upon the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.”⁹

Scholars agree that the scene, whether literal or figurative, is one of judgment. The literal Futurists sees in this first Trump a specific, cataclysmic upheaval. A nuclear or biological war brought on by man or a catastrophe in nature like a large meteor hitting the earth. The Preterits and Historical Approach interpret the Trumpets along symbolic lines; yet, they connect them with historical events. Preterits cite Josephus’ account of the destruction of Jerusalem while the Historical camp often refers to the breakup of the Roman Empire.¹⁰

FIGURATIVE IMAGES

“Hail and fire mixed with blood” are symbolic. Why take them literally? Should we expect hemoglobin to fall from the sky? Although anything is possible with God, I am persuaded that this image typifies a more basic reality. The image of *“fire”* that *“burned up”* clearly denotes judgment falling.

⁷ God’s judgments against the wicked, which follow in the Trumpets, constitute the answer to the cry “How long, O Lord, holy and true, do you not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” ⁸ Rev. 8:3-5 ⁹ Rev. 8: 6-7 ¹⁰ Archdeacon Farrar sees the hail and fire as years of burning drought, rains of blood, disastrous conflagrations and earthquake, as those in Lyons, Rome, Jerusalem, and Naples. E. B. Elliott cites as fulfillment the invasion of the Roman Empire by Alaric King of the Goths in 395-410 AD. “Early Days of Christianity” and “Horae Apocalypticæ.”

Often associated with the End, fire is a recurring theme in Revelation. It appears two dozen times and is clearly symbolic when used of the Two Witnesses. “*Fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies...and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire.*”¹¹ The “*hail and fire*” of the first Trumpet reminds us of the seventh plague God brought on Egypt.¹²

PARTIAL JUDGMENTS

Appearing sixteen times, the phrase “*a third*” dominates the seven Trumpets. It expresses a recurring theme of partial judgments. Being a large fraction, it indicates a significant part is affected by God’s judgments, and yet these judgments are mixed with mercy. In wrath, God remembers mercy.¹³ Partial judgments serve God’s purposes in several ways. They strengthen the saints, because they prove that God is doing what He has forewarned. They also demonstrate to the inhabitants of the earth that God means business. His aim is to bring men to their senses so as to win them back to Himself. During these judgments mixed with mercy, God seals the elect and warns the wayward.

The ministry of the prophets was to warn men of God’s coming judgment. In Ezekiel, we find both images of “*a third*” and “*fire*” to forewarn Israel. “Now, son of man, take a sharp sword and use it as a barber’s razor to shave your head and your beard. Then take a set of scales and divide up the hair. When the days of your siege come to an end, burn *a third* of the hair with fire inside the city. Take *a third* and strike it with the sword all around the city. And scatter *a third* to the wind. For I will pursue them with drawn sword. But take a few strands of hair and tuck them away in the folds of your garment. Again, take a few of these and throw them into the *fire and burn them up.*”¹⁴

The Trumpets pronounce partial judgments, providing unbelievers with a foretaste of the Day of Wrath. They are “a plain indication of God’s righteous judgments...For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you.”¹⁵ Trumpet judgments serve to practically announce the coming of the end. Various upheavals that happen in this world fulfill the Trumpets. You might say they are like forest fires that burn up millions of acres of grasslands. But their fulfillment is manifold and no single, historical event can quench them. They will only find their utter end in the wrathful Bowls, which culminate in the Lake of Fire, for they are like the fire that never goes out.

¹¹ Rev. 11:5-6; 16:21 ¹² “Hail” appears 17 times in the plagues on Egypt. (Ex. 9:18-10:15) “Great hail from heaven fell upon men.” “Fire and hail...fulfilling His word.” (Ps. 148:8) “I am come to send fire on the earth.” (Luke 12:59) “Have you (Job) seen the treasury of hail, which I have reserved for the time of trouble.” (Job 38:22-23) ¹³ Hab. 3:2 ¹⁴ Ezek. 5:1-5 ¹⁵ 2Thess. 1:5ff NAS

A HUGE FIERY MOUNTAIN TURNS A THIRD OF SEA INTO BLOOD

“The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.”¹⁶

Literalists say that this huge fiery mountain is a meteor that falls from space. Sound like a movie you saw? A meteor of extraordinary proportions enters the earth’s atmosphere like a blazing mountain on fire. When it plunges into the sea, it causes widespread tidal waves that sweep away ships in the coastal cities. Should we expect “*a great mountain*” to fall from space and turn “*a third*” of the earth’s seawater into blood?¹⁷

FIERY MOUNTAIN AND BLOODY SEA

Jeremiah uses this same prophetic image. Babylon is a burned out mountain. “Before your eyes I will repay Babylon and all who live in Babylonia for all the wrong they have done in Zion,” declares the LORD. “I am against you, O destroying mountain, you who destroy the whole earth,” declares the LORD. “I will stretch out my hand against you, roll you off the cliffs, and make you a burned-out mountain.”¹⁸

“Something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea.” Symbolic language is evident by the phrase “*something like*.” The result is “*the sea is turned into blood*.” The ongoing parallel to the plagues on Egypt is undeniable. In the first plague, Egypt, a type of the world, had its water turned to blood. Jeremiah predicts Babylon’s doom in similar terms for their harsh treatment of God’s people. John follows suit. This world has spilled the blood of God’s servants so He turns the world’s water into blood.¹⁹

A sea turned to blood by a burning mountain is best understood figuratively. Mountains in the Bible speak of kingdoms.²⁰ Blood equates with death. The sea depicts multitudes of people.²¹ God sets the kingdoms of this world on fire and puts their inhabitants to death, because they refuse to repent. Like He plagued the Egyptians, God also plagues the world of Babylon to deliver His people from bondage. This same motif of water turned to blood is seen with the Two Witnesses who turn water into blood and strike the earth with various plagues during the time of their testimony.²²

¹⁶ Rev. 8: 8-9 ¹⁷ Revelation chapter 16 also speaks of water turned to blood. Bows parallel Trumpets. (Rev. 16:3-6). ¹⁸ Jer. 51:24-25 ¹⁹ (Ex. 7:17ff) God brings partial judgment like He did on Pharaoh “to let my people go.” “Let them serve me.” ²⁰ Dan. 2:35; Zech. 4:7; Matt. 4:8 ²¹ Matt. 13:47; Luke 21:25; Rev 17:1,15 ²² Revelation’s next chapter draws heavily from this portion of Zechariah: “great mountain” “two lampstands” “two olive trees” and “two witnesses.” (Rev.11 cp. w. Zech. 4).

Babylon is the antagonist of God's people and embodies all that is foul. John says, *"In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth."*²³ "They have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve."²⁴

3 A GREAT BLAZING STAR FALLS POISONING A THIRD OF WATERS

*"The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water—the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter."*²⁵

The first Trumpet brings hail, fire and blood to burn a third of the landscape. The second, a huge blazing mountain, destroys a third of the sea life. With each Trumpet blast, the destruction spreads through creation. First vegetation, second animal life, and third mankind remind us of the Genesis creation account. Yet, in Revelation these are acts of demolition.²⁶ The original creation is being destroyed. With the third Trumpet, a star called *"Wormwood"* falls to the earth and kills a third of mankind. Who or what is Wormwood?

ANGEL WORMWOOD

A literal star falling on the earth would completely destroy our world at once. Stars, however, represent angels in Revelation and elsewhere in the Bible.²⁷ The Dragon's *"tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth."*²⁸ The star's name, *"Wormwood"* portrays his personality.²⁹ He makes life bitter and causes people untold misery. Jeremiah says, "Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of gall."³⁰ "Remembering my misery, the wormwood and the gall."³¹ A life separated from God by sin is bitter. Satan's Wormwood will see to that.

Wormwood is not the only star-angel named in Revelation. The fifth Trumpet introduces another angel who has two descriptive names: Apollyon and Abaddon. Both names, the Greek and the Hebrew, mean *"Destroyer."* No wonder they feature in earth's deconstruction. Satan and his angels were the active agents in the plagues on Egypt. Recall Moses' rod turned into a serpent, demonstrating that God had given Moses power over these demonic plagues.³² The Bible says, "He gave up their cattle also to hail, and their flocks

²³ Rev. 18:24 ²⁴ Rev. 16:6 ²⁵ Rev. 8:10-11 ²⁶ The final devastation of creation occurs with the Bowls. ²⁷ Rev. 1:16-20; 2:1;3:1; Job 38:7 ²⁸ Rev. 12:4 ²⁹ (Rev. 9:11) Image of bitter troubles (Isa. 13:10; 24:23; Jer. 15:9; Ezek. 32:7; Amos 8:9; Matt 24:29) ³⁰ Lord gave them poison and bitter water to drink so they prefer death to life. (Jer. 8:3, 14; 9:13-15; 23:15; Prov.5:4) ³¹ Lam.3:9 ³² Satan's destructive powers seen in polluted waters, frogs, boils, hail, darkness and death. (also Job 1:15-19).

to hot thunderbolts. He cast upon them the fierceness of His anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending evil angels among them.”³³

BITTER PILL

Angel Wormwood comes in many forms and kills many with his bitter waters. His waters are like the radiation-poisoned waters from the Russian nuclear accident at Chernobyl. The name of that city actually means Wormwood.³⁴ The accident occurred in the early hours of April 26, 1986, when a tired nuclear plant operator allowed the level of reactivity in one of the reactors to fall dangerously low. As he attempted to correct this, the power in the reactor rose dramatically. The reactor’s core then melted down. A powerful explosion of steam occurred, followed by a massive second explosion of hydrogen. The end result was a huge graphite fire that lasted ten days and that blew 100 million curies of radioactivity into the environment.

Polluted water by any kind of contagion qualifies as a work of ‘Wormwood.’ New Orleans, in 2005, submerged in polluted seawater is a recent appearance. But like the other plagues, Wormwood is not any one event or kind of pollutant. Men even drink Wormwood’s poison wilfully. “Wormwood” is a bitter herb used in certain alcoholic beverages. Such drinks are more intoxicating due to their hallucinogenic properties than ordinary liquors. What a tragic irony that people drink wormwood spirits to swallow the bitter pill of life.

The Danish philosopher, Kierkegaard, illustrates this irony by a parable. He tells of a theatre where a variety show is proceeding. Each act is more fantastic than the last and is applauded by the audience. Suddenly, the manager comes forward, apologizing for the interruption, but the theater is on fire. He begs his patrons to leave in an orderly fashion. The audience thinks this is the most amusing turn of the evening and cheers thunderously. The manager continues to implore them, while his words are unheeded amidst the laughter. Soon the fire races through the building and the fun-loving audience with it. “And so,” concluded Kierkegaard, “will our age go down in fiery destruction to the applause of a crowded house of cheering spectators.”³⁵



A THIRD OF THE SUN, MOON AND STARS TURN DARK

“The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night.”³⁶

³³ Ps. 78:48-49,51a ³⁴ The city of Chernobyl is 80 km. north of Kiev. In the Russian Bible, the word for Wormwood is Chernobyl from a Ukrainian name for a bitter, wild herb. Wormwood doubles in Russia as a name for Satan. ³⁵ Resource, July/August, 1990 ³⁶ Rev. 8:12

Futurists interpret the Trumpets as a series of events occurring at the End. They expect a literal fulfillment for each Trumpet. For example, radioactive fallout in the atmosphere could cause darkness like the ninth plague did in Egypt. If not caused by man, they claim that an unprecedented eclipse of the sun or trouble in our solar system will cause this darkness. No doubt countless evils would follow either a nuclear war or a cosmic catastrophe.

NUCLEAR WAR

Weapons exist today that could cause devastation on a scale worse than John's Apocalypse.³⁷ And it remains a fact that every weapon man has ever invented, he has eventually used in a widespread manner.³⁸ I have watched more than one film's version of the day after a full-scale nuclear war, and have listened to the experts discuss its aftermath: a thermonuclear winter, widespread deaths by radiation fall out, and a poisoning of the environment. Between the United States and Russia alone, 70,000 warheads still wait to be launched. Smaller developing nations like Iran and North Korea seek to obtain such weapons. It is not hard to imagine another madman like Adolph Hitler appearing on the scene. Even now, terrorist groups are trying to get their hands on nuclear devices, which they would use without hesitation.³⁹

Does cosmic cataclysm, divine intervention or man-made weapons trigger the End of our world.⁴⁰ Prophecy can be fulfilled in various ways. Normally, Bible prophecies are fulfilled in ways men have never imagined. Revelation provides general prophecies, but that does not make them any less true. I may not teach a one-off fulfillment of John's vision, but I do readily concede that no one can say for sure how all of its images will find fulfillment. For that reason, I do not subscribe to the elaborate, prophetic scenarios taught in many church circles. I am sure, though, that every prophecy will be fulfilled.

GROSS DARKNESS

The darkening of the sun is often associated with the last days.⁴¹ Isaiah foretold, "The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. I will punish the world for its evil."⁴² This happens in the day of the Lord's

³⁷ Nuclear bombs generate heat 2 ½ times hotter than the center of the sun and as much destructive power as all the weapons used in WWII. ³⁸ French scientist, Pierre Berthelot in 1897, said, "We have only begun to list the alphabet of destruction." ³⁹ Certain Bible prophecies may depict a nuclear war. Joel says, "In the last days... fire and pillars of smoke." Zechariah adds, "Their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes (eye sockets)." (Joel 2:30; Zec. 14:12; Matt 24:22; 1 Thess. 5:1-5; 2 Peter 3:12). ⁴⁰ Destruction is ultimately due to man's sin, as Revelation avows that God will "destroy them which destroy the earth." (Rev 11:18)

⁴¹ Joel says, "The sun and moon grow dark." (Joel 2:10; 3:14-15) ⁴² Isa. 13:11

burning anger.⁴³ Peter says, “The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.”⁴⁴ Jesus foresees, “Immediately after the distress of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light.”⁴⁵

All natural light will one day fail, for there is no sun in the New Jerusalem. Darkness also has a spiritual source. With the fifth Trumpet, the sun and the air is darkened by smoke that rises out of “*the shaft of the abyss.*” The parallel, fifth Bowl confirms a spiritual dimension to this darkness. “*The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony.*”⁴⁶ Satan is the source of darkness.⁴⁷ And he is released because men choose darkness.⁴⁸

TRIPLE WHAMMY

“*Woe, woe, woe!*” is the sad prediction of the coming bitterness in spirit, soul and body for all who rebel against the light. By rejecting the light and loving darkness, men open themselves to multiple woes. “*As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: “Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!”*”⁴⁹

These final three Trumpets are known as the woe-trumpets. They remind us of Jeremiah’s trumpet. “I have heard the sound of the trumpet...disaster follows disaster; the whole land lies in ruin.”⁵⁰ The Trumpet Woes predict harsher judgments that affect man’s very soul.⁵¹

The bird that warns of these three woes is a vulture and not “an eagle flying.” Strong says, “The vultures are intended. The meaning seems to be that, as these birds of prey gather where the carcass is, so the judgments of God will descend upon the corrupt state of humanity.”⁵² These vultures hover over those dead in sin, eagerly waiting to swoop down and feed on their corrupt flesh. The cities of this world are full of such moral decay. And if there were no agents whereby what is corrupt could be removed, life could not go on. The cry of the vulture is a clear prelude to the many vultures that appear at Armageddon for the supper of the great God.⁵³

⁴³ Isa. 13:9 ⁴⁴ Joel 2:31; Acts 2:20 ⁴⁵ Matt 24:29 ⁴⁶ Rev 16:10-11 ⁴⁷ “Our struggle is against the powers of this dark world.” (Eph. 6:12) ⁴⁸ John 3:19-21 ⁴⁹ (Rev. 8:13) “The inhabitants of the earth” are at home in this world and are held in contrast to men of faith who are sojourners. ⁵⁰ “This is your punishment. How bitter it is... the agony of my heart.” (Jer. 4:18-20) ⁵¹ God has no pleasure in their pain, but that men would turn to Him and live. So He allows men to experience anguish for their sins. (Ezek. 18:32ff). ⁵² From Vine’s Expository Dictionary ⁵³ “Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.” (Matt. 24:28) “And I saw an angel...who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, “Come, gather together for the great supper of God.” (Rev. 19:17 -21).



ABYSMAL LOCUST TORMENT THOSE WITHOUT GOD'S SEAL

“The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. And out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth. They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. They were not given power to kill them, but only to torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes a man. During those days men will seek death, but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them.”⁵⁴

The Trumpets are structured like the Seals. The first four happen very quickly. (Compare the Four Horsemen of the Seals to the four blasts of the Trumpets). This fifth Trumpet follows the pattern of the fifth Seal. The pace slows down. All of Revelation chapter nine concerns only two Trumpet-woes while chapter eight covers four Trumpets in fewer verses. Also the fifth Trumpet like the fifth Seal takes us into the spirit world to discern what is unseen.

A FALLEN STAR OPENS THE ABYSS

John sees an angel who “*had fallen*” from heaven. This angel had occupied a place in Heaven but does no longer.⁵⁵ Isaiah predicted Lucifer’s fall from Heaven. “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!”⁵⁶ Jesus also spoke of Satan’s fall. “I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.”⁵⁷ Chapter twelve fills in many details on Satan’s fall, and clears up a great deal of confusion in Christian circles concerning its timing.

John watches Satan receive a key to “*the shaft of the abyss.*”⁵⁸ Also translated “bottomless pit,” it is the prison from which certain demons are sentenced and released.⁵⁹ When the prince of demons opens their confine “*the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.*” The smoke of the pit explains how the sun was darkened in the previous Trumpet. “The prince of the power of the air” is the cause of this present darkness.

Evil is indeed a deep pit and when left unrestrained it contaminates the very atmosphere like a heavy cloud, darkening man’s understanding.⁶⁰ And these hideous locust creatures appear in swarms so vast they are like great clouds.

⁵⁴ Rev. 8:13- 9:6 ⁵⁵ Past tense of verb indicates time had elapsed since he fell. ⁵⁶ Isa. 14:12 ⁵⁷ Luke 10:18 ⁵⁸ Bond between Satan and world is a recurring theme. ⁵⁹ Term occurs seven times in Revelation (9:1-2, 11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3; plus Luke 8:31). ⁶⁰ 2 Cor. 4:3-4

They fill the air with evil thoughts and passions that conceal the light. This fathomless “mystery of iniquity” gives rise to strong deception and a great falling away.⁶¹ People will have religion with all its visible forms, but their lives will be unchanged. “There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy...without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good...lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.”⁶²

DEMONIC HORDE DESCRIBED

The description of these locust-like creatures with the repeated usage of comparative words “like” and “as” reveal that this is not literal. They look “like horses” but are not really horses. Their “faces resemble human faces” but they are not actually human. Here the literalist is hard pressed and interprets these locusts as a new species of insect. Other literalists take John’s description as that of a modern-day army. And yet, they are clearly demonic spirits, who do not hurt the grass, trees or plants but only those without God’s seal.

“The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. Their hair was like women’s hair, and their teeth were like lions’ teeth. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. They had tails and stings like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months. They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon.”⁶³

The symbols for this demonic horde are graphic. They are **(1)** Malicious as scorpions. **(2)** Strong as those clad in iron armor. **(3)** Swift as galloping horses. **(4)** Faces of men implying human reasoning, but **(5)** they are characterized by strong seductiveness typified by “*the hair of women.*” **(6)** They have teeth like lions, tearing the soul to pieces. **(7)** And this demonic army is under the direction of a king whose name means destruction.⁶⁴

What a formidable foe we face. In our day, angry fallen angels of rebellion and obscenity invade the land. The evidence of their activity is everywhere.⁶⁵ At times, Christians are even tormented in their souls like Lot was tormented in Sodom, watching such lawless conduct.⁶⁶ Although man’s life is full of anguish, death eludes those stung by these evil powers.⁶⁷ “*In those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die.*”

⁶¹ 2 Thess. 2:4ff ⁶² 2 Tim 3:1-4 ⁶³ Rev. 9:7-11 ⁶⁴ (Joel 1:1-7; 2:1-11). Supernatural armies (2 Kings 2:11; 6:13-17; Rev 19:14). ⁶⁵ Rev 11:10 ⁶⁶ 2 Peter 2:8 ⁶⁷ Job 3:20,21; Jer. 8:3; Job 7:15; Luke 23:30

LIMITATIONS

As horrible as it is, God places clear limitations on Satan and demonic activity. They could not harm grass, plants, trees or God's people. Like the flies of the fourth plague swarmed only upon the Egyptians and not upon the Israelites. *"They were not given power to kill."* *"But only to torture."* When God permitted Satan to strike Job's flesh, He required him to spare his life.⁶⁸ So their time was limited to a season of *"five months."*⁶⁹ These demons are limited as to what and who they may strike, how far they may go and for how long.⁷⁰ Thank God, Satan is ever bound by certain limitations.



FIRE, SMOKE AND BRIMSTONE KILL A THIRD OF MANKIND

*"The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come. The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the horns of the golden altar that is before God. It said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind."*⁷¹

The four angels, bound at the Euphrates, remind us of the four angels who held back the four winds after the sixth Seal.⁷² They are not the same angels, however, since these are bound and are different by nature. These come to destroy, which may identify them as evil angels.⁷³ Evil forces are not only in the "abyss" but also on earth. These pent-up powers wait to be let loose. Once loosed, the calamity that they bring is worse than what has preceded. The fifth Trumpet brings torment to men but the sixth Trumpet brings death. Again we are conveyed from the spirit realm to the natural world as with the sixth Seal. Here John tells us of colossal army he saw and heard about.

AN ARMY OF TWO HUNDRED MILLION

*"The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. I heard their number. The horses and riders I saw in my vision looked like this: Their breastplates...The heads of the horses resembled the heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur. A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur... The power of the horses was in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails were like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury."*⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Job 2:4-6 ⁶⁹ Palestine's locust-plague is 5 months from April to September. Commentators vary on this timeframe. Some substitute a year for a day so 5 months = 150 years, applying it to the Saracens, 830-980 AD or Mohammed's conquests, 612-762 AD. All such calculations are subjective and limit it to a specific locality and time. ⁷⁰ Rev. 9:18 ⁷¹ Rev. 9:12-15 ⁷² Rev. 7:1-3 ⁷³ Jude 6 ⁷⁴ Rev. 9:16-19

An army 200 million strong befits a population giant like Red China.⁷⁵ Futurists say John describes the weapons and battle dress of today's soldiers. Expecting a future fulfillment, they claim this is a prediction of World War III. Historical interpreters, however, look back and say this great invasion has already taken place. They point to Attila the Hun, Arab-Turks, Idumaeans and other huge armies who marched across Asia into Europe, leaving villages, towns and cities burning in their wake.⁷⁶ How else might we interpret this?

EAST OF EUPHRATES

From ancient times, Israel's principal invaders, the Assyrians, Babylonians and Persians came from beyond the Euphrates. That river represented a natural barrier to keep Israel's enemies at bay. Once that divide was crossed, potential devastation was only days away - and the larger the force, the greater the danger. So an army of 200 million, crossing the Euphrates, depicts war on a massive scale. The parallel sixth Bowl also affects the Euphrates, drying it up and preparing the way for the kings of the east.⁷⁷ With the sixth Bowl demonic spirits are also released, who *"go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty."*⁷⁸

When we study the Battle of Armageddon, we will enlarge on the significance of the Euphrates.⁷⁹ Notice, however, a progression in the details on the place and scope of the war. War appears in the Seals with a Red Horse riding with a large sword. In the Trumpets, a number of 200 million combatants is given. In the Bowls, the combatants are the kings of the east and in chapter twenty, Gog and Magog where the numbers become as numerous as the sand on the seashore. In the Bowls, they march to battle at a place called Armageddon and in Revelation chapter twenty we see them outside the camp of the saints.

In 1978, I discussed the possibilities of future wars with my Reserve Officer Training Corps' Captain. Where would the next war be fought? He was certain that it would happen between eastern and western Europe. I told him the Bible says, "it will be in the Middle East." My understanding was very incomplete and immature, but the Gulf War in 1990 and the Iraq War in 2004 did bring the world to the crossroads of the earth. I believe that there will be wars and rumors of wars: big wars, small wars and a possible nuclear war. Wars only culminate when Christ comes and men no longer learn to make war. Until then, by their smoke, fire and brimstone, wars (past, present, and future) fulfill every aspect of John's vision.

⁷⁵ China has 2,761,000 men in organized military forces. ⁷⁶ The Euphrates runs a length of 1800 miles, and was the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire. ⁷⁷ Rev. 9:14-16;16:12-14 ⁷⁸ Rev.16:14; 20:8. ⁷⁹ Use of specific numbers, localities and invaders is not because John predicts a onetime event but due to what they represent in Scripture.

MANKIND UNREPENTANT

“The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshipping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood— idols that cannot see or hear or walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.”⁸⁰

Men fight and murder. They use magic and narcotics to appease their lust. They commit fornication and engage in every kind of dishonesty. Daily the media announces their crimes. All of this warns us of the approach of the End. And in spite of God’s looming judgment, men refuse to repent of their covetousness and idolatry. Naturally, a thunder peal may alarm, but it does not cleanse or cure. Pharaoh’s plagues terrified him; yet, his heart was hardened.⁸¹ And so, although every war, famine, and pestilence is meant to bring men to their knees, Revelation’s vital observation is that *“men repented not.”⁸²*

“The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists” keeps a “Doomsday Clock.” It measures how close nuclear peril looms. Currently, the clock stands at seven minutes to midnight - 2 minutes closer than it read in the year 2001. Everyone agrees that the End of the world is a possibility. But while we may speculate about possibilities, John records certainties. This Old World will end one way or another. It is only a matter of time. We live on the verge of the End - six out of seven in our sequence.



ALL GOD ANNOUNCED BY PROPHETS IS ACCOMPLISHED

“Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven. And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, “There will be no more delay! But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.”⁸³

A huge angel, like the one King David saw standing over Jerusalem, announces, *“There shall be no more delay!”⁸⁴* The Authorized Version reads, *“Time shall be no more.”* Both translations have merit. For when Christ comes, time, as we know it, shall no longer exist. This present age will end. *“No delay,”* however, fits the context better. For once the previous six Trumpets have duly warned mankind, there can be no more delay.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Rev 9:20-21 ⁸¹ “The rest of mankind” may have congratulated themselves, thinking they did not deserve what had befallen others. (Luke 13:3-5). ⁸² Judgement Day warnings go out regularly as partial judgments of “a third” are a part of man’s experience. ⁸³ Rev.10:1-7 ⁸⁴ 2 Sam. 24:16 ⁸⁵ Seals (Rev. 6:17), Trumpets (Rev.11:18) and Bowls (Rev. 16:14) each bring us to the end.

MYSTERY COMPLETE AS CHRIST REIGNS

When the seventh Trumpet sounds, *“the mystery of God will be accomplished (or complete).”* The Greek word for *“mystery”* simply means a hidden truth, which is only knowable by revelation.⁸⁶ We are told that *“the mystery”* will unfold itself on the lines laid down by the Old and New Testament prophets. Scriptures contain many such hidden truths. Of all the mysteries in the Bible, however, none is more compelling than the mystery of the End itself.⁸⁷

We are told the seventh angel is about to sound his Trumpet, but John only records the sounding of it in chapter eleven after an interlude.⁸⁸ The seventh Trumpet contains the third woe, *“destroying those who destroy the earth.”* If the first two woes do not bring men to repentance, what can they expect? *“Only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.”*⁸⁹ The former Trumpets were meant to help men avert judgment by timely repentance. Now with due notice given, the world must end and judgment come. With the End, *“the third woe comes quickly.”*⁹⁰

*“The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon. The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever...The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great - and for destroying those who destroy the earth.”*⁹¹

The seventh Trumpet proclaims Christ’s Kingdom has fully come on earth. Again we see the backdrop of Heaven, where loud voices worship *“the One who is and who was.”* They leave off the third part *“and who is to come,”* because Christ has indeed come at the sounding of the seventh Trumpet.⁹² His Kingdom has come in power - power beyond what men have called overruling providence. Now on display is what the prophets anticipated - Christ’s unrestricted reign in strength and in duration.⁹³

JUDGING THE DEAD

“The time has come for judging the dead.” The seventh Trumpet announces the resurrection of the dead. *“In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last*

⁸⁶ (Col. 1:26) Vine’s says terms associated with “mystery” are “made known,” “manifested,” and “revealed” (Eph. 3:3-5). ⁸⁷ Mystery of the kingdom of Heaven, resurrection, Gospel, inclusion of the Gentiles, union of Christ and His people, Person of Christ, Christian faith, working of sin, and God’s purposes. (Mark 4:11; 1 Cor. 15:51; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:9; 3:3; 5:32; 1 Tim. 3:9,6; 2 Thess. 2:7; Rev. 10:7; 17:5). ⁸⁸ Interlude to measure temple - Two Witnesses. ⁸⁹ Heb. 10:27 ⁹⁰ Third woe is the End itself. ⁹¹ (Rev. 11:14-18) Lake of Fire is described later. ⁹² Rev. 1:4, 8; 4:8 ⁹³ Matt. 4:8-9; Luke 4:5-6

trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.” It is noteworthy that the seventh Trumpet has the resurrection of the dead, as Paul says it occurs at “the last trumpet.”⁹⁴ The righteous will be rewarded and the wicked punished.⁹⁵ More words are dedicated here to God, “rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great.” God’s wrath, warned of in the Seals and Trumpets is also highlighted.⁹⁶

The chapter ends with God’s temple in Heaven opened and a vision of the Ark of His Covenant. “Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant.”⁹⁷

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why hear various views on Revelation before you draw a conclusion?
2. How does it feel to know that God takes our prayers into account before He acts?
3. What makes you think the Trumpets are symbolic or literal?
4. Why may one say all judgments in this world are partial and not complete?
5. What aspect of the demonic horde do you find most disturbing and why?
6. What Trumpet do you consider the worse and why?
7. Why do you think men refuse to repent in spite of such warnings?

The Ark of the Covenant signifies God’s abiding faithfulness and justice. The phenomena that follow highlight the theme of judgement.

*“And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm.”*⁹⁸

⁹⁴ 1 Cor. 15:52 ⁹⁵ “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.” (Dan. 12:2) ⁹⁶ God judging unbelievers is found at length in Revelation: the time for judging the dead (11:18); the harvest of the earth (14: 15-16); the seven Bowls of judgment (16:17-21); the White Horse rider’s return to judge the wicked (19:11-21); the Great White throne judgment and the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11-15). ⁹⁷ Rev 11:19 ⁹⁸ Lightning, thunder, earthquakes, and hailstorm are found often in Revelation (4:5; 8:5; 11:13,19; 16:18, 21).

NOTES

PART FIVE

WARTIME

CHAPTER TWELVE: TWO WITNESSES
(Rev. 11:1-19)

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: WOMAN AND DRAGON
(Rev. 12:1-17)

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: TWO BEASTS
(Rev. 13:1-18)

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: SEVEN APPROACHES
(Rev. 13:1-18)

CHAPTER SIXTEEN: TIME QUESTION
(Rev.11: 2 - 22:21)

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: LAMB FOLLOWERS
(Rev. 14:1-20)

**The Beast overcomes the Two Witnesses.
They arise and are taken up in a cloud. A Great Earthquake
then destroys the cities of the nations at the End of the age.**



**The picture is by Nicolas Fontaine 1625 - 1709.
Many thanks for the pictures used in the seven parts of the book,
provided courtesy of Pitts Theology Library,
Candler School of Theology, Emory University.**

CHAPTER TWELVE

TWO WITNESSES

SEVEN PRELUDES TO THE END IN REVELATION 10:1-11:19

A ‘head-hunter’ who hires corporation executives said, “When I find an executive that I’m trying to hire for someone I like to disarm him. I offer him a drink, undo my tie and talk about football, or whatever, until he’s all relaxed. I then look him square in the eye and say, “What’s your purpose in life?” It’s amazing how top executives unravel at that question. Well, I was interviewing this guy and had him all relaxed with my feet up on his desk, talking about his family. Then I leaned up and said, “What’s your purpose in life, Bob?” Without blinking an eye he said, “To go to heaven and take as many people with me as I can.” For the first time in my career I was speechless.”

JESUS WITNESSES

I like Bob’s answer. It is a purpose we share. Jesus told His followers “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses... to the ends of the earth.” After Christ ascended, angels announced, “This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”¹ Instead of standing around, looking up, the disciples were empowered to witness. John was an initial witness, and ever since then, the Return and the End waits for the witnesses to complete their global testimony.

The pause between the sixth and seventh Seal gives time for God to seal His people before the Day of Wrath. In this interlude, between the sixth and seventh Trumpets, it follows that the Church must complete her witness to every nation so that all may be sealed before the End.² In this chapter, we explore John’s mission and that of the Two Witnesses. Much symbolic language surrounds both John and the Two Witnesses. Consider how laden with symbolism the passage is. For John eats a little book and measures a temple. He then narrates the mission of Two Witnesses who are represented by two olive trees and two lampstands. These Witnesses speak with fire, strike the earth with plagues, battle with a beast who ascends out of a bottomless pit, and are put to death in a city that is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt. The great conflict between the Beast and the Two Witnesses concludes with a resurrection and ascension.

¹ “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.” (Acts 1:4-12).

² Luke 24:47-48; John 6:39

To arrive at the prophetic significance of this passage, reflection is necessary. So let us look at the text in seven segments to interpret its visionary features. Then we can catch the heavenly vision and be part of this company of unashamed witnesses. Their witness began with the ancient prophets and includes all who testify of Christ from His ascension until His Return.



1 BEFORE THE END NATIONS HEAR JOHN'S REVELATION

“Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: “Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.” So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, “Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour; but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.” I took the little scroll from the angel’s hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. Then I was told, “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings.””³

When John takes the Little Scroll from the angel, we observe a vital step in Revelation’s transmission, which was pronounced at the book’s outset. *“He (Jesus) made it known by sending his angel to his servant John.”* This follows the first step of transmission. *“The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him (Jesus).”⁴* That part was visualized in Revelation chapter five. The Scroll was sealed and in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne, and God gave the Scroll to the Lamb, Jesus.

From chapters five to eight, Jesus opens each of the seven Seals, one by one. Christ then gives the open Scroll to His angel. His angel, who bears His attributes in this vision, then gives the little book, now open, to John. John is told to eat the Scroll so that he may prophesy its contents.⁵ In this way, the churches and thus God’s servants receive the Revelation.

John’s Scroll is like the open scroll that Ezekiel was given to eat by an angel. Ezekiel’s Scroll also resembles John’s in that it was written on both sides with words of lament, mourning and woe. The prophet, like the apostle, was told to *“eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.”* So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.” Once digested, Ezekiel prophesied to the house of Israel, but the words became bitter in his stomach.⁶

Often, life is bittersweet. The Scroll discloses judgments as well as mercies. John has a foretaste of the New Heaven and New Earth, sweet as honey.⁷ But the revelatory Scroll also contains troublesome, bitter decrees.

³ Rev. 10:8-11 ⁴ Rev. 1:1 ⁵ Many say the little, open book is a different book than Revelation. As elsewhere, they needlessly complicate and confuse Revelation. ⁶ Ezek. 2:8-3:3 ⁷ Rev. 21:1-22:21

Both sweetness and bitterness is often true of the prophetic office. It is a sweet message of comfort to those who believe but a bitter pill to rebels. Of the gift ministries in the Church, the prophetic carries the greatest mix of what is sweet and bitter.⁸ Revelation from God's Word is pleasant to taste, but digesting it in life experiences is another matter. Students of Bible prophecy often never go beyond the tasting stage. They sample what fancies them only to speculate. But if one absorbs the reality of Christ's coming, it will create concern for lost souls. To act on John's striking images and prophetic message requires spiritual maturity. It is "solid food for the mature."⁹

BALANCED DIET PLUS EXERCISE

Ezekiel and John are good examples for us to follow towards real maturity. To be healthy and grow strong, we must eat a balanced diet, not just candy and ice-cream. We must not only feed on what we like in the Bible, but eat meaty proteins too, chewing and digesting the meat so it can be converted into energy to develop mature muscles. Ezekiel and John demonstrate for us that in addition to eating a balanced diet, you need to exercise your muscles. "Be not hearers of the word only but also doers."¹⁰ Otherwise, three 'square meals' a day can leave you big and soft in the wrong places.

By eating the Scroll, John was able to assimilate their every word. The man became the message. Once the message is digested, the work of prophesying must follow. "*Many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.*" John's command to "*prophesy again*" is not a new commission but an ongoing action. By writing the Book of Revelation, he prophesies again in a way he could not have done once his earthly life had ended. By both His spoken and written word, God has given the world a dual witness, by which men might be induced to repent. But men have often despised both and only added to their guilt. So the End must come. Before it does, however, God's covenant people are taken into account, which means more exercise for John.



BEFORE THE END GOD COMPLETES HIS TEMPLE

"I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshipers there. But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months."¹¹

What temple does John measure? Preterits apply Revelation to the First Century, and so they see a reference here to Herod's temple in Jerusalem. The

⁸ Eph. 4:11 ⁹ Heb. 5:14 ¹⁰ James 1:22ff ¹¹ Rev. 11:1-2

trampling of the Holy City by the Gentiles, they allege, shows John knew of Jerusalem's overthrow in 70 A.D. by Rome.¹² On the other hand, Futurists look for a new temple before Christ returns, rebuilt in modern day Jerusalem.¹³ Symbolic interpreters view the temple in a figurative manner.¹⁴

HOLY CITY AND TEMPLE MEASUREMENTS

Before interpreting "*the temple*," what about "*the Holy City*?" John says, the Gentiles "*trample on the holy city*." Is John alluding to Jerusalem? It is called the Holy City in both the Old and New Testaments.¹⁵ In addition to that fact, Jesus identifies the Holy City in Luke's Gospel as Jerusalem, employing the exact same image. "There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. The Gentiles *will trample on Jerusalem* until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled."¹⁶ Scholars agree that Jesus' prediction began with the Roman overthrow of the city in 70 A.D.. Jesus said this foreign occupation would continue "until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." John states that this trampling will last "forty-two months."¹⁷

To interpret "the temple," let us define "measure," as John is told to measure it. In biblical terms, measuring indicates three things. **First**, it denotes rebuilding. "I will return to Jerusalem with mercy, and there my house will be rebuilt. And the measuring line will be stretched out over Jerusalem."¹⁸ Measuring also signifies rebuilding in Ezekiel.¹⁹ "God took me to the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain... buildings that looked like a city. I saw a man... with a linen cord and a measuring rod in his hand."²⁰ **Secondly**, measuring connotes an examination in order to make a precise judgment.²¹ Amos says, "The Lord was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb, with a plumb line in his hand... Then the Lord said, "Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel."²² **Thirdly**, measuring logically involves counting. John is told, "*Go and measure the temple... and count.*"

We already saw that the Jewish remnant was numbered and certified.²³ This measuring of the temple and counting its worshippers is a direct parallel.

¹² But for the Preterists' interpretation how can John measure a destroyed temple? ¹³ Futurists say the temple will be rebuilt (2 Thess. 2:3ff; Matt. 24:15; Dan. 9:27). ¹⁴ Church as the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:20-22). ¹⁵ In OT, Jerusalem, is "the holy city." (Neh. 11:1,18; Isa. 48:2; 52:1; Dan. 9:24). In Gospels, Jerusalem is also "the holy city" before and after Jesus' resurrection (Matt. 4:5;27:53). ¹⁶ Luke 21:23-25 ¹⁷ Discussed later this same timeframe is applied to the Two Witnesses and to the Woman. ¹⁸ Zech. 1:16; 2:1-5 ¹⁹ (Ezek. 40-43; Zech. 2:1-2). Angel measures the New Jerusalem. (Rev. 21:15-22). ²⁰ (Ezek. 40:1-49) Ezekiel's measurements fill four chapters to assure God's people that they will again inhabit Jerusalem. Every aspect of the temple is measured, including outer court. ²¹ To delimit the area that is holy from that which is profane. (Rev. 22:14-15). ²² Amos 7:7-8 ²³ "Oh, when the saints come marching in – I want to be in that *number*."

Revelation fills in vital details concerning the Jewish people. The End does not come until all who belong to Christ from among the Jews are fitly joined and accounted for in God's temple.²⁴ God knows when His temple is complete and according to Divine architectural plans there are final Jewish worshipers who, once examined and accounted for, must be included in the building. Our interpretation of John's prophecy must account for Israel.

Paul reminds us that we "were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise." But now in Christ, we are made one new body. "Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become *a holy temple* in the Lord... being built together to become *a dwelling in which God lives* by his Spirit."²⁵

ISRAEL'S RESTORATION

Avoiding two extremes is crucial to understanding Israel in Bible prophecy. One approach bestows on natural, geopolitical Israel every Bible promise. The other approach gives everything to the Church. Paul confronts Gentile believers with the danger of the latter. "I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers... Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved."²⁶

John presents the mystery of Israel's restoration with images of "the temple" and "the Holy City." He says, "*The mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.*"²⁷ They tell us that God is cognizant of all His covenant promises. He sets a limit, therefore, on Israel's apostasy and Jerusalem's desolation. Before the End, Israel is restored as holy to the Lord and the capstone to His temple. Her restoration is two-fold: a geopolitical Israel in control of Jerusalem and a large, final company of Jews who believe in Jesus as the Messiah.

"The Return of the Lord" by Earnest Baker sits on my bookshelf. Although published in 1917, when there was no nation Israel, Earnest predicted the rebirth of Israel as a nation.²⁸ "Who has ever heard of such a thing? Who has ever seen such things? Can a country be born in a day or a nation be brought forth in a moment? Yet no sooner is Zion in labor than she gives birth to her children."²⁹ Reborn in 1948, Israel then retook Jerusalem during the Six-Day War in 1967. Two hundred thousand Jews went to the Wailing Wall on the

²⁴ For "when Israel came out of Egypt, Judah became God's Sanctuary." (Ps. 114:2) His temple in which He took up residence in the world. ²⁵ Paul says, "This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body." (Eph. 2:12-3:6) ²⁶ Rom. 11:25-29 ²⁷ Rev. 10:7 ²⁸ Ezek. 36:33-35; Hos. 3:4-5; Lev. 26:1ff; Deut. 28:1ff ²⁹ Isa. 66:8

day they retook Jerusalem, where they wept and rejoiced as they read from the Psalms. “I rejoiced with those who said to me, “Let us go to the house of the LORD. Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem.”³⁰

One of the greatest arguments for the Bible is the history of the Jews.³¹ Their return to Palestine is a witness to the nations that the End is near.³² Regular news events from Israel broadcast to the world that time is running out. Since Jerusalem is a Holy City to every global religion, it is no wonder that the ministries of the Two Witnesses began in Jerusalem and will eventually end there. Their ministry logically follows and is related to the measuring of God’s temple and the counting of His true worshipers.



BEFORE THE END ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH WITNESS

“And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.”³³ “If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die. These men have power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want.”³⁴

Who are these Two Witnesses? Some say they stand for the Old and New Testaments. Others claim that they are literally Moses and Elijah, who prophesy in Jerusalem during the Great Tribulation.³⁵ These Two Witnesses are very symbolic, however, and are likened to two Olive trees and two Lampstands. These symbols clearly reveal them as Israel and the church. We saw both groups when God sealed His servants. Now John shows us their anointed ministry, which is severely opposed by Satan but will ultimately usher in the End of the age.

³⁰ Ps. 122:1-2 ³¹ Palestine’s desolation and rejuvenation is predicted beforehand. That desolation partly resulted from a Turkish tax placed on trees. In protest, Bedouins living in Palestine cut down many trees. A result was lack of rainfall for centuries, which caused the desert to gradually encroach upon the land. Travellers to Palestine were appalled by its barrenness. Returning Jews, however, planted millions of trees, and the land has experienced increased rainfall. Isaiah said, “the desert will bloom like a rose.” Today, Israel is a leading exporter of roses. (Isa. 35:1ff;41:1 - 44:8) ³² God’s blessings and judgments upon Israel were so that “the nations will know that I am the Lord!” (Ezek. 12:15). The rebirth of Israel and advance of the Gospel via the Church is a tremendous witness of the approaching end. Israel is God’s Timepiece, and a sign that the prophecies awaiting fulfillment will be fulfilled in due course. ³³ (Rev. 11:3-4) They prophesy for 1,260 days. A time, times, and a half time or 3 1/2 years or 42 months of 30 days each. This timeframe will feature frequently. We spend a whole chapter looking at it. ³⁴ Rev. 11:5-6 ³⁵ Some say they are Enoch and Elijah because they did not see death. (Gen. 5:24; 2 Kings 2:11).

OLIVE TREES AND LAMPSTANDS

Reasons abound for interpreting the Two Witnesses as Israel and the Church. **(1)** Obviously, they are not literal trees or lampstands. **(2)** Olive trees and lampstands represent Israel and the Church.³⁶ **(3)** Paul uses this analogy for both. “You were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree.”³⁷ **(4)** Lampstands stand for churches. Jesus stood in the midst of the seven lampstands or churches. **(5)** God often says of Israel, “You are my witnesses,” as she made known to the world that there is One True God.³⁸ Jesus says the same of the Church, for she makes known the only Savior. **(6)** John’s vision of their awe-inspiring power confirms their identity as Israel and the Church. “*If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies.*”³⁹ History confirms that nations rise and fall based on whether they receive or reject God’s witnesses. National blessings and curses are a direct result. **(7)** The specific powers of the Two Witnesses allude to Moses and Elijah, who turned water into blood and called fire down on their adversaries.⁴⁰

MOSES - ELIJAH COMPANY

Moses is a fitting type of the Old Testament saint (Israel), while Elijah characterizes the New Testament believer (the Church).⁴¹ Moses for the Old due to his relationship to the Law, while Elijah is likened to a New Testament believer by James.⁴² The Spirit of Elijah is also said to prepare the way for the Lord.⁴³ In their witness, Moses and Elijah both stood in the face of great opposition as does Israel and the Church. And God wonderfully preserved them until their mission was accomplished. It is noteworthy too that Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, which Peter cites as a type of the Second Coming. For Christ will appear in the clouds with all His departed saints from both the Old and New Testaments.⁴⁴

God establishes everything in the mouth of Two Witnesses. Consider how apropos it is, therefore, that there are Two Witnesses and not one, three or any other number. **(1)** For the law itself required two witnesses: “the testimony of two men is true?” **(2)** The same principle was applied in the New Testament. “Every matter must be established by the testimony of two.”⁴⁵ **(3)** A serious judgment could not be carried out against anyone without two witnesses.⁴⁶ **(4)** God uses two because they provide confirmation. **(5)** God also ordained two

³⁶ “Lord called you a thriving olive tree.” (Jer. 11:16). ³⁷ Rom. 11:24 ³⁸ Isa. 43:10-12; 44:8 ³⁹ Rev. 11:5-6; Ex. 7:17, 19-20 ⁴⁰ 1 Kings 17:1ff; 2 Kings 1:10, 12 ⁴¹ They represent more than themselves ⁴² Timeframe for their prophecy, 3 1/2 years, parallels the time it did not rain during Elijah’s prophecy. (James 5:16). ⁴³ Mal. 3:1; 4:5 ⁴⁴ Matt. 17:3; 2 Peter 1:16-19; 1 Thess. 4:14; Rev. 1:7; Zec. 14:4 ⁴⁵ Deut. 17:6; 19:15; 2 Cor 13:1; Matt. 18:16 John 8:17. ⁴⁶ Num. 35:29; Deut. 17:6-7; 19:15

for companionship.⁴⁷ (6) There are many examples of Two Witnesses in the Bible: Caleb and Joshua, Moses and Aaron, and Elijah and Elisha. (7) Two Witnesses are better than one for a complete number of other reasons.⁴⁸

God has never been without witnesses.⁴⁹ He has two due to the seriousness of their testimony.⁵⁰ Their testimony is so serious that plagues accompany it, and fiery condemnation awaits all who reject it.⁵¹ Their words are compared to fire that devours their enemies like Jeremiah's prophetic words. "I will make my words in thy mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them."⁵² Jeremiah could not keep quiet in spite of all the opposition he faced. "His word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones."⁵³ These witnesses "cannot help speaking about what they have seen and heard," which is the "*testimony of Jesus, the spirit of prophecy.*"⁵⁴

OPPOSITION

The Witnesses invariably face opposition. "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."⁵⁵ C. S. Lewis testified to millions of readers. At first such undignified behavior embarrassed the hierarchy at Oxford University. It cost Lewis a chance of advancing to a higher position in the faculty. He discovered that if you speak about beauty or goodness or God as a great spiritual force, people remain friendly. But the temperature drops when you discuss a God who gives definite commands, clearly acts and who has one way to save sinners.⁵⁶

Soon God's witnesses will complete their testimony to the entire world.⁵⁷ The Gospel will have made a complete circuit from Jerusalem to all nations and back to the Holy City. Until then no one can stop God's witnesses. Woe to all who try. The plagues on Egypt have their counterpart in the sorrows that have come on men in all ages that have sought to hurt the Lord's people. No one can harm them without suffering God's judgments.⁵⁸ Just as our Lord was hedged around with an impenetrable guard until His voice was stilled in death not one of God's witnesses can ever be swept away until his testimony is finished.⁵⁹ Once the martyrs have finished their testimony; "*the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit*" appears on the scene to kill them.

⁴⁷ Mark 6:7; Luke 10:1; Gen. 19:1ff ⁴⁸ Eccl. 4:9-12 ⁴⁹ God calls heaven and earth to witness (Deut. 4:26; 30:19). ⁵⁰ Two witnesses were required to inflict the death penalty. Same principle applies to the second death. (Deut. 17:6). ⁵¹ Heb. 10:28 "Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people." (Acts. 3:22-23) ⁵² Jer. 51:4 (Hos. 6:5) ⁵³ (Jer. 20:9 see also Ps. 39:3; 18:8, 97:3). ⁵⁴ Acts 4:20; Rev.19:10 ⁵⁵ 2 Tim. 3:12 ⁵⁶ Kathryn Lindskoog - James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988), pg. 490. ⁵⁷ Rom. 15:19 ⁵⁸ 2 Thess. 1:6 ⁵⁹ John 10:39



4 BEFORE THE END THE BEAST OVERPOWERS THE WITNESSES

“Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them. Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.”⁶⁰

Here is the first mention of “*the beast*.” From this point on, Revelation enlarges greatly on this war against the Two Witnesses.⁶¹ In fact, the Beast’s opposition to God’s witnesses represents his whole history. In the ensuing chapters, we are shown, not one, but two Beasts. The first reappears as “*the beast that comes up from the Abyss*.”⁶² He is the ongoing expression of Satan’s antagonism. We will investigate both Beasts and the nature and methodology of their war on the witnesses. We will see that Satan employs them in a two-fold attack: from without by persecution and from within by heresy.

FROM WITHOUT

Persecution is one form of attack that Satan uses against God’s witnesses.⁶³ Satan inspired Cain to murder his brother Abel. Pharaoh was roused to genocide against the Jews. Satan has often stirred up powerful enemies to annihilate God’s righteous seed. These attacks include all the martyrs and massacres of history. John is shown a Beast carrying a woman who is drunk “*with the blood of the saints*,”⁶⁴ and is told that “*in her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth*.”⁶⁵

Jesus knew His witnesses would face persecution. He said, “On account of me you will stand before governors and kings.”⁶⁶ “This will result in your being witnesses to them.”⁶⁷ Jesus endured persecution and understands that Satan’s aim is to silence us. But Christ allows these attacks, because they can make us strong and spread the Gospel even more if we refuse Satan’s intimidation. Therefore, Jesus does not issue bulletproof vests or sell us life insurance. Instead, He says, “Stop being afraid” not just once but forever “of people who can kill the body but not the soul.”⁶⁸

FROM WITHIN

Satan knows that a martyr-like Abel “still speaks, even though he is dead.”⁶⁹ So in a more subtle strategy to silence the witnesses, Satan adapts himself

⁶⁰ Rev. 11:7-8 ⁶¹ “Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who... hold to the testimony of Jesus.” (Rev. 12:17; 13:1-18; 16:14; 19:19). ⁶² Rev. 11:7; 17:8; Dan. 7:21 ⁶³ Rev. 1:9; 2:10,13; 6:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2 ⁶⁴ Rev. 17:6

⁶⁵ Rev. 18:24 ⁶⁶ Mark. 13:9-10 ⁶⁷ Luke 21:13 ⁶⁸ Matt. 10:26-28 Paraphrased. ⁶⁹ Heb. 11:4

to an outward form of Christianity. It's the "if you can't beat 'em join 'em" approach. His aim though is to distort the Gospel. This strategy is far more deceitful and devastating than persecution. Throughout the Old Testament, we see this same strategy used against Israel. And like Israel, the church has experienced a Babylonian captivity, bound by the traditions of men and their false modes of worship. The New Testament warns that Satan would make numerous inroads against the Church.⁷⁰ The letters to seven churches reveal the onset of Satan's attack.⁷¹

DEVIL'S CHRISTMAS

*"For three and a half days men from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth."*⁷²

This verse has aptly been called, "The Devil's Christmas." As the Beast silences the witnesses, the world responds with a festive holiday. Their lifeless, unburied bodies, left in full public view, become an occasion to party, because their testimony no longer torments them. Three verbs describe the world's response: gloat, celebrate, and exchange.

In the symbolic language of the passage, the world observes the demise of the Church's prophetic witness, even while all its worldwide structures are still in place.⁷⁴ Christ's body becomes a listless frame, the Church a mere carcass of Christianity. Sending each other gifts in the name of Father Christmas, promoting excess and greed, and making Christ's birthday an occasion for drunkenness and revelry testifies to Christianity's lifeless witness.⁷³

The city in which the bodies of the witnesses lie is called "*Sodom and Egypt*." It is an immoral (Sodom) place of bondage (Egypt).⁷⁵ Shockingly, the city is identified as Jerusalem "*where our Lord was slain*."⁷⁶ It is also called "*the great city*," referred to elsewhere as Babylon.⁷⁷ Without the Spirit of God, Judaism and Christianity are but dead religions. Their relics are powerless to save and their rituals void of virtue to change men's hearts.

The interval of the world's triumph is short.⁷⁸ Even during this brief time, unbelievers cannot forget the spirit that once inhabited their bodies.

⁷⁰ Dark Ages was a time of apostasy. ⁷¹ Rev. 3:1ff ⁷² Rev. 11:9-10 ⁷³ Let us celebrate Christ's Advent without making it an occasion to sin. (Proper use of sending gifts in Est. 9:19, 22). ⁷⁴ In the ancient world to leave someone unburied was to show them great contempt. ⁷⁵ Gen. 13:13 ⁷⁶ Prophets refer to the people of Jerusalem as inhabitants of Sodom. (Isa. 1:9-10; 3:9 Ezek. 16:46, 48-49; Matt 10:15; 11:23). ⁷⁷ Rev. 14:8; 17:18; 18:2, 10, 16, 18-19, 21. ⁷⁸ The 3½ years are contrasted to 3 ½ days. The contempt to which men will subject the Church is limited compared to the affect of her witness.

The Greek verb here is enlightening. The English reads, “*when they shall have finished their testimony*,” but the tense is literally “*whenever they finish*.”⁷⁹ The witnesses are not silenced until they have testified to Jesus and they are only silenced for a season. Revelation thus gives us not only that which was true then but also what is true now. And, we might add, will continuously be true in one part of Christendom or another throughout the Christian age.⁸⁰



BEFORE THE END ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH ARE REVIVED

“But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them.”⁸¹

The Witnesses are raised back to life. The resurrection answers all. “After three days,” Christ’s body was raised.⁸² On the third day, Jonah was brought forth from the belly of the whale.⁸³ On the third day, Israel is restored.⁸⁴ Ezekiel’s dead bones that symbolized captive Israel have come alive. The Lord told him to prophesy to them. “I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life.”⁸⁵ In Revelation, all the great truths of the Bible are found. God’s witnesses, Israel and the Church, share in Jesus’ resurrection power.

CHRIST’S PATTERN

Jesus is the pattern for Israel and the Church. They share in the likeness of His death and in the likeness of His resurrection. Throughout the New Testament, we find this truth. Believers are “made conformable unto his death” so that they may know Him in the power of His resurrection.⁸⁶ When Christ was betrayed, condemned, and crucified, it was Satan’s “hour, and the power of darkness.”⁸⁷ Often the powers of hell have thought that they have crushed God’s people. But when the Devil can do no more than what he has done and the Voltaires and Diocletians of this present age have written the epitaph of the Church, God suddenly turns the tables on them.

Israel’s history, her horrid Holocaust of late, evinces a death and resurrection. This past century has seen an unprecedented period of new life for both witnesses. “The Spirit of life” has moved on “the dry bones” of Israel and the Church.⁸⁸ Israel is a nation and the Pentecostal revival, which began in 1906, saw many great, global ministries launched by 1948. Now Israel and the Church stand before the world again as powerful witnesses.

⁷⁹ Same verb tense for the Millennium: “Whenever the thousand years are expired.” ⁸⁰ Luke 6:26 ⁸¹ Rev. 11:11 ⁸² Matt. 27:63; Mark 8:31 ⁸³ Jonah 1:17; Matt. 12:40 ⁸⁴ (Hos. 6:2) There are other renewal events after three days like Paul receiving his sight. (Acts 9:9). ⁸⁵ (Ezek. 37:5, 10-12) Revelation uses the image of resurrection like Ezekiel does in his vision of the Valley of Dry Bones. ⁸⁶ Rom. 6:6-10; 2 Cor. 1:9; 4:10-14; Phil. 3:10-11 ⁸⁷ Luke. 22:53 ⁸⁸ Holy Spirit outpourings are sounds of this breath of life entering the witnesses. (John 3:8).

For seventy years, people in the Soviet Union were told that God was dead. It was old ladies who venerated a buried corpse, but the State had seemingly destroyed faith in Christ. But in 1990, just months before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, something unusual happened. During the May Day parade in Moscow's Red Square, the tanks, missiles and troops were marching along, saluting the ruling elite, when a crowd of Orthodox believers made their way to the back of the parade. They had a huge eight-foot cross. The moment the throng passed in front of the Soviet leader, the believers hoisted their heavy burden toward the sky. Up out of the crowd the Cross emerged, towering over the poster faces of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. Right in front of Gorbachev's reviewing stand, one protester shouted, his deep voice piercing straight toward the Soviet leader. "Mikhail Gorbachev! Christ is risen!"

RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION

*"Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on."*⁸⁹

In many places around the world, the church is coming alive. So watch out, because after the Two Witnesses are raised up, they are taken up. They share not only in Christ's death and resurrection, but they ascend in a similar manner. There is a cloud and they are taken out of sight.⁹⁰ Revelation envisions the enthronement of God's witnesses, as they are vindicated like their Lord.⁹¹ Our resurrection and ascension at Christ's Return will complete this prophecy as it will every unfulfilled prophecy. For this catching up is immediately accompanied by a mighty earthquake, associated with the End of the age.



AT THE END GOD'S KINGDOM COMES

*"At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon."*⁹²

Christ's resurrection proved His claims that He was the Son of God, and the Witnesses' resurrection authenticates their testimony. The earthquake that follows is also the counterpart to the earthquake when Jesus was raised.⁹³ It signals the End of the age,⁹⁴ and parallels the earthquake in the sixth Seal. *"There was a great earthquake...the sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place."*⁹⁵ This is not your typical earthquake.

⁸⁹ Rev. 11:12 ⁹⁰ Rev 1:7 ⁹¹ Rev. 3:21; 4:1,4,10; 5:6; 7:9-17; 14:3-5; 19:4-5 ⁹² Rev. 11:13-14 ⁹³ Matt. 27:51-54; 28:2 ⁹⁴ Rev. 8:4-6 ⁹⁵ Rev. 6:12-14

When I invite mission partners to Zimbabwe, I like to humor them saying, “in Zimbabwe, we don’t have earthquakes. Neither do we have floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, typhoons or volcanic eruptions like in the U.S.A.. We only have droughts, famines, wars and pestilence. We have what you might call ‘the African version’ of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

John reveals that there is an earthquake coming that will strike all lands at the same time. It signals the End. We read of it again with the seventh Bowl. *“No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake.”*⁹⁶

The numbered killed by the earthquake is seven thousand people. That does not sound like a very large number, but it is not meant as a literal tally of the death toll. It is used to signify a complete number. And when seven is raised to a thousand, it signifies a large, total number. Also, a tenth of the city is destroyed, which is a significant Bible fraction. Scripturally, the tenth part is the tithes that belongs to God. So God exacts His due. Men had refused to recognise that everything they possess belongs to God, but they are suddenly forced to acknowledge that the remaining nine tenths are now on call for collection. Men are awe-struck. They realize how completely wrong they have been, and *“the remnant gives glory to God.”*⁹⁷ *“Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come.”*⁹⁸

TO KINGDOM COME

When the Witnesses are caught up and the earthquake strikes, God’s Kingdom has fully come. Everything in the seventh Trumpet signals the End. The seventh Trumpet announces the third woe, the destruction of the wicked as well as the resurrection and reward of the righteous.

*“The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.” And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: “We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign.”*⁹⁹

The seventh Trumpet announces God’s Kingdom take-over. His Kingdom comes on earth as it is in Heaven. “Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”¹⁰⁰ “When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Rev. 16:17-18 ⁹⁷ First time evil men give glory to God. Another indication of the End. (Jos. 7:19; Prov. 16:4; Jer. 13:16). ⁹⁸ Rev. 14:7 ⁹⁹ Rev. 11:15-17 ¹⁰⁰ Matt. 13:41-42 ¹⁰¹ 2 Thess. 1:10



AT THE END THE FINAL JUDGEMENT COMES

John's previous passage left out the fate of the remnant. For at Christ's Return, a great earthquake ends the world, and Jesus judges the living and the dead. Final judgment starts with the nations.

*"The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great—and for destroying those who destroy the earth."*¹⁰²

NATIONS JUDGED

Judging the nations is often found in the Old Testament and in Revelation.¹⁰³ "Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge you." "His wrath is upon all their armies. He will totally destroy them." John likens God's judgment upon the nations to all-out war. That war is called "*the battle on the great day of God Almighty,*" "*Armageddon*" and "*the great supper of God.*"¹⁰⁴

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your purpose in life and how do you hope to fulfill it?
2. What do you currently need more: a balanced diet, exercise or both?
3. Why would you say you are part of God's company of witnesses?
4. What opposition do you face?
5. What are your thoughts on Israel?
6. How do you understand death and resurrection in the life of a witness?
7. What area in your life is Friday? Do you know 'Sunday is comin'!

The next chapter of Revelation gives us details on this war. It is the age old conflict of the Woman and the Serpent.

John reveals the heavenly origin of this war, which is waged on earth. He also explains why the Woman and her Seed are fiercely opposed by Satan.

In the chapters that follow we are told that the Dragon conjures up

the Beast and the False Prophet, and uses Babylon and the nations, who he deceives, to fight on his behalf.

¹⁰² Rev. 11:18 ¹⁰³ "The nations" 17 times in Revelation. (Joel 3:2; Ps. 79:1-10; Isa. 13:4-6; 17:12-14; 34:2) ¹⁰⁴ Rev 16:12-16; 19:15-21; 20:8-13

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

WOMAN AND DRAGON

SEVEN PARTICULARS OF JOHN'S VISION IN REVELATION 12

I had two vivid dreams in the space of week, when I first came to Christ. In my first dream, I was in a car with my hands on the steering wheel, moving very fast. It was pitch black and I could not see anything in front of me. With no brakes at my feet, I was in dire straits. I cried out, "Jesus!" At that moment, the light came on in my room, and I heard my mom call to wake me. In the second dream, I was again in a car, but now I could see; it was broad daylight. Cars were closely parked on either side of the road. I was moving fast in reverse with my tires screeching. Although my hands were on the steering wheel, an unseen power was steering the vehicle backwards.

These God-given dreams revealed a lot about my life. Driving spoke of the direction my life was heading. The first dream was about Christ coming into my life to prevent me from blindly rushing into a dead-end eternity. "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will give you light."¹ The second dream was about Christ taking control of my life, enabling me to back out of sinful habits and bad associations, symbolized by the dead-end street with cars parked on both sides. In dreams, dramatic events are often conveyed through symbols. Once these symbols are interpreted, the dream is understood. God-given dreams will always be in harmony with God's written Word.

LANGUAGE OF DREAMS AND VISIONS

John's Apocalypse is a classic example of the language of dreams and visions. It is full of meaning when we interpret its symbols in the light of Scripture. Although schemes of interpretation abound, the book clearly reveals Jesus' victory, and nowhere is that triumph proclaimed more powerfully than in Revelation chapter twelve. John presents a detailed account of Satan's defeat. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, a great Nineteenth-century preacher, preached from here in Revelation that Christ, through His death and resurrection, defeated the Devil in the highest realm of Heaven.

To appreciate Christ's victory, we must understand the nature of the conflict. It is no less than the age-old enmity between the Woman and the Serpent and between her Seed and his seed. The connection between the two Witnesses and the Beast of chapter eleven and that of the Woman and her adversary in

¹ Eph. 4:14

chapter twelve is logical rather than chronological. Revelation fills in vital details concerning the origin of this great conflict. John identifies the Two Witnesses as the Woman's offspring and the two Beasts as the Dragon's seed. He provides the vital context to Revelation's disputed thirteenth chapter.² Let us interpret, therefore, seven particulars of this great vision.

1 ➤ **PREGNANT WOMAN ABOUT TO GIVE BIRTH**

“A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth.”³

John sees a remarkable sign in Heaven that tells the greatest story ever told. This vivid scene portrays Israel's history as that of a pregnant Woman ready to give birth to the Messiah. Every feature of the vision indicates that the Woman is Israel. In Joseph's dream with the sun, moon, and twelve stars, the entire incipient nation of Israel is symbolically represented in these exact terms.⁴ She is “clothed with the sun.” The sun symbolizes Christ, “the Sun of righteousness.”⁵ “A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.”⁶ All of Israel's prophets foretold of the coming Man-child, the Seed of the Woman, who would break the Serpent's power.

The opening verses of John's vision depict the entire Old Testament period. The “moon” under her feet represents the dispensation of the Law. Like the moon in relation to the sun, the Law merely reflected the good thing to come.⁷ Along with the prophets, the law bore witness of Christ, and Israel walked in it until she brought forth her Man-child.⁸

ISRAEL EXPECTING MESSIAH

Jeremiah frequently uses the motif for Israel of “pain as a woman in travail.” “I hear a cry as of a woman in labor, a groan as of one bearing her first child - the cry of the Daughter of Zion gasping for breath.”⁹ After centuries of travail, Israel brought forth the Christ-child, the one who is to rule all nations. The prophet Micah wrote, “But you, Bethlehem of Judah...out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth...He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD...for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.”¹⁰ The Old Testament prophets depicted Israel expecting the Messiah.

² Chapter twelve is a most crucial connecting chapter. ³ Rev. 12:1-2 ⁴ Gen. 37:9-10 ⁵ Mal. 4:2 ⁶ Luke 2:32. ⁷ Col. 2:16-17; Heb. 10:1 ⁸ Gal. 3:19ff. ⁹ Jer. 4:31; 13:21; 22:23; 30:6 ¹⁰ Micah 5:2-4

The Woman is Israel. This is the only interpretation consistent with Scripture. It is also in keeping with the rest of John's vision. Notice the elements that confirm the Woman as Israel. (1) The twelve stars on her head. (2) Her being clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet. (3) Her being pregnant (4) A Dragon opposing the birth of her child. (5) The ruling Man-child who she delivers. (6) The desert to which she goes after the Man-child ascends. (7) The rest of her offspring. These elements all fit Israel and no body else.

Other interpretations are mistakenly put forward for the Woman's identity. For example, many claim the woman is Mary, Jesus' mother, and that this envisions her earthly sorrow and Assumption as Queen of Heaven. But Scripture does not teach that Mary is Heaven's Queen.¹¹ Further a field, Mary Baker Eddy, founder of Christian Science, considered the vision to represent her and Christian Science her "brainchild." The dragon, she taught, was the mortal mind trying to destroy her new religion. Still others maintain that the pregnant woman is the Church. But the Church did not give birth to Christ. On the contrary, the Church came out of Christ. She is represented as a chaste bride, awaiting her Bridegroom - not as an expectant mother.

2 ➤ **RED DRAGON SEEKS TO DEVOUR HER CHILD**

*"Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born."*¹²

A THIRD OF THE HEAVENLY HOST

The next personage to appear in this great cosmic drama is a horrible Dragon.¹³ He stands in opposition to the Woman because of her Child. His aim is to destroy her Seed. He is not alone in his endeavour, for he has angels who fight on his side. For when introduced we are told, *"His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky."*¹⁴ The stars stand for angels and we know that Satan led numerous spirit beings into rebellion. These evil spirits constitute a third of the heavenly host. Since their full number is incalculable, a third alludes to a vast aggregate of demons. A third, however, is the lesser part. The majority of angels, two thirds, remained loyal to God. As Elisha said to his servant, "those who are with us are more than those who are with them."¹⁵

¹¹ Mary does not flee to the Wilderness nor does Satan make war on her other offspring. ¹² Rev. 12:3-4

¹³ Michael and his angels cast Satan and his angels down from Heaven. ¹⁴ (Rev. 12:4; Dan. 8:10) ¹⁵ [The horn] threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them." ¹⁵ 2 Kings 6:16

The Dragon is enormous in size (as head of a vast host), and horrible in his disposition. His red color signifies his anger and hostility. War is imminent. It is no surprise to find him on the scene and ready to fight with the birth of the promised Seed. He does all he can to keep Man in bondage to his tyranny. This demands that he somehow stop the Man-child lest his authority over mankind be broken. Satan's earthly dominion was dependent on his ability to prevent the Man-child from fulfilling God's redemptive mission.

John saw the climax to the struggle between the Woman's Seed and Satan's. It is a straightforward throwback to the beginning of human history. "He (Christ) will crush your (Satan's) head, and you will strike His heel."¹⁶ From the time Adam fell into sin, God promised a Savior. Because the Serpent knew a Deliverer was coming to crush his big head, he continually attacks the Woman to destroy her offspring. Since Eden, the story repeats itself. We see Cain slaying Abel, the pre-Flood decadence, Pharaoh's decree to kill the Israelite male children, and Haman's evil plot to annihilate the Jewish people. The names and places change, but it's the same old story. Then with the birth of Jesus, Herod massacres the male babies in Bethlehem to destroy Him.¹⁷

MANY EXAMPLES

John envisions Satan's enmity and aim. He also pictures his evil activity. In a desperate effort to block the promised Seed, Satan used the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, and Imperial Rome. Later we see Rome represented among "*the seven heads*" of the Dragon.¹⁸ Each head of the Dragon sought "*to devour her child as soon as it was born.*"¹⁹ And each episode of Israel's history is replete with examples. These attempts were to prevent the promised lineage from having descendants or bring about their defilement. That pattern we see with Jesus. Herod tried to destroy Jesus at birth and Satan tempted Him to sin without succeeding.

Satan found Herod an easy target. It did not take much to motivate Herod to kill the babies in Bethlehem in Satan's attempt to destroy the Christ-child. Herod, the so-called Great, did everything he could to preserve his throne. He slew his wife and his own sons. He systematically hunted down the last of the Hasmonean line to eliminate them from claiming his throne. More than once he ran to Rome to maintain his crown: in 37 B.C. to Antony and in 31 B.C. to Octavian. Satan and Herod thought, if they could stop Christ at birth, they would remain in power and their thrones would be secure.

¹⁶ Gen. 3:15 ¹⁷ Gen. 4:1ff; Ex. 1:7ff; Est. 3:1ff; Matt. 2:16. ¹⁸ Seven signifies completeness. ¹⁹ The seven heads are seven hills, which virtually all scholars agree points to Rome. (Rev. 17: 9-10). We'll look at these verses later in greater detail.

History is fraught with examples of rulers who murder to remain in power. One by one, however, they have fallen and come to nothing. Such is the end for all who “take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His anointed”²⁰ “For they are dead which sought the young child’s life.”²¹ Satan’s workers could not touch Jesus before His appointed time. When at last they were permitted to do so, they unwittingly fulfilled God’s eternal plan of redemption. They overthrew their thrones by the very act by which they sought to maintain them. The same weapon they used to hold their dominion broke their dominion.²²

3 → **MAN-CHILD ASCENDS TO GOD’S THRONE**

“And she brought forth a Man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.”²³

Christ’s birth and exaltation are summed up in one verse. The vision skips over Jesus’ ministry to focus on His exaltation, because John’s vision concerns the issue of heavenly authority. Once ascended to God’s right hand, Jesus was awarded all authority in Heaven and earth.²⁴ He alone has the right to rule all nations. Three times in Revelation the Psalm is quoted, “You will rule them with an iron scepter”²⁵ Because Christ did not hold onto His power and position, He is given the divine right to rule all nations and peoples.

MAN-CHILD ENTHRONED

Jesus’ ascension is the most decisive and deciding event in the cosmic drama. “No one has ascended into heaven except the one who came down from heaven – the Son of Man.”²⁶ Before Christ ascended, the gates of Heaven stood closed to man. But the Son of Man has now opened Heaven and secured a place for us there. Jesus is our “high priest who is made higher than the heavens...who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.” He is not only our sympathetic High Priest, which “ever lives to make intercession for us,” but He is also our “advocate with the Father.”²⁷

There are times in history when an event unleashes radical, unalterable change. In South Africa, after years of apartheid, Solomon’s words were again illustrated - this time in the life of Nelson Mandela. “For out of prison he comes to reign.”²⁸ Dramatic changes have occurred in all nations at one time or another. Nothing in history, however, can compare to the level and scope of transformation brought about by the ascension of Christ to the throne of God.

²⁰ Ps. 2:2. ²¹ Matt. 2:20 ²² “By death He might destroy...the devil.” (He. 2:14) ²³ Rev. 12:5 ²⁴ Acts 2:32-36 ²⁵ Ps. 2:9; Rev. 2:26-28; 19:15 ²⁶ John 3:13 ²⁷ Heb. 7:25-26; 8:1; 1 John 2:1 ²⁸ Eccl. 4:14a.

The Exodus, the conversion of Paul, the rise and fall of the Roman Empire, the Reformation, the defeat of the Spanish Armada, the American Revolutionary War, World War II, the demise of the Soviet Union - nothing, not the affect of everything combined, can be compared to Jesus' exaltation

ACCUSER EXPOSED IN HEAVEN

Jesus' ascension is of ultimate significance in light of Satan's former position. Functioning as the Accuser of men, Satan had a place in Heaven. He acted in the courts of Heaven like a prosecuting attorney, indicting men on earth; yet, his place before God's throne is mostly hidden in the Old Testament. He is only seen when God draws back the curtain. Against Job, Satan stands before God's throne, accusing.²⁹ Most Christians, however, overlook Satan's previous standing. But it is crucial to a proper understanding of the Bible.³⁰

Without an understanding of Satan's place, some Scriptures are incomprehensible. For instance, how else do we understand the "evil spirit from the LORD" that troubled King Saul?³¹ Or how "God sent an evil spirit" against the men of Shechem?³² What about Miciah's vision? He sees the host of Heaven on God's right and left hand, and "a lying spirit" appears before God's throne to go and deceive wicked King Ahab.³³ Before the Cross, Jesus warned Peter of Satan's aim. "Satan hath desired (asked, made strong requests) to have you, that he may sift you as wheat"³⁴



4 WOMAN FLEES INTO THE DESERT

"The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days."³⁵

Another identifying feature of the Woman as Israel is her wilderness sojourn. God brought Israel into "the wilderness of the nations."³⁶ This desert image evokes a memory of Israel's 40-years in the Sinai Peninsula.³⁷ Like ancient Israel, God takes care of the Woman in the desert of the nations. It was to the desert that the prophet Hosea said God would lure Israel in order to restore her as His own.³⁸ The wilderness is an ongoing part of Israel's history, and entire books have been written on the significance of her wilderness time.³⁹ The wilderness is one of the greatest analogies in the Bible.

²⁹ Job 1:1-2:10 ³⁰ Satan a strong man fully armed for all had sinned and so all stood accused. ³¹ (1Sam. 16:14) 'Out of the presence' of the Lord like in Job. (Job 1:1-2:10). ³² Judg. 9:23-24 ³³ Heavenly host in OT includes evil angels. (Judg. 9:23-24; 1 Kings 22:19-23; Ps. 78:48-49,51; Zec. 3:1) Cherubim on either side of the mercy seat represented the angelic host in Heaven. (Ex. 25:18-20; Heb. 8:5). ³⁴ (Luke 22:31) Request based on Peter's claim as he was snared by his words. Satan tested him on them. ³⁵ Rev. 12:6 ³⁶ Ezek. 20:35-38 ³⁷ Ex.16:25 ³⁸ Hos. 2:14-15 ³⁹ 1 Cor. 10:6,11

We all journey through the wilderness of the world, made desolate by sin, to our heavenly land of bliss.⁴⁰ There is no way around it.

We spend time in a desert for seven basic reasons:⁴¹

1. Learn **dependence** on God to provide for our necessities
2. **Exposure** of what is in our hearts
3. A temporary place of **transition**, not our permanent residency
4. A place we are **trained** for godly service
5. Where we learn **warfare** against opposing forces
6. Deep internal **changes** in our attitudes and core values
7. Lessons learnt there we will **remember** all our days

The wilderness is a place where we change profoundly. It requires a fundamental change in the way we view and live life. The wilderness is part of the journey and process of transformation, as nobody changes completely overnight. We experience a Passover salvation and we go through a Red Sea baptism, but we must also renew our minds to learn a new way of living.⁴² Moses found that it is easier to get people out of Egypt than to get Egypt out of people. Therefore, in the wilderness, God cuts off ties with our past. He knows that the greater the change the longer it will take. So He takes us into the wilderness where we might learn to humbly trust and rely on Him.

1260 DAYS

After completing her mission as the Christ carrier, John sees the Woman's Offspring scattered in the wilderness of the nation for a period of 1260 days.⁴³ We saw this timeframe when John was told to measure the temple, but not the outer court; it equals the time of the Gentiles, when the Holy City is trampled down for 42 months (30 days each totaling 1260 days).⁴⁴ Measured in years, it is 3 ½ years. It is also called "a time, times, and half a time."⁴⁵ We will spend an entire chapter on the significance of this timeframe.

Satan knows that his time is short, since he failed to achieve his aim against the Woman, the Manchild, and her Offspring. Satan is portrayed in this chapter as a seven time loser.

1. **Dragon attempted to devour Jesus but He ascended to God's throne.**⁴⁶
2. **Satan and his angels fought against Michael and his angels but lost.**⁴⁷
3. **Satan's malicious work as the Accuser in Heaven is ended.**⁴⁸

⁴⁰ Elijah fled to the desert. John the Baptist sojourned there. Jesus spent time there as did Paul. (Deut. 8:2-4; 1 Kings 19:3-8; Luke 1:80; Gal. 1:17-18). ⁴¹ Deut. 8:1-18 ⁴² In the wilderness, God gave the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20). ⁴³ Luke 21:24; Rom. 11:24-26 ⁴⁴ Rev. 11:2 ⁴⁵ Rev. 12:13-17 ⁴⁶ Rev. 12:5 ⁴⁷ Rev. 12:9 ⁴⁸ Rev. 12:10-11

4. He no longer has a place in Heaven for he has been cast out.⁴⁹
5. Devil pursued the Woman but God prepared a safe place for her.⁵⁰
6. Serpent tried to drown Her but earth swallowed up the flood.⁵¹
7. Satan lost the war against the Woman's Offspring.⁵²

The verbs *lost* and *hurled down*, which appear five times, highlight the most significant aspect of Satan's defeat - losing his place in Heaven.⁵³



5 DRAGON LOSES HIS POSITION IN HEAVEN

*“And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.”*⁵⁴

WAR IN HEAVEN

After the Man-child ascended, war broke out in Heaven.⁵⁵ John's wording and order of the combatants is significant. Notice that Michael, not Satan, is spoken of first. For Michael and the elect angels are on the offensive. *“The Dragon and his angels fought back”* indicates that they were on the defense. Satan fiercely resisted but he could not withstand the great Archangel who acted on Christ's victory. Satan and his legions were forcibly removed from their position in Heaven, a place they had occupied since creation.

John's vision is not an account of a prehistoric rebellion and removal of Satan. Nor does John predict a future casting down. Satan's eviction from Heaven happened at Christ's ascension in fulfillment of prophecy. Ezekiel prophesied, “I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God... O covering cherub.”⁵⁶ Isaiah says, “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! For you said in your heart: I will ascend... Yet you shall be brought down.”⁵⁷ Jesus said His death would end Satan's place in Heaven. “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.”⁵⁸

John's Gospel uses exactly the same words as Revelation: “cast out.” From where was Satan cast out? He was not cast out of the world, but out of the third

⁴⁹ (Rev. 12: 10) Prophets predicted Satan's dethronement. (Isa. 14:3-20, Ezek. 28:11-19). These passages reveal pride was Satan's root sin. (1 Tim. 3:6). Genesis provides the account of the first sin as Satan's murderous lie by which he established a kingdom, the very antithesis of God's, and man became part of it. God, however, promised a Redeemer. (Gen. 3:1-15). ⁵⁰ Rev. 12: 6, 14 ⁵¹ Rev. 12:15-16 ⁵² Rev. 12:17 ⁵³ Rev. 12: 9,10,13. ⁵⁴ Rev. 12:7-9 ⁵⁵ Conflict in heavenlies. (Dan. 10:12-13). ⁵⁶ Ezek. 28:16 ⁵⁷ Isa. 14:12-15 ⁵⁸ John 12:23-24,28-33

or highest Heaven, where God dwells and where he accused the brethren.⁵⁹ Jesus speaks of this happening in the “now,” at the present time.

NO MORE PLACE

The war’s outcome is perfectly summarized. *“Neither was their place found any more in heaven.”*⁶⁰ Heaven is off-limits to the Accuser. Throughout history, Satan had appeared there “day and night.”⁶¹ However, when Jesus bore the penalty for our sins, Satan lost his grounds to accuse us in Heaven.⁶² He can neither ask permission to test us as Job nor to sift us as he did Peter. Job’s cry for an Advocate has been answered, and Peter’s desperate need for a High Priest has been met. The Lord has broken the staff of the Wicked. He has drawn out Leviathan by His Cross and bound the Strongman by His blood. The Anointed Cherub has been cast as profane out of the mountain of God. Lucifer has fallen from Heaven like lightning. The thunderous sound of God’s judgment against his proud rebellion still echoes throughout creation.⁶³

V-DAY IN HEAVEN

*“Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.”*⁶⁴

When Lord Nelson reported to the British Admiralty his great victory over the French fleet in the Battle of the Nile, he said that victory was not a large enough word to describe it. What word then can describe Christ’s victory? All Heaven proclaims it. Let the church bells ring. It is V-day! It is a victory longed for since Eden, which every elect angel awaited and every demon dreaded. The Lion of the Tribe of Judah has prevailed. He has cleansed the true Tabernacle in Heaven. As our great High Priest, He has applied His blood to the mercy seat. His victory is ours. Now men can appear before God’s throne faultless, since **three spiritual realities** in Heaven have been cleansed:

- **Handwriting of ordinances was blotted out.**⁶⁵
- **Continual accusations of sin were silenced.**⁶⁶
- **The Accuser himself was removed from Heaven.**⁶⁷

Faith in Christ’s cleansing work is a key to victorious Christian living. If, however, we think that Satan’s expulsion from Heaven is a future event,

⁵⁹ Satan is confined to 1st and 2nd heaven. (Eph. 2:2; 6:12). ⁶⁰ Rev. 12:8 ⁶¹ Job 1:6; 2:1; 1 Sam. 16:14; Judg. 9:23-24; 1 Kings 19:22ff; Luke 22:31 ⁶² Rom. 8:34 ⁶³ In Luke, the metaphor is lightning (Luke 10:18). Satan hits earth like lightning. In John, it’s preceded by a sound like thunder (John 12:29,31). ⁶⁴ Rev. 12:10 ⁶⁵ Col. 2:14-15 ⁶⁶ Rom. 8:31,33-34 ⁶⁷ Rev. 12:10

we can fail to appropriate what is ours right now. Paul, however, asked the rhetorical question, “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies...Christ Jesus... is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.”⁶⁸

In Christ, we have been raised “*far above* all principality and power.”⁶⁹ We “*tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy?*”⁷⁰ You see Satan cannot be in Heaven and under our feet at the same time.⁷¹ The war in Heaven has been won, and our position there is secure; yet, the battle on earth has intensified. John hears this battle cry. “*They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.*”⁷²

Satan still lords it over the children of disobedience. His names, in this passage, reveal his ongoing activity. His names are great Dragon, ancient Serpent, Devil, Satan, and Deceiver. These are given for two reasons: to identify the one whom Christ has conquered, and to alert the dwellers on earth of this monster’s capability to still deceive and destroy.



HEAVEN REJOICES BUT EARTH MOURNS

*“Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.”*⁷³

HEAVEN OPEN

Heaven’s inhabitants have many reasons to rejoice.⁷⁴ The Accuser has been cast down and Heaven is now open to their brethren.⁷⁵ The highest or third Heaven was represented by the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle of Moses.⁷⁶ The Veil in that earthly tabernacle, which separated the Holy of Holies, conveyed a great spiritual reality. It meant that in no uncertain terms the way into God’s presence was closed to sinful mankind.⁷⁷ Only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies once a year on the Great Day of Atonement.⁷⁸ But when Jesus died, the Veil was torn from top to bottom, indicating that God had reached down to Man and opened the way back to His presence.⁷⁹

Few Christians realize the liberty that belongs to God’s children.⁸⁰ It is like the Emancipation Proclamation, which released African-Americans

⁶⁸ Rom. 8:33-34 ⁶⁹ Eph. 1:21 ⁷⁰ Luke 10:19 ⁷¹ Rom. 16:20 ⁷² Rev. 12:11 ⁷³ Rev. 12:12 ⁷⁴ Nowhere after the ascension, do we see Satan in heaven. ⁷⁵ Before Christ ascended, no man had ever ascended to Heaven. (John 3:13). ⁷⁶ Heb. 8:5 ⁷⁷ Ex. 26:31; Gen. 3:23-24 ⁷⁸ Ex. 25:18-20; 26:31; Gen. 3:24; Ezek. 28:11-19; Matt. 27:50-53 ⁷⁹ Heb. 9:7-14; Luke 23:45 ⁸⁰ We are free from condemnation.

from slavery. They were free to live where they wanted, to vote and own property. However, even after the Civil War, their previous oppressors used violence, intimidation and deception to deny them their rights. As a result, many former slaves failed to realize the benefits of their new freedom. Some returned to their places in the slave gangs under their old masters. Outwardly, nothing seemed to have changed. Their oppressors, although defeated in the war, appeared as powerful as ever. In addition, they were angry and bitter, prepared to do whatever they could to stay in control. Change only came with a struggle. It was the same with the children of Israel. To possess the Promised Land, they had to take what God had promised. To possess our inheritance in Christ also requires a good fight of faith. For the Church on earth our struggle is not yet over. Much territory must still be possessed.

WOE AWHILE

It is necessary to stress that Christ's exaltation does not mean peace on earth, but a sword and fire. For although Satan can never access God's throne again, he does still have a place on earth due to man's unbelief and sin. Herein lies the source of every injustice and tyranny. And God does not disregard earth's woes. On the contrary, He is engaged in the work of salvation among all nations, not willing that any should perish.⁸¹ Yet, when God banishes Satan and his angels to the Lake of Fire, lost men must also be judged.⁸²

During this interval, Satan wages war against the Woman and her Offspring. Since Israel brought forth the Man-child, Satan hates her. Of course, he also hates the Church for she carries the testimony of Jesus.⁸³ And Satan realizes that once the good news is proclaimed to every nation and again to Israel, his time will be up. Israel and the Church are the Divine timepieces for reckoning Satan's remaining moments.



DRAGON'S ANGRY WAR AGAINST THE WOMAN

*"When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he persecuted the woman who had given birth to the male child. The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. And the dragon was angry with the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring - those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus."*⁸⁴

⁸¹ 2 Peter 3:9 ⁸² Rev. 20:10-15 ⁸³ Rev.12:17 ⁸⁴ Rev. 12:13-17

God preserves Israel in the face of Satan's angry onslaughts. She is given the wings of a great eagle that carry her into the desert. When God brought Israel out of Egypt and through the desert, He carried her on eagles' wings.⁸⁵ "Oh, that I had the wings...I would flee far away and stay in the desert; Selah. I would hurry to my place of shelter, far from the tempest and storm."⁸⁶

When the serpent spews out waters of persecution like a tempest and storm, the earth itself helps the Woman. This river of persecution and trouble to sweep her away proves unsuccessful.⁸⁷ History illustrates Israel's flight to the wilderness of the nations, and the veracity of John's vision. Because of Divine preservation, the Jewish people continue to this hour.

TIME, TIMES AND HALF A TIME

The Woman is preserved in the desert "*for a time, times and half a time.*" This equals 3 ½ years and parallels the timeframe given earlier for her sojourn. In our next chapter, we read that the Beast exercises his authority for an

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What dreams have spoken to you?
2. Why is Satan's position, as the Accuser in heaven, so vital?
3. How would you feel if you knew Satan could accuse you to God?
4. Why is Jesus' Advocacy at God's right hand so important?
5. When did you last have a wilderness experience? What did you learn?
6. Where do you see proof of Satan's war?
7. What was new to you from this chapter?

equal period of forty-two months. It thus becomes evident that the Devil is allotted the same length of time on earth as Israel and the Church. Satan will not give up nor will his activity cease until Jesus Returns. It is darkest, in fact, just before dawn. Missionaries testify that the last onslaught of heathenism is the most ferocious.

Although the Seed of the Woman, as predicted in Genesis, has defeated Satan, his deceptions are not yet over. The Dragon uses two Beasts to make war on the Woman and her Offspring. Our next chapter provides insight into how Satan conducts his war. John thus enlarges upon each theme that is introduced, providing parallels that develop progressively with each chapter. This brings us to what is the most disputed passage in all of Revelation.

⁸⁵ Ex. 19:4; Deut. 32:11; Isa. 40:31; Ps. 91:4 ⁸⁶ Ps. 55:6-8 ⁸⁷ Isa. 43:2

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

TWO BEASTS

SATAN'S SEVENFOLD SCHEME IN REVELATION 13:1-18

Sir Issac Newton's third law of physics states, "Every action has an equal and opposite reaction." In other words, "The bigger the push, the bigger the kickback." That is why a gun recoils. As it fires in one direction, it moves in the opposite. That is also how a plane flies and a rocket enters space. Like the law of sowing and reaping, action and reaction has a moral and spiritual parallel, which applies to everything seen and unseen.

Throughout Revelation, earth reacts to hidden actions occurring in Heaven. In John's vision of the last chapter, we saw a Great War was fought in Heaven to remove Satan from his place. After being cast down to the earth, an angry Devil now reacts by making war on the Woman and her Offspring.

Revelation chapter thirteen tells us how Satan conducts his war. Although the images are profound, the message is simple. There are two directions from which Satan attacks God's people: from without by worldly powers and from within by religious deception. Just as God has Two Witnesses on earth, the Dragon has two Beasts to wage war against them. They appear in different forms, but they have the same purpose.¹ Stop God's witnesses by force or usurp them by deceit. Let us outline Satan's sevenfold scheme.²



DRAGON GIVES HIS POWER TO A SEVEN-HEADED BEAST

"And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority."³

Cast down from Heaven, John sees the Dragon stand on the shore of the sea. Standing at the dividing line between sea and land, he is well positioned to signal and supervise the Beasts from both these lower realms. Satan's aim is to maintain his rule by either killing or subverting God's

¹ Introduced in Revelation chapter 11 and extending to chapter 20, the Dragon uses two Beasts and Mystery Babylon. (Rev. 11:7; 13:1-4, 11-18; 14:9-11; 15:2; 16:2, 10-13; 17:3-17; 19:19-20; 20:4-10). The relationships between them become more clear in Revelation chapter 17. ² Rev. 2:13; 6:10; 11:7; 12:17; 13:4,7; 16:6; 17:6,14; 18:24; 19:2. ³ Rev. 13:1-2

witnesses. The first Beast he embodies and empowers is the Sea Beast, giving him *“his power and his throne and great authority.”*⁴

SEA BEAST WITH BLASPHEMOUS NAMES

Beasts in Scripture represent kingdoms. Daniel’s prophecies describe four beasts or empires coming up out of the restless sea.⁵ John’s Sea Beast arises amidst the peoples of the earth. *“The waters...they are the peoples and the crowds and nations and languages.”*⁶ In Isaiah, the nations are like the raging sea. In the Gospels, the sea signifies the nations in anguish and perplexity as they look with apprehension on what is coming upon the earth.⁷ So the Dragon conjures up the Beast when nations encounter turbulent times of uncertainty. Recent historical examples of beastly powers emerging during a time of national distress include Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, and Mao Tse-tung.

The Dragon’s antagonism towards God is seen by his blasphemous names. These names, displayed on the Beast’s seven heads, reveal that he claims titles and attributes that belong only to God. They are like mottoes or creeds a government adopts. In John’s day, Caesar was revered as “Dominus et Deus” (Lord and God). Other anti-God governments have made their teachings known by slogans. During the French Revolution the saying, “ni Dieu ni maitre” (neither God nor master) was blasphemously touted.⁸ Whenever a government claims what belongs to God, it becomes an instrument of Satan. By assuming Divine prerogatives, it loses its legitimate function. Because it no longer acts as God’s servant, it is rightly said to “go into perdition.”⁹ Totalitarian states are examples. And those who help establish such dictatorial regimes, be they in or out of the Church, are agents of the Beast.¹⁰

SEVEN HEADS AND TEN HORNS

Man’s propensity to form empires to dominate part or if possible all of mankind and every area of life is as old as sin. Satan’s children naturally serve their father’s lust to control. That is why men have struggled under the tyranny of so many evil governments that deny men basic freedoms like worship and speech. From the beginning, Satan has usurped earth’s Righteous King.

The Dragon has seven heads and ten horns just like his Sea Beast. This is hardly a coincidence. It shows how closely Satan is related to his earthly

⁴ Satan offered Jesus such a deal. (Rev. 13:1 cp. w. Luke 4:6). ⁵ Isa. 17:12; Dan. 7:3; Jer. 51:13, 42, 55, 56; Ezek. 26:3 ⁶ Rev. 17:15 ⁷ The times of the Gentiles. (Luke 21:24-26). ⁸ NT Commentary Revelation, Simon J. Kistemaker, pg. 378. ⁹ Rev. 17:8-11 ¹⁰ When government forces men to pay homage to its leaders, they exhibit the first beast and inevitably persecute God’s people. (Dan. 2:37-38; 3:18, 28; 4:17; 6:1ff; Acts 19:31; Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17; Rev. 12-13; 17-18).

representative. Although both have ten horns, the Sea Beast, unlike the Dragon, has ten crowns on his ten horns rather than seven crowns on seven heads.¹¹ The Dragon thus differentiates himself from his delegate. For it is the Dragon who gives authority (crowns) to each beastly head.

The Beast's seven heads, in keeping with the use of that number throughout Revelation, represent a complete number and sequence of evil powers. In chapter seventeen, John tells us that the seven heads of the Beast are also seven mountains. Many scholars interpret these as the hills of Rome. Others understand them to signify seven kingdoms of which Rome is only one. For now, we simply note that Satan clearly used pagan Rome to try to devour the Man-child when he was born and to make war on the early Church.

DANIEL'S BEAST

The Dragon's Sea Beast is similar to Daniel's four beasts. Revelation alludes to some twenty-seven verses in Daniel. Notice seven parallels between John's and Daniel's beasts: **(1)** Come up from the sea **(2)** Make war against God's people **(3)** Have a Lion's mouth. **(4)** Bear's feet **(5)** Leopard's body **(6)** Ten horns and **(7)** Eventually destroyed.

John's Beast, however, is a composite, made from all four of Daniel's beasts. Daniel's first beast was a lion with eagle's wings, next a bear, then a four-headed leopard and finally a fourth beast with ten horns.¹² The leopard speaks of speed in capturing prey and the bear for sheer power while the lion's mouth symbolizes cruelty. The Beast is forceful, fast and furious.

PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Bible students observe that Daniel's four beasts coincide with four successive kingdoms that reigned over the Jews from the time of Daniel until the birth of Christ. **(1)** Babylon – a Lion **(2)** Persia – a Bear **(3)** Greece – a four-headed Leopard (after Alexander the Great, Greece was divided among four kings). **(4)** Rome – a terrible Beast with ten horns.

Daniel's fourth beast was the most dreadful.¹³ It "included all the evil terrors of the evil empires which had gone before it."¹⁴ Although Daniel's fourth beast does not have seven heads, we will see that Revelation's seven-headed Beast out of the sea denotes all worldly powers hostile to God's people, not only in the past and present, but also all that will appear in the future.

¹¹ Ten speaks of a human total number like the whole duty of man is summed up in Ten Commandments.

¹² Dan. 7:1-28 ¹³ Dan. 7:7-8 ¹⁴ R. H. Mounce, Revelation, New Inter. Commentary NT, pg. 246.



SEVEN-HEADED BEAST RECOVERS FROM FATAL WOUND

“One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was astonished and followed the beast. Men worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, “Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?”¹⁶

Satan has always desired the worship that belongs exclusively to God. Through the Beast he receives it as people ask, “Who is like the beast?” This is a parody of the songs of Zion. “Who among the god’s is like you, O Lord?”¹⁷ And it is blatant blasphemy.

FATAL WOUND QUESTION

What does the Beast’s fatal wound and healing mean? It is spoken of three times and becomes the means by which the second Beast compels mankind to worship the first Beast: *“he made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed.”¹⁸* Some relate this head wound to the prophecy in Genesis: *“he (Christ) will crush your (the Serpent’s) head.”¹⁹* That fits the context.²⁰ In chapter twelve the Dragon received a fatal blow when he sought to devour the Woman’s Man-child.²¹

The imagery of the text is multi-faceted. For it is the Beast, not the Dragon, who has the fatal wound that is healed. The Dragon can never recover from Calvary. The entire New Testament teaches that Jesus clearly broke the Dragon’s headship over mankind. By Christ’s death and resurrection, He has disarmed, dethroned and destroyed the Devil’s works.²² Satan’s judgment necessitates his giving his authority to the Beast in a desperate bid to keep mankind in bondage. The text also tells us that “the sword” fatally wounds the Beast and not the Dragon: *“the beast who was wounded by the sword.”²³*

THE SWORD

God’s Word, made flesh in Christ, brought judgment on Satan. It is also the Sword of the Spirit, God’s Word as the testimony of Jesus, in the mouth of the early church martyrs that fatally wounded the Roman beast.²⁴ And it will fatally wound every other Dragon-inspired Beast.

¹⁵ Some Preterists interpret the seven heads as seven Roman emperors: some begin their count with Julius Caesar, others with Augustus. I take seven to mean completeness or all rulers who Satan uses. It therefore does not matter if Rome is the chronological first of seven or a later number. It is part of a complete number. ¹⁶ Rev. 13:3-4 ¹⁷ Ex. 15:11; Ps. 35:10 ¹⁸ Rev. 13:12 ¹⁹ (Gen. 3:15) ²⁰ Rev. 12:1-8 ²¹ Rev. 12:9; Isa. 27:1 ²² Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8 ²³ Rev. 13:14 ²⁴ Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12

History is replete with examples of how the blood of the martyrs has overcome satanic powers. This explains the seeming paradox of how beastly powers have at times overpowered the saints, but their very act of putting the saints to death brings about their downfall. *“And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony...unto death.”* This replicates Satan’s defeat; believers defeat the Beast the same way Christ defeated Satan.

John is not predicting a one time, historical event in the Beast’s war on the saints that results in his head wound and recovery. Rather, John explains the Beast’s reappearance after his defeat, as he imitates Jesus’ resurrection. Here is his subtler attempt to keep mankind enslaved by religion. By usurping Christ, the Beast shows a craftier scheme of the Serpent at work among men.

ANTICHRIST ANSWER

Revelation’s use of parallels between the Lamb and the Beast, between Christ and Antichrist provide the answer to this deadly wound that heals. Since Satan’s victory by violence against the saints is short lived, he employs, when and where possible, a far more subtle strategy - Antichrist! The word ‘anti’ means ‘instead of’ as an impostor or ‘a substitution.’ When this prefix is used of a person, it means that he is an impostor to whomever the prefix *anti* is attached. In the case of *anti*-Christ, he is an impostor to Christ.²⁵ The Beast is *“an opponent of Christ, which sets himself up in place of Christ.”*²⁶

The Beast, therefore, cannot be limited to any one historical entity, because he has seven heads or a complete number of Impostors. He has the ability to revive one of his heads when it is fatally wounded. He will thus manifest in numerous forms. He also cannot be limited to a single one-time fulfillment due to the time he operates and the scope of his authority. His authority is worldwide and he operates for 42 months. This is the same timeframe for God’s Two Witnesses and the Woman’s sojourn in the wilderness.

John reveals prophetic trends. These trends expose Satan’s war on the saints; it is conducted through not one but two Beasts. The first Beast suffers what appears to be a mortal blow; yet, he comes back to life more powerful than before by means of a second Beast that uses deception instead of brute force. The aim is to silence the testimony of the churches. Jesus therefore strongly warns the churches against deception. There is a competing, false system that would take them captive if they do not listen to Christ. There is a different gospel, a different Jesus and a different spirit, which Paul warned about.²⁷

²⁵ Greek word ‘*anti*’ is a primary particle. In the KJV Bible, every other places where the translators encountered this prefix they translated it into the English words: “for” or “in the room of.” ²⁶ E. W. Bullinger, A Critical Lexicon to the English and Greek NT, pg, 56. ²⁷ 2 Cor. 11:4 Gal. 1:6-7

Jesus warns His churches that like the king of Babylon once took captive God's people, another king is coming in the spirit of the King of Babylon. He will make war on them in every nation, persecuting them from without or seducing them from within.²⁸ This war will go on for a set time.



FOR FORTY-TWO MONTHS THE BEAST MAKES WAR

“The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast - all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.”²⁹

SET TIME AND POWER

Four times in two verses we read the phrase “*was given.*” Satan gives the Beast his authority. And God allows him to operate for a specific purpose and time. The activity of the Beast serves God's purpose to clearly divide humanity into those who worship the Beast and those who refuse. The godly are called to exercise endurance as the earlier chapters admonish, and the Beast serves to this end as well.³⁰

Repeated in days and years, the Beast exercises his authority for 42 months. Gentiles trample the Holy City for 42 months, Two Witnesses prophesy for 1260 days, and the Woman flees into the wilderness for 1260 days.³¹ In Daniel, it is “time, times, and half of time,” or three and a half years. During this time a little horn arises to speak against the Most High.³² “The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time.”³³

DANIEL'S LITTLE HORN

John's Sea Beast is similar to Daniel's little horn. He rises out of Daniel's fourth beast and like Antichrist **(1)** He appears in relationship with ten horns **(2)** He blasphemes God **(3)** He wages war against the saints **(4)** He defeats them. **(5)** He has a universal kingdom **(6)** He continues for the same length of time as John's Beast and **(7)** Finally is destroyed by Christ at His coming.³⁴

²⁸ To “make war” is not necessarily physical but to fight against by whatever means (Rev. 2:16; 11:7; 12:7,17; 16:14; 17:14; 19:11,19; 20:8; 2 Cor. 10:4). “To conquer” refers to either subversion of their faith or destruction of their bodies. (1 Cor. 10:20). ²⁹ Rev. 13:5-8 ³⁰ Rev. 1:9; 2:2,3,19:3:10; 14:12 ³¹ (Dan. 7:25; 8:14; 12:7,11, 12: Rev 11:2-3: 12:6,14,13:5) See “Time Questions” ³² Dan. 7:8, 11,20; 11: 36 ³³ Dan. 7:25 ³⁴ Dan. 7: 7-28

Some commentators thus conclude that Daniel's little Horn is the Antichrist. This is a moot point because the real issue is not what symbols and images constitute the Antichrist for there are many, but rather what function does he play? When Scripture says, "*he was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them*" the question is "how?" How does the seven-headed Beast conduct his war on the saints? The answer is simple and irrefutable. He wages a two-fold war against the saints. He either puts them to death or seduces them.³⁵

This latter tactic constitutes his more subtle war aimed at the heart. Revelation unfolds this war tactic in the rest of the book. We will see how the second Beast from the earth, known as the False Prophet, and Mystery Babylon serve Satan to that end. They enable him to continue to function as the prince of this world and to occupy Christ's place, dwelling in the midst of humanity. Antichrist usurps Jesus of Nazareth, and is the great theological counterpart to all that Christ represents. We therefore note seven parallels that John reveals between the Lamb and the Beast:³⁶

1. **Christ and Antichrist both were slain.**³⁷
2. **Christ and Antichrist both wield swords.**³⁸
3. **Both have followers on whose foreheads are inscribed their names.**³⁹
4. **Christ and Antichrist both have horns.**⁴⁰
5. **Christ and Antichrist both rise to new life and authority.**⁴¹
6. **Both are given power over every nation, tribe, and people.**⁴²
7. **Both are in relationship to Women and receive worship.**⁴³

In chapter seventeen a Woman, Babylon, rides on the back of this Beast. Many claim that she represents the false church, "*the Mother of Harlots.*" They claim that the prophecy of Daniel and the prophecy of Revelation reveal that another king would come out of Rome. A little Horn, who looks like a lamb but speaks like a dragon, would arise to exercise authority over the whole world. He would begin small like a little horn, but make great strides and increase in power until he becomes so great that the world follows him. We look at this interpretation, along with others, in our next chapter under the Historical School of interpretation.

³⁵ John 10:28; Matt. 10:28 ³⁶ Same word is used for their arrivals. The verb "coming" for the lawless one is closely related to the noun that describes Jesus' Parousia. (1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 2:19; 1 John 2:18). ³⁷ Same Greek word 'sphagizo' (slain) is used to describe their deaths. "And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded." (Rev. 13:3). "In the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain." (Rev. 5:6). ³⁸ Rev. 1:16; 2:12,16; 6:4,8; 13:4,7-10,15 ³⁹ Rev. 13:16-14:1 ⁴⁰ Rev. 5:6; 13:1 ⁴¹ Rev. 5:6-8; 13:3 ⁴² (Rev. 1:5; 7:9; 13:7; 17:12) Alan F. Johnson, Revelation, Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 12, pg. 527 ⁴³ Jesus is the true Bridegroom. But the Beast also has a woman, 'Mystery Babylon.' She is the source of all forms of idolatry.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

John's final words in this section encourage the saints and address both of Satan's war strategies. For the Devil's two devices, human violence and supernatural deception, call the saints to faithful endurance.

*"He who has an ear, let him hear. 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. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints."*⁴⁴

The saints need to know that God is sovereign over the Beast and his activities. That is the basis of their patient endurance in the midst of violence, knowing that no one can kill them with the sword unless God allows it. It also accounts for their faithfulness in the midst of apostasy. As God's elect, they are kept from Babylon's deceptive captivity. The possibility of captivity, however, brings us to the second Beast.


SECOND BEAST PROMOTES WORSHIP OF FIRST BEAST

The second Beast appears with two horns like a lamb, adding to the Dragon's caricature. This is the embodiment of deception for a lamb signifies what is pure and devoted. Here we have the proverbial "wolf in sheep's clothing."⁴⁵ He looks like a lamb but his speech betrays him.⁴⁶

*"Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed."*⁴⁷

EARTHLY, SENSUAL, DEVILISH

The second Beast arises from the earth, which means he is of this world. He stands in contrast to God's Lamb who came down from Heaven. James aptly says, "This wisdom descends not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish."⁴⁸ The second Beast offers mankind a substitute for the true God and His Christ. J. O. Sanders describes the counterfeit nature of this religion:

1. **Satan has his own trinity: Devil, Beast, and False Prophet.**⁴⁹
2. **He has his own church, "a synagogue of Satan."**⁵⁰
3. **He has his own servants, "ministers of Satan."**⁵¹
4. **He has his own system of theology "doctrines of demons."**⁵²

⁴⁴ (Rev. 13:9-10) "Those destined for death, to death... those for captivity, to captivity" (Jer. 15:2; 43:11). Law of Retribution ⁴⁵ Matt. 7:15 ⁴⁶ Deceptively like the Serpent to Eve. (Gen. 3:1ff). ⁴⁷ Rev. 13:11-12 ⁴⁸ James 3:15-17 ⁴⁹ Rev. 16:13 ⁵⁰ Rev. 2:9 ⁵¹ 2 Cor. 11:4-5 ⁵² 1 Tim. 4:1

5. He has his own sacrificial system and “communion table.”⁵³
6. His has his own “gospel.”⁵⁴
7. He has his own “throne” and his own “worshippers.”⁵⁵

Satan has developed a thorough imitation of Christianity. As imitator of God, he inspires false Christs, sponsors “false apostles...deceitful workers.” He employs false teachers who bring in “destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them.” He is adept at mixing truth and error in such proportions as to make error palatable. He sends out “many false prophets” who “will mislead many.” He introduces false brethren who “spy out our liberty...in order to bring us into bondage.”⁵⁶

While the Sea Beast represents Satan’s political power, the second Beast stands for its religious counterpart, which is more insidious. The first Beast uses physical force to subdue men; whereas, the Beast coming up out of the earth possesses supernatural powers to take men captive. The former Beast attacks the external part of mankind, the physical body, while the latter Beast influences the inner parts of man, namely his mind and affections.

The second Beast incorporates every false religion and ideology from communism to secular humanism. He deceives the inhabitants of the earth to worship false gods. What makes his deceptions convincing are “*great and miraculous signs,*” which support his lies.⁵⁷



SECOND BEAST ESTABLISHES WORSHIP

*“And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived.”*⁵⁸

This second Beast, known as the False Prophet, performs supernatural signs.⁵⁹ The same words are used of the works of Jesus, whose mission was confirmed by the “miracles, wonders and signs, which God did through him.”⁶⁰ “Here again the ministry of Jesus is imitated.”⁶¹ Miraculous powers, which were used so effectively in laying the foundation of the church, are used by Satan’s ministers to perform miracles comparable to those done by God’s servants.⁶² They call fire down like God’s Two Witnesses.⁶³

⁵³ “The Gentiles sacrifice to demons...the cup of demons...the table of demons.” (1 Cor. 10:20-21).

⁵⁴ “Another gospel” (Gal. 1:7-8). ⁵⁵ Rev. 2:13; 13:4 ⁵⁶ Matt. 24:4-5,11; Rev. 2:2; 2 Cor. 11:13; 2 Peter 2:1; Gal. 2:4 ⁵⁷ (Rev. 19:20) Second Beast is called “the False Prophet.” ⁵⁸ Rev. 13:13-14 ⁵⁹ Rev. 16:13-14 ⁶⁰ Acts 2:22 ⁶¹ F. F. Bruce, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, pg. 173. ⁶² Acts 2:22,43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36; 14:3; Rom. 15:19; 2 Cor. 12:12; He. 2:4 ⁶³ 2 Thess. 2:10; Matt. 24:24; 2 Thess. 2:11-12

LYING WONDERS

Moses and Elijah contended with evil secular and deceptive religious powers. Moses confronted Pharaoh and his ‘magicians’ who performed opposing miracles. With their tricks these magicians incited Pharaoh to harden his heart and not let God’s people go.⁶⁴ Elijah contended with Ahab and Jezebel who employed prophets of Baal. Simon Magus who kept people in bondage with witchcraft and opposed the apostles allegedly said, “I made statues move; I gave breath to inanimate objects.”⁶⁵

Images that speak and do miracles were part of ancient religious deceptions.⁶⁶ The Christian apologist Athenagoras interprets the ability of statues to give oracles and to heal the sick to demonic powers.⁶⁷ Lucian, a secular writer, attributes it to human deception.⁶⁸ In the case of Revelation’s False Prophet, his signs are real and performed by Satan’s power. The Devil has always used the paranormal; yet, how many people pursue supernatural power without questioning the source from which it originates?

Lying signs tested the Israelites’ devotion to the Lord; whereas, now they test a Christian’s exclusive loyalty to Jesus as Lord. Under the Old Covenant, the Law was the standard by which people tested the supernatural. “If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods’ - which you have not known - ‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.”⁶⁹

IMAGE WORSHIP

‘Supernatural feats’ enable the Dragon to establish a false system of worship. This idolatrous worship breaks the first two commandments.⁷⁰ It calls for worship of one other than the true God and His Son, Jesus, and it involves images, which the Law strictly forbids. It reminds us of Nebuchadnezzar’s golden image and decreed that everyone must worship it while the music played or else ‘face the music’ as the saying goes.⁷¹ The fact that all peoples

⁶⁴ Rev. 16:13 cp. w. Ex. 7:10-13,22 ⁶⁵ Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions 3.47.2 See Aune, Revelations 6-16, pg.764. ⁶⁶ Hippolytus claims magicians produced a fiery bolt through the air. Hippolytus Refutations 4.35-36 ⁶⁷ Athenagoras in Supplications for the Christians 27. ⁶⁸ “As he [Alexander] wished to astonish the crowd still more, he promised to produce the god talking... It was no difficult matter for him to fasten a crane’s windpipes together and pass them through the head... Then he answered the question through someone else, who spoke into the tube from the outside.” Asclepius Lucian in Alexander the False Prophet 26. Greek literature has moving and talking statues in the Hierapolis temple. ⁶⁹ Deut. 13:1-3 ⁷⁰ Ex. 20:1-2 ⁷¹ Dan. 3:1-5, 10-11.

and languages were to worship it suggests that Nebuchadnezzar intended to unite his kingdom under one religion with himself as the head.

Pagan Rome also used image worship by setting up images of their emperors. This provided an effective means of revealing Rome's opponents by their refusal to bow before their images. Pliny the Younger wrote a letter to Trajan (112 A. D.) that he had executed Christians who had refused to offer wine and incense before a statue of the emperor. "Among these I considered that I should dismiss any who denied that they were or ever had been Christians when they had repeated after me a formula of invocation to the gods and had made offerings of wine and incense to your statue (which I had ordered to be brought into court for this purpose along with the images of the gods)."⁷²

Steven Friesen traces the Imperial Cult of emperor worship throughout Asia under the various Caesars of the First Century.⁷³ Roman authorities required all to bow in worship and confess, "Caesar is Lord!" Such worship often took place before a statue of the emperor with the widespread belief that a person's image caused their spirit to be present. It was before the image that the loyalty of the subject could be marked. Such practices had a long history among pagan nations.⁷⁴ They persisted until the time of Domitian and Trajan.

Emperor worship is a work of the False Prophet, but it does not exhaust it. Throughout the centuries images have been set up for people to worship. They include Antiochus Epiphanes' statue to Zeus, placed in the temple of Jerusalem.⁷⁵ This list would also include the more subtle uses of pictures like the swastika of Hitler's Nazi party in Germany and the hammer and sickle in the former Soviet Union.⁷⁶ To get a tiny feel for what Christians in Rome faced, imagine your child refused to pledge allegiance to the America's flag. And what if there was no Bill of Rights to protect you?



FALSE PROPHET FORCES MEN TO TAKE BEAST'S MARK

*"He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name."*⁷⁷

⁷² Betty Radice - translator, Letters and Panegyrics, Volume 2, pages 287-289 ⁷³ Steven J. Friesen Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John, Reading Revelation in the Ruins, copyright 2001 Oxford Press. ⁷⁴ (Dan. 3:15) Persian kings; Plutarch, Gracchus 18:2, the Gracchi; Tacitus, Annals 1.10.5, Augustus; Philo, Gaius 29, 188, 30, 198, 43, 346, Caligula; Dio Cassius 62.18.3; 67.8.1, Suetonius, Nero 23.2. ⁷⁵ Caligula tried to have a statue placed in the same temple. ⁷⁶ Rom. 1:22-25 ⁷⁷ Rev. 13:16-17

In a further fraudulent wonder, the False Prophet gives breath to an image. This mimics God who breathes life into the Two Witnesses.⁷⁸ Since the basic interpretation of the ‘image of the beast’ is a false religious system, the False Prophet will ‘give life’ or inspiration to a system of worship that incorporates “*the deep things of Satan.*” Such a counterfeit church could even worship ‘Christ,’ but it would certainly not be the Christ of the Bible.

BEASTLY MARK

The mark on the hand and forehead is a demonic counterpart to God’s seal. The Jews wore phylacteries on the forehead and leather straps on the arm. These showed that they worshiped Israel’s God. In Revelation, a person is marked by whomever they worship, becoming like the one they worship. “But their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men... Those who make them will be *like them*, and so will all who trust in them.”⁷⁹

Many Christians think the mark of the Beast is a future, physical mark. It has happened in the past. At different times in history people were literally and outwardly marked. The Jews have been especially targeted in the past and required to carry a mark of identification. In Maccabees, Ptolomy IV demanded that Jews offer pagan sacrifices and sacrifices to their own God.⁸⁰ On the feast of Dionysus, the Jews were compelled to walk in bacchanalian procession with their heads crowned with ivy. Those who refused were reduced to the condition of serfs and outcast from all that society offered.⁸¹

Nazism furnishes a more recent example. The Jews were compelled to wear a yellow Shield of David. This was a revival of the medieval Jewish badge, which was itself a Mohammedan import. In the Seventh Century Pact of Omar, the Mohammedans established a code of laws by which Jews and Christians who remained in their conquered lands were forced to live and dress. The aim of the code was to make it perfectly clear that Jews and Christians were inferior to Mohammedans. The Roman Church reintroduced this requirement for Jews in the pontificate of Innocent III, during the Fourth Lateran Council (1215 A.D.). Any Jew above the age of thirteen was to wear a mark, usually a yellow patch, front and back, on the outer garment. It was reasoned that without such a badge the Jews were not distinguishable from Christians. The badge, however, was really a mark of shame to force them to convert to the Church of Rome or drive them out of European society.

⁷⁸ Gen. 2:7; Rev. 11:11 ⁷⁹ Psalmist says, “They have mouths, but cannot speak... nor can they utter a sound with their throats.” The fact that the image of the beast is made to speak makes it more deceptive. (Ps. 115:4-8) ⁸⁰ 3 Maccabees 2:28-30 ⁸¹ It worked both ways. Those who were initiated had equal rights with the citizens of Alexandria. The ‘mark’ indicated that the recipients were the ‘slaves’ or obedient worshipers of the god. For the Jew the ‘mark’ was a sure sign of idolatry.

Although all such edicts are beastly, I understand the mark to be invisible, like God's seal, and thus far more subtle and dangerous.⁸² God tells His people to "Keep these words that I command you today in your heart...Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead."⁸³ Such was not meant to be physical.⁸⁴ This fact is bolstered by the Hebrew parallelism of the verse where the second line reinforces the sense of the first line.⁸⁵ "Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes."⁸⁶ C. F. Keil says, "These words are figurative, and denote an undeviating observance of the divine commands."⁸⁷

The right hand signifies fellowship or partnership in a common cause. The mark on the forehead signifies related thinking or a similar mind set. God's children have an invisible mark and it is presumptuous to expect a visible mark on unbelievers. The next chapter begins with these words: "*Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.*"⁸⁸ The mark of the Beast is the antithesis to the seal of God. It displays worship of the Beast in the realm of the spirit.

BUYING AND SELLING

Beast worship also has an economic component. Connecting worship with a mark to buy and sell is part of the worldly system of the False Prophet. According to Erwin W. Lutzer's "*The Third Reich*," the Nazi party used a sign to buy and sell. "If you did not say, "Heil Hitler!" when you entered a business establishment, you would not be served."⁸⁹ Some scholars say a mark was also part of Caesar worship, so that only those people who received a certificate might enter the market place.⁹⁰

It is true that every transaction of buying and selling in the Roman Empire meant the handling of imperial coins that bore the image and blasphemous titles of Caesar. "Whose image is on the coin." These coins bore the image and name of the Emperor, often pictured as a god, and more than one emperor had as his title "lord and god."

⁸² Isa. 44:5 ⁸³ (Deut. 6:6-8, RSV) The consecration of the firstborn is said to be "like a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead that the law of the Lord is to be on your lips." (Ex. 13:9-16).

⁸⁴ Earl S. Kalland, Deuteronomy, Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 3, page 66 ⁸⁵ Gordon F. Fee & Douglas Stuart, How to read the Bible for all its worth, pg. 180 ⁸⁶ Deut. 11:18 ⁸⁷ Pentateuch, Volume 1, page 885, A NT equivalent for these instructions is the 'commands of God' and the 'testimony of Jesus Christ.' (Rev. 12:17). ⁸⁸ Rev. 14:1 ⁸⁹ Erwin W. Lutzer Hitler's Cross, page 63 ⁹⁰ Britannica Christianity claims that "under the emperor Decius, who reigned AD 249-251, by edict all citizens were required to offer sacrifice and to obtain from commissioners a certificate witnessing the act."

Concerning what Revelation intends by the mark of the Beast as it relates to buying and selling, interpreters point to everything from Roman coins to electronic implants; John tells us there is also a number that identifies him.



BEAST HAS A DISTINGUISHING NUMBER - 666

“This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man’s number. His number is 666.”⁹¹

A call for divine wisdom is often associated with the end of the age. Daniel says, “Those who are wise will understand...the abomination.” Jesus says, “The abomination...let the reader understand...flee to the mountains.”⁹² Wisdom calls for a response not mere speculation. The number of the Beast, however, has generated more speculation than any passage in the entire Bible but little action. What does his number signify? Is the “name of the beast,” equal to the “number of his name?”⁹³

666 QUESTION

We need godly wisdom to rightly interpret this passage.⁹⁴ Many assume that 666 is the numerical value of a specific person’s name. This is based on the fact that the Hebrew and Greek alphabets were used for counting. The identification of a specific *name* with a *number* led to the possibility of making play with the numerical equivalent of names. Deissmann tells of a legend scribbled on a wall in Pompeii. “I love her whose name is 545.”⁹⁵ Many claim when the Beast’s name is translated into the Greek or Hebrew languages that it will equal 666.

Others claim that 666 is simply a symbolic number. Since the number seven speaks of perfection, six falls short of seven and represents imperfection. Six is thus seen as a sinister number to the Jews. Just as the number thirteen is for people today. Skyscraper buildings have no 13th floor; hotels have no room number 13. So for the Jews 666 stands for great evil, and is eminently suitable to characterize the Beast and his followers, for it implies falling short of complete perfection in 777. Early on Christians realized that the name *Jesus* in Greek totals 888. Manifestly the contrast between 666 and 888 strikingly conveys the difference between the Devil’s ‘Antichrist’ and God’s Christ.

⁹¹ Rev. 13:18 ⁹² Dan. 12:10; Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:13; Luke 21:20 ⁹³ Some say each is separate since victors triumph over “the beast, his image, and *the number of his name.*” (Rev. 15:12). The three-fold designation may simply signify different aspect of the beastly system that believer overcome like the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. ⁹⁴ Wisdom also need in Revelation 17:9 ⁹⁵ Light from the Ancient East, pg. 275ff Beasley-Murray, pg. 219.

Is 666 the number of a certain, historical person or institution? Or is it symbolic? The words of the text cannot answer this crucial question. Although the New Revised Standard Version says, “*it is the number of a person,*” others translate the clause, “*it is a human number.*”

Those who take 666 as the number of a specific, historical person vary greatly. There are over one hundred different interpretations among modern British writers alone on the identity of 666.⁹⁶ The number among American writers is far greater. Personally, I have read well over a hundred books on these verses. Every solution advocated falls into one of *three* categories:

(1) A world leader in the past or in the future with the Roman Ceasar Nero heading the past list, while the future person is yet to be known for obvious reasons. **(2)** A world empire or religious power in the past or in the future: Pagan and Papal Rome feature in the past views, and the E.U., U.N., W.C.C., Islam

or some institution to emerge are the future prospects. **(3)** A symbolic significance that points to Man’s fallen sinful nature.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What war tactics does Satan use in your locality to stop God’s witnesses?
2. How might turmoil in your nation cause a political Beast to arise? What about church – state relationships?
3. When has the Beast been fatally wounded only to appear again to wage war on you?
4. Why is Satan’s best strategy to usurp Christ by means of an imitation?
5. Where have you seen lying signs?
6. What today may be image worship?
7. How do you interpret the mark of the Beast and the number 666?

To consider more fully these possibilities and how scholars have understood the worship, mark, number and name of the Beast, let us carry on with this study by looking at seven different interpretations in the next chapter.

⁹⁶ David Brady, *The Contribution of British writers between 1560 and 1830 to the Interpretation of Revelation 13:16-18 (The Number of the Beast)*.

NOTES

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

SEVEN APPROACHES

SEVEN INTERPRETATIONS TO REVELATION 13:1-18

In 1899, a U. S. Patent Office worker said, “Everything that can be invented has been invented.” A memo from Western Union, predicted that “the telephone has too many shortcomings for useful communication.” As a child, I read a science magazine that claimed everyone would be flying around in air-cars and living in domed houses by the year 2000.

Predictions about the future are mostly bad guesses. The only reliable source is the Bible; yet, men have often read into the Bible what is not there. That has really been the case when we consider what people have taught concerning the Beast and 666. In this chapter, we examine seven interpretations of 666. These will help you to clarify your approach to this disputed passage.



PRETERITS INTERPRET NERO AS THE BEAST

Preterits teach that John is dealing with past events in the First Century.¹ They say Caesar Nero of the Roman Empire is the Antichrist. No only did he persecute the Church, but he also commanded Vespasian to begin the siege of Jerusalem in 67 A.D.. The Jews suffered so intensely that they saw Nero as the embodiment of evil. After he committed suicide by cutting his own throat, rumors persisted that he was not dead; or if he were, he would revive to lead the Parthians against Rome and usher in the End of the world.² Preterits interpret the Sea Beast with seven heads as seven Roman emperors. The one with the mortal wound that heals is this myth regarding Nero.³

This interpretation places great emphasis on his name. Neron Caesar equals 666 in Aramaic letters.⁴ Also the last “n” on Neron is not necessary; if it is omitted, the total is 616, which is the number given in a variant reading of Revelation 13:18.⁵ Added to this is the Preterits claim that emperor worship was required by Roman authorities to receive a certificate in order to buy and sell. Hence, all the elements of the prophecy are said to fit Nero.

¹ See Four Views in Introduction ² “In the Jewish Sibylline Oracles, written after Jerusalem fell, Nero...will cross the Euphrates with tens of thousands to destroy Rome and the whole world...as the Beast he ascends out of the bottomless pit.” (Miriam T. Griffin, Nero, pg. 15). ³ “The mysterious circumstances of Nero’s death, favored the spread of this belief.” (A. Momigliano, Nero, pgs. 741). ⁴ “Requires a spelling for “Caesar” that is not normal” but was used in “an Aramaic document from the Dead Sea cave, dated to the second year of Nero where the name is spelled ‘nrwn qsr.’ ⁵ N=50 E=6 R=500 O=60 N=50 = 666. If the N is dropped, the number is 616 as found in some manuscripts.

Nero's name totaling 666 is problematic because:

(1) It requires us to calculate a Hebrew transliteration of a Greek form of a Latin name. (2) It is calculated with a variant spelling (the vowel 'y' must be omitted from 'qysr'). (3) In transliteration of foreign names into Hebrew, there is considerable latitude in the treatment of vowels and three possible equivalents for the letter 's.' (4) Why would Revelation's author, writing in Greek, not use a Greek form; how can he expect his reader to do such language jumping? (5) No ancient commentators ever suggested Nero as 666. Nor is this interpretation found in the history of the church until the 1830's when German scholars purposed it. (6) Nero as 666 would require the book to have been written around 70 A.D., which is too early a date for scholars who study the date of its composition. (7) Finally, Nero as 666 calls for an interpretation that makes 666 the number of a specific individual, which in itself is a questionable interpretation.

Nero as the Beast takes into account the historical context of the writing in an attempt to make John's message meaningful to the early Church. For the rest of the Church age, however, it makes Revelation's message ancient history. Although Nero is an initial type of the Beast, to make him a one time fulfillment is to take away from the book's prophetic message. After all, the Nero Myth remained a mere myth. Therefore, for those who believe that the Bible is without error, the Preterits' position is unacceptable.



FUTURISTS LOOK FOR A COMING GLOBAL DICTATOR

Futurists believe that Revelation deals exclusively with events still in the future. The two Beasts represent a coming one-world government and religion. The first Beast is the emerging one-world political system that is gaining strength in our generation. This integration of the world's educational systems (media), and economies will continue. The United Nations or European Union becomes a revived Roman Empire.⁶ The city of Rome, its past capital, becomes its new headquarters. The World Council of Churches serve as its False Prophet with Babylon being its religious conglomerate.⁷

A world government makes it possible for the Antichrist to assume control of global politics and all the economies of the world. The Antichrist is a specific individual, and 666 is the numerical value of his name.⁸

⁶ John's ten horns (Daniel's ten toes) become the ten nation members or simply all of its members. ⁷ This ecumenical giant includes all apostate churches. ⁸ The list of alleged "Antichrists" is lengthy: Mohammed, the Roman Church, the Papacy, certain emperors and religious leaders, Martin Luther, Napoleon Bonaparte, Benito Mussolini, Ronald Wilson Reagan (notice each of the three parts of his name has six letters-666) and Saddam Hussein are but a few. Claude Ludy believes Adolph Hitler was the Antichrist and set out a scheme by which his name equals 666. (CE Ludy, End of the Age).

Some say the Antichrist will recover from an assassination attempt - the mortal wound that heals.⁹ He then sets himself up as the world's savior, proclaiming his divinity at a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. The False Prophet promotes his claim and the world worships his image. Soon no one can buy or sell without his mark, as he uses an existing electronic system of credit cards or implants to control mankind. These microchips are prompted as an easy way to identify people, eliminating crime and identity theft.¹⁰

The Futurists' School upholds Revelation's prophetic nature, looking for a future fulfillment. But by limiting the message to seven final years of history, it puts John's entire prophecy off into the future and takes everything literally. By so doing, it fails to see the present manifestations of the Beast. And it may be looking for what will never happen the way it is expected to happen. If it does happen as mapped out, it will be a first. For when have God's people ever articulated just how a Bible prophecy would be fulfilled?



HISTORICAL SCHOOL SEES THE PAPACY AS THE BEAST

According to this approach, John predicts specific events from Christ's ascension to His Return. The little horn of Daniel is the Beast of Revelation. It rises up out of Daniel's fourth beast, which, they interpret as Rome, and promotes the Roman Beast until it devours the whole earth and its yoke is upon every nation. "Has anyone yet fulfilled this prophecy," they ask? "He arises out of Rome and causes Rome to conquer the whole earth?" They point out that under the Caesars, Rome never conquered the whole earth. The Beast that goes into perdition is the Roman Church, since it is through the little Papal horn that this prophecy came to fulfillment.

John said, "*All the world worshipped the beast.*" The Caesars of the past had political kingdoms, but the kingdom of the Beast will be a worldwide religious kingdom that requires man's worship. "He (Antichrist) will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws."¹¹ Christian sects that keep the Sabbath claim that Rome changed the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday, and Sunday observance is a mark of the Beast.¹² They argue that Roman Catholicism overcame the saints for a season, but since the Reformation there has been an ongoing spiritual war between Mystery Babylon and the true Church.

⁹ Others see the healed mortal wound as a revived Roman Empire. ¹⁰ Implants are being used by the rich as a tool to prevent kidnapping. Motorola is said to produce a microchip for Mondex Smartcards. The "Bio-chip" implants are the size of a grain of rice. A thermocouple circuit that produces an electrical current with the fluctuation of body temperature recharges its Lithium battery. The best place to insert the "bio-chip" into the human body is said to be underneath the scalp and the hand.

¹¹ Dan. 7:25 ¹² Seventh Day Adventists are an example of this position.

The woman who sits on the Roman Beast is called “*mystery Babylon.*” She is described as “*the Mother of Harlots.*” They assert that is a perfect name and portrayal for the false mother church at Rome. She possesses great wealth and power, and her tentacles reach into every nation.¹³ Church history is interpreted in light of Paul’s prediction of a great falling away from the faith.¹⁴ The power of paganism after Constantine grafted itself upon the Church-vine. The ceremonies of the Church grew, and a life of faith was lost, until the organized Church in the Dark Ages had very little left to distinguish her from old pagan superstitions.¹⁵

This approach was held by the Reformers without a Sabbath day link.¹⁶ Many who adopted this view took the 1260 days as 1260 years in which the Papal Church dominated Christendom.¹⁷ They saw the sale of indulgences as Revelation’s prediction of buying and selling. Veneration of statues answered to image worship. The Beast performing miracles would be apparitions of Mary, crying statues and various paranormal manifestations. “Vicegerent (or Vicar) of the Son of God” as a title of the Pope was viewed as a blasphemous claim against Christ and made to equal 666 in Roman numerals.¹⁸

The Historical School interprets John’s prophecy on a wider scale than First Century events or the last seven years of history. The Reformers, however, limited the prophecy, because of their intense conflict with Roman Catholicism. Rome’s claims, doctrines and practices are now rejected by the better part of Christendom so where might the Beast be now?¹⁹



SYMBOLIC APPROACH VIEWS MAN AS THE BEAST

The Symbolic approach sees no historical events or persons in Revelation. Only Jesus! General principles of the great conflict between Christ’s Church and the Devil’s world are shown by means of apocalyptic visions. In a book full of symbolism, why would you look for a literal person to come whose name equals 666? Since six falls short of seven, the number of perfection, six has long been recognized as the number of Man destitute of God. It represents the final state of Fallen Man in all his sinful pride, opposed to Christ.

¹³ “By peace shall destroy many.” (Dan. 8:35) ¹⁴ 2 Thess. 2:2 1 Tim. 4:1-5 ¹⁵ Her suspect practices are numerous: use of holy water, justification by works, a separate priesthood among believers, celibacy, the sacrifice of the Mass, purgatory, prayers for the dead, crowning of images, idol procession, relic worship, certain clothing, the rosary, traditions and church law, Extreme Unction, Lent and holy days, the veneration of Mary and the saints. ¹⁶ They did not interpret the mark of the Beast as Sunday worship observance. ¹⁷ Barnes in his well-known Barnes Notes holds to a day for a year principle. (Albert, Barnes Notes on Revelation). ¹⁸ Others adopted the view of Irenaeus, an early church leader, and understood 666 to refer to “Lateinos,” a common term for the Romans, equalling that number. (Alexander Roberts & W. H. Rambaut - translators, The Writings of Irenaeus 5: 30:3, Vol. 2, pg. 137). ¹⁹ To more fully appreciate each approach, we will revisit them in “Beast and Babylon.”

John says, “*all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life...is of the world.*”²⁰ The two Beasts stand for sinful Man and his wicked world under the control of the Evil One. Man’s day-to-day devotion, which he pays to this bestial system amounts to worship.²¹ Men are deceived into thinking they will have life if they gratify their cravings by seeking what the world offers. This mind of the Beast produces thoughts that are hostile to God, based on images of worldly success. Lying signs and wonders follow since Fallen Man finds an outward form of life.²²

The “*mark of the beast*” is the antithesis to the “*seal of God.*” It is the imprint of the Beast’s name, which is his nature and character. Every person bears this bestial nature, until we are born anew with Christ’s nature, to bear the mark of God. We are to become partakers of the divine nature and be “conformed to the image of Christ.”²³ “For as we have born the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.”²⁴ The Beast’s mark on the hand and the head stand for thinking and acting according to the ways of the world. The issue is not a ‘tattoo’ on your forehead or hand or an electronic implant. The challenge is to not be conformed to the image of this world.

The Symbolic Approach highlights spiritual realities. It makes the book relevant to the Church throughout her history. For God’s Word should, when properly interpreted, speak to the saints of all time, presenting types and trends that transcend a one-time fulfillment. The downside, however, is that the Symbolic view can lose sight of Revelation’s prophetic nature, which is meant to confront the many actual types of the Beast and False Prophet that appear among men at various times in history.



UNSEALED BOOK SEES BEAST AS REAPPEARING

Before enlarging on my view, let us review the images in the last chapter:

1. **Satan empowers a complete number of beastly kingdoms.**
2. **When an evil kingdom falls, another emerges to exercise power.**
3. **Satanic kingdoms assume God’s prerogatives and persecute people.**
4. **They are supported by apostate religions that promote their devotion.**
5. **They perform supernatural signs and wonders to deceive.**
6. **They set up idolatrous worship that marks all who buy into their lie.**
7. **A symbolic number identifies the nature of this Beast.**

I take 666 as “*the number of man*” rather than “a man.” Mankind was created on the sixth day and he labors for six days. As six falls short of seven, man’s works continually fall short of God’s glory. Jesus, on the other hand, fulfilled

²⁰ 1 John 2:16 ²¹ John 15:19 ²² 1 John 2:14-20 ²³ Eph. 4:23; Col. 3:9-10 ²⁴ 1 Cor. 15:49

all righteousness and His name equals 888 in Greek.²⁵ In the name, *Jesus*, each digit is one more than seven, the complete number.²⁶ Whereas, 666 yields the opposite phenomenon, revealing man's absolute need for a Redeemer!

Six, six, six speaks volumes, depicting Man's character and condition.²⁷ The name, number and mark of the Beast are not physical features. They are symbols. His name reveals his character, his number his activity and his mark his ownership.²⁸ John teaches that mankind is not only lost but bound to the Dragon.²⁹ Adam and Eve sought to be like God, but ended up stamped with the Dragon's rebellious nature.³⁰

The image of buying and selling with his number and mark is very appropriate. The Beast leaves his sinful mark on human hands and heads. This is the result of believing a lie that says a life consists of the things one possesses. But "you cannot serve God and money." Paul defined covetousness as idolatry, and John tells us covetousness equals worship.³¹ That is the state of the human race, not only in so-called "non-Christian" lands, but everywhere on an ongoing basis.³² It will only end when Christ returns.

In Revelation, seven brings us to the end, while six introduces judgment. The sixth Seal, sixth Trumpet and sixth Bowl tell us the End is quickly approaching. The core message of Revelation is that time is short and Jesus is coming soon. The harvest is at hand for the wheat and the tares have grown to full stature. It is time to swing the sickle and separate them. Since the number six points to the nearness of this End, putting three sixes together reveals sinful Man on the eve of the Final Judgment. Without God's redemption in Christ, Mankind will share in the Dragon's fate.³³ Repentance and faith in Christ are the only way of escape.

The Dragon manifests himself in two Beasts: false religions and evil governments. They usurp Jesus. The Beast of evil empires has a complete number of seven heads. He can suffer a crushing blow like Rome did only to raise his ugly head to make war on the saints another day. He is like the proverbial cat with nine lives.

First Century Rome represents one early form of how the Beast operates in society and emerges from Man's collective sin.³⁴ More recently, Adolph

²⁵ Numbers have symbolic meaning. ²⁶ Highlighted in the Book of the Sibylline Oracles: "Then indeed the Son of the great God will come, incarnate, likened to mortal men on earth, bearing four vowels, and the consonants in him are two. I will state explicitly the entire number for you. For eight units, and equal number of tens in addition to these, and eight hundreds will reveal the number to men who are sated with faithfulness." (Sib. Oracle 1.325-30 and 5.1-51). ²⁷ Eph. 2:2-3 ²⁸ Rev. 13:8 ²⁹ Luke 16:15 ³⁰ Matt. 16:23 ³¹ Col 3:5 ³² Eph. 6:12 ³³ Rev. 14:9-11 ³⁴ Adolf Deissmann came up with a provocative rendering of 666 as "Caesar God." (Light from the Ancient, pg. 344).

Hitler's "Third Reich" constituted a type of the Beast. That regime proudly placed itself in the seat of God.³⁵ Hitler attempted to redefine the Christian faith, replacing it with an ideology that suited his ends.³⁶ He hoped to harness the Church in the service of his new society. When he could not control certain church leaders, they were treated like common criminals.³⁷ And Hitler's treatment of the Jewish people is a running commentary on the Beast's deadly pursuit of the Woman. But even Hitler could not exhaust Satan's evil acts. For neither of the two Beasts are limited to one place or time in history. They are universal and continue until the End of time.³⁸



MORE FORECASTERS SEE ISLAM AS THE BEAST

With an ongoing Global War on terror, Islam is now more likely to feature as the Beast. The attacks of September 11th 2001 made Americans aware of the intense hatred of Islamic extremists against the United States. A Newsweek article, "*Why Do They Hate Us?*" stated, "Bin Laden and his followers are not an isolated cult...They come out of a culture that reinforces their hostility, distrust and hatred of the West - and of America in particular...To say that Al Qaeda is a fringe group may be reassuring, but it is false."³⁹

Islam's hatred of Israel and Christianity is neither a recent nor passing phenomenon. It is the old hostility between Abraham's son of promise, Isaac, and the son born after the flesh, Ishmael. "The son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit." Isaac is born of grace by the Spirit, but Ishmael is born of the flesh and law. Anger and violence is the fruit by which the one born of the flesh is known.

In the past thirty years, Arab-funded schools have churned out tens of thousands of Muslims versed in the Koran, who view the West as the Great Satan. Hollywood movies and American's foreign policy seem to reinforce their perception. This awkward reality has led some in the West to dust off old essays and older prejudices predicting a "clash of civilizations" between the West and Islam.⁴⁰ It is not the first clash. The Crusades testify to past bloody clashes. More Forecasters will, therefore, identify the Beast as a revived Muslim Empire to which all Islamic nations belong.

³⁵ "After Hitler had annexed Austria and, in conscious or unconscious imitation of the medieval German emperors, when he traveled to Rome, the German press erupted in headlines proclaiming, "The Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation." (Bailey, pg. 363) ³⁶ Many Nazis claimed to be Christians. ³⁷ Like Hitler and Stalin, many dictators have seen the Church as a threat to their ambitions of powers. ³⁸ "Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh." John defines "any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist!" (1 John 2:23; 2 John 7). ³⁹ Quoted from a Newsweek article, "Why Do They Hate Us?" Newsweek, October 15, 2001. ⁴⁰ Barnes' Notes identifies the False Prophet as Islam, the followers of Mohammed.

The following seven reasons support Islam as the Beast:

1. Islam says “no God but Allah and Mohammed is His prophet.”

Christians believe that Mohammed is a false prophet. Since Islam is the second major religion of the world, it perfectly fits the “False Prophet” description. The number 666 also fits Mohammed, because he started Islam in the sixth century. By 666 A.D., he had set up this Antichrist religion.

2. Islam surrounds Israel and God focuses on the Promised Land.

The Old Testament is full of prophecies concerning the nations around her, and these nations are Islamic. Revelation’s Beast has two horns. Islam has two main sects - Sunni and Shiite Muslims.

3. The Dome of the Rock occupies the location of the Jewish Temple.

Solomon’s Temple was located in Jerusalem on Mount Zion where Islam has its most holy site. In a very real sense, Islam dislocated Judaism.

4. Islam attacks Israel and the Church today.

A hallmark of Islam is its attacks on Israel and the Church. These attacks will increase and serve two purposes. To awaken the Church to the last hour, and to stimulate moderate Arabs to seek the truth, which is only found in Jesus.

5. Islamic extremists still behead “infidels” as the Bible predicts.

The Bible speaks of martyrs being beheaded and Muslims still behead “infidels.” Muslims have put to death over a million non-Muslims in recent times - most recently in the Sudan and northern Africa.⁴¹

6. Islam made “fire to come down from heaven in full view of men.”

September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center are an example, which the entire world saw in real time. More examples could include terrorist bombs falling on northern Israel and the future use of a nuclear device.

7. Islam says the words of Mohammed are the way to heaven.

Islam fits John’s definition that he who “denies that Christ came in the flesh is the Antichrist.”⁴² According to Sharia Law, one should only “*buy or sell*” with those who keep the Qu’ran. Islamic laws have also changed the day of worship to Friday and they do not date time from the birth of Christ.

The Mahdi of Islam has predictions that set Muslims up for an Antichrist. “There will come forth a man from my nation who will talk according to my Sunnah. God will send upon him rain from heaven, and the earth will sprout

⁴¹ “Atrocities that shocked the world, include massacres estimated to have caused the death of 200,000 Armenians in 1896 alone... which reached an estimated total of 800,000 Armenians during the war period.” (Funk & Wagnall’s New Ency. Vol. 2, pg. 287). ⁴² Islam rose to prominence around 7th century and relies on works for salvation. ⁴³ The “Mahdi” of Shi’i Islam has a real eschatological importance, and is in the future the most important figure for Islam as well as the world.

forth for him its blessing. The earth will be filled through him with equity and justice, as it has been filled with injustice and crime. He will direct the affairs of this nation for seven years, and he will settle in Jerusalem.”⁴³

More strong reasons could be added to fit Islam with the Beast. The Fifth Pillar of Islam - Hajj (or Pilgrimage) involves a huge Black Stone. Perhaps, you have seen it on TV with massive crowds of people swirling around it.⁴⁴ Its relevance to the doctrine of Antichrist is that “The Black Stone is ‘the stone which the builders refused, which has become the head-stone of the corner’ (Psalms 118:22). Islam claims “that although Ishmael was looked on as being rejected by God, or so the Israelites believed, it was a progeny of Ishmael that the Last Prophet, ‘the head-stone of the corner’ was to arise.”⁴⁵ Here we again find a substitute for Christ and a clear contradiction of Scripture. The stone the builders rejected is Jesus, but Islam offers Mohammed instead.

Islam’s dogmas and violence are the greatest obstacles to world evangelism. The geopolitical strongholds of Islam are centred in parts of the world that are currently unreached by the Gospel, and the completion of the Great Commission, which is connected with Christ’s Return, is linked to reaching the Islamic World with the Gospel. The Devil is, therefore, determined to keep Islamic countries closed. Islam may not be the total fulfillment of the seven-headed Beast, but it certainly is part of the Dragon’s kingdom by which he carries on his war against the Two Witnesses.



WHAT MAY COMPLETE THE ORACLE OF THE BEAST

Technology becoming man’s evil master is a popular theme in movies. So under our seventh approach, I outline this threat, as a form of the Beast, in a way that I have not seen in any movie. This will help us see that there are more possibilities to John’s prophecy, and that “*the image of the beast*” may be wider and more subtle in our day than we think or have seen before.

They “*set up an image in honor of the beast...that it could speak*” makes me think of the one-eyed monster in my living room. Television sets and now computers convey an “*image*,” which is, in a sense, “*alive*” with color and sound. It is warm and needs room to breathe. It has enormous influence on our minds and activities from the time we are born, and yet the larger part of these transmissions propagate a materialistic worldview that is anti-Christian. Technology and medicine are also producing “miracle drugs.” But they also produce men acting like God, cloning life and calling down “fire from

⁴⁴ The stone is said to pre-date the Qu’ran, going back to the time of Abraham. Although Islamic people would deny that the stone structure is an idol, they readily acknowledge that before Mohammed, the temple structure contained 360 idols. ⁴⁵ Taken from a Website of Islamic Paths.

heaven” to destroy life.⁴⁶ Technology also leads the way in commerce. The buying and selling of goods is now conducted via numbers. Today we have the EAN-Code International. Technology now makes it possible to number everyone on earth, which can lead to a greater control of people. Technology’s influence is likely to dominate every facet of life, and although it is often used for good, the Beast would have man adore his own image rather than worship the invisible Creator. Mankind’s trust in science and technology, the work of their hands, to save them is likely to increase in the future.

I believe that the image of the Beast is all around us and has always been. *“For everthing in the world - the cravings of sinful man, the lust of the eyes, and the boasting of what he has and does - comes not from the Father but the world.”*⁴⁷ And the apostates of the ‘Christian West’ have been precursors of the world’s decadence. You could say with John, “they went out from us.”⁴⁸ I believe Antichrist ‘as originating in the church’ needs renewed emphasis.⁴⁹

Impostors will always fall short of the real thing. So it is said that the Devil cannot assume a human form without a noticeable way of distinguishing his body from that of man. Like a beggar cannot act as a prince so cunningly without his behavior at some point betraying his true identity. So, whenever and wherever Satan appears among men, there is a distinguishing ‘mark.’ Soon all his machinations throughout history will be exposed for all to see.

Revelation is book of dynamic visions, and it cannot be defined in cut

and dry formulae. For that reason it speaks to every generation and is not merely a prediction of someone to come, but a visionary account of something present at the time of John and present throughout the Church age. So we should expect Satan’s war against the saints to take on many shapes and sizes until Jesus Returns.⁵⁰

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How would you adjust the Preterits’ view to fit Revelation’s message?
2. How might you use a Futurists’ view?
3. How about the Historical view?
4. What about the Symbolic?
5. And my view in the Unsealed Book?
6. What’d you think of the Islamic Beast?
7. How do you expect the oracle of the Beast to be fulfilled?

⁴⁶ “Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.” (Eccl. 7:29; Ps. 99:8; 106:29,39; Rom. 1:30). ⁴⁷ 1 John 2:16 ⁴⁸ 1 John 2:18-22 ⁴⁹ Matt. 24:4-5, 11, 24; Gal. 1:6-9, 2 Cor. 11:4, 13-15; 2 Thess. 2:3-13; 1 Tim. 4:1-3, 1 John 2:18-24, 26, 4:1-3; Jude 3-4 ⁵⁰ Interestingly, the numerical value for the Greek word “Beast” that is used by John if it were written with Hebrew letters equals the number 666. (Lucas and Washburn in Theomatics, chapter 7, pgs. 177-202).

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

TIME QUESTIONS

SEVEN TIMEFRAME QUESTIONS IN DANIEL AND REVELATION

While I was studying prophetic timeframes in Daniel and Revelation, our church accountant, Tony, was reconciling the church's set of books. I teased him, saying, "After you've finished those accounts, could you help me reconcile Daniel's 70 weeks, his 2,300 mornings and evenings, his 1,290 and 1,335 days with John's 1,260 days, his 42 months, and both their time, times and half of time?" We had a good laugh. The same joke for my wife was also fun, and one that brings balance to her husband's studies. She told me that "most people are just trying to live their life one day at a time."



HOW DO OTHERS ANSWER THE TIME QUESTION

Be that as it may, how about you and I balancing these prophetic timeframes? It is time that we address Revelation's various "timeframes." In the last chapter, we saw the last reference to a 42-month period, and from chapter eleven to thirteen, we saw the following timeframes: "*1,260 days*," "*42 months*," and "*time, times and half of time*." What do these timeframes mean? In the last chapter we surveyed the various approaches to 666, and in this chapter we look at how the school's of interpretation understand these timeframes. I will also let you in on how I have perfectly reconciled them.

PRETERISTS

Preterists take literally the timeframes found in both Daniel and Revelation. They interpret them based on major events near the time of both authors. Daniel's timeframes are said to concern the daily sacrifice removed by Antiochus Epiphanies. He erected an image of Jupiter on the altar in Jerusalem.¹ This was an abomination to the Jews, and Daniel's 1,290 days is the timeframe when the temple was desecrated.² The trouble started around 170 B.C. and ended in 167 B.C., when the daily sacrifice was restored.³ The Feast of Dedication was observed in remembrance of God's deliverance.⁴

¹ Antiochus is said to be the evil ruler, who arose out of one of the divisions of the Greek Empire, as the "small horn" from the "male goat" (Alexander the Great in Daniel 8:5-9). This 'little horn' desecrated Israel's temple, prohibited her religion and burned her Scriptures. The Seleucid (Greek-Syrian) Empire was the only northern oppressor after Daniel's time that fits. ² There were two daily sacrifices (Dan. 9:21; Ex. 29: 38-42). ³ The 2,300 "morning and evening sacrifices" are thought to be 1,150 days, and 2,300 is the total number of sacrifices: 1,150 evenings plus 1,150 mornings. So the Good News Bible translates it "1,150 days." ⁴ (John 10:22) Celebrated during the time of Jesus.

The Maccabees recovered the temple and the city from foreign control.⁵ Their complete deliverance is set at 45 days later, that is 1,335 days after Antiochus profaned the temple. “Blessed is he that waits and comes to that time.”⁶

Preterits believe the key event in Revelation’s timeframes is also a past event - the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D.. The Woman in the wilderness for 42 months (1,260 days) answers to the scattering of the Jewish nation. The Beast killing the Two Witnesses is Rome’s persecution of the early church. Although the end of the world did not follow, Preterits consider the destruction of the temple ‘a coming of the Lord’ in judgment on Israel for her rejection of the Messiah and bringing about a type of the End.

FUTURISTS

Most Futurists also apply Daniel’s days (morning and evening) to Antiochus. Others claim that these are future periods, but what happens during these timeframes varies with each author. Some see the Rapture of the church, while others use the Trumpets and Bowls to take us from 1,290 days through to the Millennial Kingdom at 1,335 days.

All Futurists teach that Revelation’s timeframes are future periods. These cover a period of specific events that will occur during the Great Tribulation. They are said to happen during a literal 1,260 days, which is 42 months. This is thought to be Daniel’s 70th Week, appearing in John’s Book of Revelation.⁷ The prophetic clock stopped at Daniel’s 69th Week with the death of Christ, leaving Daniel’s 70th Week. John breaks the 70th Week into two half-weeks. A half-week, is then calculated on a day for a year basis,⁸ and equals Revelation’s 3½ years or “a time (1 year), times (+2 years) and half of time (+6 months).” It is the same timeframe as the 1,260 days (360 multiplied by 3½) or 42 months (1,260 divided by 30 day months).

HISTORICAL

The Historical School applies the year for a day scheme to Daniel’s 70 Weeks and to John’s 1,260 days. Many think this is the Adventist’s view only, but it was an early Protestant position.⁹ The Reformers attributed these

⁵ The cleansing of the Temple by the warrior-priest Judas Maccabaeus, after three years of oppression. (1 Mac. 9:28; 10:1) ⁶ The 2,300 evenings and mornings refers to this period. ⁷ Some take this 1,335 days as a transitional period either immediately preceding Christ’s Return or directly accompanying it during which He gathers and rewards His own and removes and destroys the wicked from the earth. Some Futurists interpret the 2,300 evenings and mornings according to a year for each day principle. Others halve them into 1150 literal days to fit with the 1,290 and 1,335 days. Most, however, fail to comment on Daniel’s evenings and mornings. ⁸ Based on a prophetic formula of a day for a year. Daniel’s 70 Weeks is 490 years. Daniel’s 70th Week, is a literal seven years, that awaits fulfillment.

days-years to the long domination of the Papacy.¹⁰ By the 18th century, the dates were relatively fixed at 538-1798 A.D..¹¹ Papal primacy, they say, began with Justinian's Decree in 538 A.D., declaring the Pope's authority over all churches and authorizing him to deal with all heretics. It ended in 1798 A.D. when Napoleon declared Rome a Republic and installed a new, weakened Pope. Papal primacy had lasted exactly 1,260 years. The Reformers considered the Pope an abomination in God's temple. The blessing, awaiting 1,335 days-years, predicted freedom from Papal power.

Having outlined the main views on these timeframes, my aim is to now explain my view of them. I plan to show that Daniel's "*time, times and half of time*" appears in Revelation and equates to John's 1,260 days and 42 months. I will prove that these timeframes have a prophetic not literal significance. My interpretation fits the context in both books where the timeframes appear, and promotes John's message of Christ's soon return without stimulating speculation as to its actual date.



TIMEFRAMES IN DANIEL IN TERMS OF DAYS

*"Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to him, "How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled—the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation... He said to me, "It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated.""*¹²

The first prophetic period in Daniel is 2,300 mornings and evenings. Are these 2,300 days or 1,150 days? Or are they 2,300 years?

The mornings and evenings are in the context of two animals fighting. Angels clearly explain to Daniel the meaning of his vision. The Persian Empire, represented by a Ram, will be defeated by Greece, represented by a Goat.¹³ Alexander the Great is the Goat's "large horn," which will be "broken." Four conspicuous horns come up in his place. After Alexander's death, his empire was divided between four of his generals. From one general comes a small horn that will grow great toward the Promised Land. This small horn removes the regular sacrifice. The vision concludes with a question, "How long?" An angel answers, "For 2,300 evenings and mornings."

⁹ Adventists say "the 2,300" days-years extend from 456 BC (edict to rebuild Jerusalem) to 1844 AD. Thus "the 2,300" begin with the "70 Weeks." The ending date speculates that God began blotting out the record of our sins in 1844 AD. ¹⁰ Seven-Day Adventism was birthed out of Miller's application of the year for a day to Daniel's 2,300 evenings and mornings. By running the 2,300 evenings and mornings concurrently with Daniel's 70 Weeks and tying this into Revelation, Miller set the date of 1844 AD for Christ's Return, a date which was later reinterpreted into a doctrine of Christ cleansing the heavenly sanctuary rather than cleansing the earth by His Return. ¹¹ In 1190 AD, Abbot Joachim of Floris applied the year principle to the 1,260 days. ¹² Dan. 8:20-21 ¹³ 1 Maccabees 4:53

SANCTUARY CLEANSED

Jews who read Daniel invariably applied them to Antiochus Epiphanes.¹⁴ The apocryphal books of Maccabees assigns Daniel's prophecy to that ruler. So do the translators of the Greek Old Testament and all rabbinical writers. Antiochus desecrated the temple, but it was cleansed and rededicated. In fact, the Jewish 'Feast of Dedication' was established to commemorate the Maccabean triumph. Jesus himself celebrated this feast.¹⁵

The termination point of the 2,300 mornings and evenings is crystal clear. It is when "*the sanctuary shall be cleansed.*" Historically, the temple cleansing took place in 164 B.C.. By counting backwards 2,300 days, we get to 170 B.C. when Onias III, a godly Highpriest, was assassinated. The following year Antiochus murdered many Jews and placed an idol in the temple. Others view the 2,300 evenings and mornings as 1,150 days of two daily sacrifices.¹⁶ They say the 1,150 days take us back to 167 B.C. when Antiochus offered swine on the altar. Regardless, both views point to Antiochus as the fulfillment.

Jerome applies the prophecy to Antiochus Epiphanes and adds that he is a type of the Antichrist.¹⁷ Luther agrees saying, "all the former teachers have called and interpreted this Antiochus a figure of the final Antichrist, and they have hit the right mark."¹⁸ Many see the Antichrist here, because Daniel is told that his vision "concerns the appointed time of the end." Also prophecies of the devastation brought about by the "*little horn*" seem greater than those brought about by Antiochus. He took away the daily sacrifices, but he did not lay desolate Jerusalem and its temple, as Rome would later do.¹⁹

TWO DESOLATIONS

Daniel predicts two temple desolations, but only one destruction of the temple. The desolation will last so many days of "evenings and mornings." It is spoken of in terms of polluting the sanctuary, taking away the daily sacrifices and placing an abomination there.²⁰ Daniel is given the timeframe for this desolation. "From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1290 days." After 45 more days, the temple was cleansed and offerings were reintroduced. For Daniel is then told, "Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1335 days."²¹ At that time the temple was cleansed and rededicated.

¹⁴ Temple's desecration was the greatest catastrophe since the Exile. ¹⁵ John 10:22-24 ¹⁶ Evenings and mornings is a Hebraism for a 24-hour day. (Gen. 1:5). The angel says, they are "true" or real - not veiled but just plain "evenings and mornings." (Dan. 8:20). ¹⁷ Antiochus was a political and religious persecutor of God's people. ¹⁸ Dan. 8:19 ¹⁹ Josephus records how the Romans brought their idols into the Temple and sacrificed to their gods. (Luke 21:20) ²⁰ Dan. 11:31 ²¹ Dan. 12:11-12

The 2,300 mornings and evenings sacrifices (made over 1,150 days) and the 1,260 days concern the temple's desecration but not its destruction.²² Those timeframes do not appear again in Scripture because they were fulfilled. The events in Daniel chapter eight correspond to events before Christ's birth.²³ The other desolation of chapter nine and complete destruction of the temple that Daniel spoke of and Jesus quoted is at the end of Daniel's 70th Week.

③ DANIEL'S DECREE OF SEVENTY-WEEKS

Jeremiah predicted that Israel would be captive in Babylon for 70 years. Based on Jeremiah's prophecy, Daniel set his heart to seek God in prayer and fasting.²⁴ In response, God sent the mighty angel Gabriel, revealing to him a 70-Week prophetic timeframe determined for his people and Jerusalem.

*"Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding... 'Seventy sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city."*²⁵

Daniel's prophecy concerns "seventy 'sevens'" or 70 Weeks as God reckons here based upon the division of time into weeks, honouring His Sabbath day. Matthew Henry points out that "with reference to the seventy years of the captivity; as they had been so long kept out of the possession of their own land, so, being now restored to it they should seven times as long be kept in the possession of it. So much more does God delight in showing mercy than in punishing."²⁶ Jesus used the 70 times 7 as a blueprint for forgiveness.²⁷

We saw in Daniel chapter eight a time when the temple sacrifice would be taken away by an evil ruler, and that was fulfilled by Antiochus. In chapter nine, Daniel is told about another time when sacrifices would be abolished and another abomination would overtake the temple. Daniel is given a timeframe of 70 Weeks and told that this will happen in the last part of the 70th Week.

The 70 weeks or 'sevens' are multiplied to get a total number of 490 days. Many Bible students understand these 490 days as 490 literal years. They apply a year for a day formula, found in Numbers and in Ezekiel. "For forty years - *one year for each of the forty days* you explored the land."²⁸ "I have assigned you the same number of days as the years... *a day for each year*."²⁹ A day for a year is in keeping, they claim, with the prophetic style, which is partly obscure so that the things foretold are not too obvious.³⁰

²² John also uses different terms for the same timeframe. ²³ Dan. 8:1-27 ²⁴ Jer. 25:11-12;29:10; Dan. 9:2-4, 22-27 ²⁵ Dan. 9:24 ²⁶ Matthew Henry on Daniel 9:22. ²⁷ Matt. 18:21-22 ²⁸ Num. 14:34 ²⁹ Ezek. 4:4-6 ³⁰ Obviously, 490 days (70 Weeks) would not provide enough time to embrace the events predicted. Daniel had been thinking in terms of periods of 7 years, specifically 10 of them - the length of the captivity determined by Israel's violation of the Sabbath year. (2 Chron. 36:21).

Some claim Daniel's prophecy covers exactly 490 years, a day for a year. Others say it simply predicts 70 periods of an unspecified but complete period of time.³¹ This latter possibility is based on the fact that we are dealing with prophetic weeks and not days. It is also clear that we are dealing with weighty events that are predicted at the end of different parts of these weeks.

*"Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble."*³²

Since the captivity began and ended in stages, an exact date eludes us.³³ There were four Degrees for the Jews to return and rebuild Jerusalem. Cyrus made an early Decree in 537 B.C., which was 70 years after the Civil Captivity began. Then Darius made a later Decree, which was approximately 70 years after the temple was destroyed. Both decrees are recorded in Ezra.³⁴ There were also two Decrees by Artaxerxes - the famous one given to Nehemiah.³⁵ Since the key event during the 70 weeks pertains to the Messiah, which Decree Daniel predicts is not too serious a matter. The great controversy, we will see, concerning Daniel's 70 Weeks is not when they begin but when they end.

MESSIAH CUT OFF

We are told that after the first 7 sevens, which covered the decree to return, repopulate and rebuild, there will another 62 sevens until the Messiah.

*"From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' ...After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate."*³⁶

³¹ A Jewish scholar Nahawendi, in the 9th century articulated a day for a year here, but others see seven as indicating complete periods of time. ³² Dan. 9:24-25 ³³ There are basically two modes to calculate this: one civil and one religious. The Civil Captivity began in stages when Nebuchadnezzar carried away groups of Jewish captives, starting in 606 BC. The later destruction of the temple in 586 BC provides the religious date, often called the Ecclesiastical Captivity. (Ezekiel 40:1 indicates that the 25th year of the captivity was the 14th year after the city was taken; hence, the captivity began before Jerusalem fell). ³⁴ Ezra 1:1-4; 5:3-7 ³⁵ (Ezra 7:11-16; Neh. 2:1-8) Nehemiah is all about rebuilding Jerusalem during troublesome times due to Sanballat and Tobiah. ³⁶ Dan. 9:25-26

After the initial 7 Weeks, an additional 62 Weeks to total 69 Weeks bring us to Daniel's 70th Week and the death of the Messiah. His death is followed by the desolation of Jerusalem. Daniel's prophecy is outlined as follows:

- **Jerusalem will be rebuilt and re-inhabited after 7 Weeks.**³⁷
- **The Anointed One (Messiah) will come and be “cut off” which is an idiom for “rejected” or “killed” after an additional 62 Weeks.**³⁸
- **Jerusalem and the Temple are desolated during the 70th Week.**

These events happened in the order predicted. In the first 7 Weeks, which some calculate as 49 years, the city of Jerusalem and the temple were rebuilt. Then 62 Weeks later, or 434 years, Christ came but was “cut off” and appeared to “have nothing.” The Romans who crucified Him, “the people of the ruler,” came and destroyed Jerusalem and completely desolated the temple.

④ WHEN DOES DANIEL'S 70 WEEKS END?

The Old Testament prophets made many promises about the coming Messiah. The sequence of events, however, provided here by Daniel are unparalleled. Daniel's prophecy still serves to refute unbelievers, who will not own that Jesus is the One.³⁹ The reason the Jewish people missed their Messiah is due to the fact that He came to do a more important and extensive work than re-establishing Israel as a geopolitical kingdom. Christ came to take away sins by being “cut off.” God could have made an end of sin by making an end of sinners, cutting them off; but Christ came to make an end of sin by taking our place on the Cross.⁴⁰

“Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed... to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy.”⁴¹

Daniel's prophecy outlines what the Messiah's death would do:

- 1. “Finish transgression” - Fulfilled** (Luke 11:47-51; Matt. 21:33-45; 23:29-32)
- 2. “Make an end of sins”—Fulfilled** (John 1:29; Matt. 1:21; Acts 10:43; Heb. 9:26)
- 3. “Make reconciliation”—Fulfilled** (2 Cor. 5:18-21; Heb. 2:17; Col.1:20; Rom. 5:10)
- 4. “Bring in everlasting righteousness”—Fulfilled** (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:12)
- 5. “Seal up vision and prophecy” – Fulfilled** (Heb.1:1-2; John 1:1; 2 Peter 1:19-21)
- 6. “Anoint the Most Holy”- Fulfilled** (Matt. 3:15-17; Luke 4:18; Acts 4:26,27; 10:38)
- 7. “Destroy city and sanctuary”- Fulfilled** (Matt. 24:15-16; Luke 21:20ff; Rev. 11:2)

³⁷ I estimate the 2,300 mornings-evenings, the 1,290 and 1,335 days as happening around Daniel's 46th Week. ³⁸ The 69 Weeks end with the arrival of the Messiah. ³⁹ Not based on an exact number of days, but on the sequence, overall timeframe and events foretold. The Messiah was cut off and the city and temple were destroyed. No honest person can deny the orderly fulfillment of each prophetic feature of Daniel's prophecy. ⁴⁰ Isa. 53:8; Heb. 9:26; 2 Cor. 5:21 ⁴¹ Dan. 9:24

Christ fulfilled the vision. He answered the prophecies to a tittle.⁴² By offering Himself as a sacrifice, once and for all, Jesus put an end to the Levitical sacrifices. When the Romans destroyed the temple they insured that “what is obsolete and aging (sacrifices under the law) would soon disappear.”⁴³

JERUSALEM AND TEMPLE

The destruction of Jerusalem followed soon after Christ’s death. It happened not only as a consequence of rejecting the Messiah, but because it was necessary for the fulfillment of one of the great intentions of His death. He died to take away the ceremonial law and to vacate its obligations. The Jews, however, would hear no talk of parting with it. They stoned Stephen for saying that Jesus should change the customs that Moses delivered to them.⁴⁴ The Mosaic economy was eventually abolished by destroying the city and its temple, along with the Levitical priesthood and scattering the nation.

Jesus spoke of the temple as an utter ruin, plundered, defaced, completely demolished and laid waste. “Not one stone shall be left upon another.”⁴⁵ Jerusalem was destroyed, her children slaughtered, sold as slaves or scattered to the four corners of the earth.⁴⁶ Titus, the Roman general, would have spared the temple, an ancient wonder of the world, but his soldiers were so enraged against the Jews that he could not restrain them from burning it to the ground, that this prophecy might be fulfilled. Its end shall be with a flood, a deluge of destruction, like that which swept away the Old World. The overspreading of abominations was complete and accomplished to the utmost.

Does Daniel’s 70th Week or perhaps half of it still await fulfillment? Some claim the entire week was fulfilled by the Roman wars in Palestine. The question arises because the 70th Week is stated only after the destruction of the “city and temple.” The 70th Week is also divided into two. “*In the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease.*” Some interpret this to mean that the Messiah’s death will cause temple sacrifices to cease. Others say the ruler will cause the sacrifices to cease by destroying the temple. The former became a spiritual reality by Christ’s death and the latter became a natural reality by the temple’s utter destruction.



Daniel’s and John’s “time, times and half of time”

To answer the question of when the 70th Week ended, keep in mind that by their end the city and sanctuary would be destroyed and “sacrifice” would cease. Many Futurists, however, look for a rebuilt temple with re-instituted

⁴² Acts 26:22-23 ⁴³ Heb. 8:13 ⁴⁴ Acts 6:14 ⁴⁵ Matt. 24:2 ⁴⁶ Matt. 27:25

sacrifices, so that the Antichrist can destroy the temple again. Sacrifices start again only to be put to an end again. God, however, said, “seventy weeks are determined,” He gave a list of specific things that would be accomplished. All of these things were fulfilled at Christ’s First Advent.⁴⁷

According to Matthew and Luke, Jesus taught that Daniel’s abomination occurred when the city was surrounded and attacked by Roman legions.⁴⁸ “So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel - let the reader understand - then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.”⁴⁹ Giving the instruction to flee, Jesus said, “When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near.” Jesus gives the reason for the desolation. “For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written.”⁵⁰ Christ’s last words concerning the temple were “behold, your house is left unto you desolate.”⁵¹ It is the same language of Daniel.⁵²

DEFINING TERM

Revelation’s defining timeframe term is “*time, times, and half of time.*” This key term is found in both Daniel and Revelation. It appears twice in Daniel. “*He (the little horn) will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time.*”⁵³ Again we read, “*It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed.*”⁵⁴

The word that Daniel uses for “time” means a fixed time or season, appointed beforehand - normally one year. He tells how King Nebuchadnezzar went insane, eating grass like an ox for “seven times,” because of his terrible pride.⁵⁵ Seven times is simply seven years.⁵⁶ Virtually all scholars agree that “time, times and half a time” means one year (time), plus two years (times) plus half a year (half of a time) to equal three and a half years.

THREE AND A HALF

If Christ was crucified in the middle of Daniel’s 70th Week, it leaves a balance of three and a half days.⁵⁷ John is then seen to carry over this balance from Daniel. Or if Daniel’s 70th Week expired with the destruction of the temple, we are still left with Daniel’s timeframe of “a time, times and half of time.”

⁴⁷ There are two items debated as to whether they are fulfilled: “to bring in everlasting righteousness” and “to seal up vision and prophecy.” ⁴⁸ Hebrew “overspreading,” is “wings,” a military term and its margin reads “battlements.” (Dan. 9:26). ⁴⁹ Matt.24:15-16 ⁵⁰ Luke 21:20-22 ⁵¹ (Matt. 23:35-39) Judgment promised for disobedience in the OT. ⁵² Dan. 9:26 ⁵³ Matt. 23:38; Luke 13:35; Dan. 7:25-26 ⁵⁴ Dan. 12:7 ⁵⁵ Dan. 4:10-15,30-31 ⁵⁶ Dan. 4:16, 23,25,32 . ⁵⁷ Hebrew means half or two parts.

Daniel saw Christ's death and the glory of His Return as "the Ancient of Days."⁵⁸ His great theme like John's is the establishment of God's Kingdom. Both Daniel and John provide the same timeframe. The big question is do we take the "time, times and half of time" as 3½ literal years or not?⁵⁹

SYMBOLIC TIMEFRAMES

I think you know my answer. The timeframe is representative. Matthew Henry says, "*a certain time for an uncertain.*"⁶⁰ Regarding its figurative use, keep in mind this term is used in context of Beasts representing nations. The Beasts are obviously symbolic, and so any part of the Beast such as its heads and horns are also symbolic. So its time must also be interpreted symbolically.

Days in Revelation are not 24-hour days nor are its years our calendar years. This is evidenced by the fact that a year in Revelation is exactly 360 days. This tidy calendar of 360 days or twelve 30-day months to a year is great for prophetic purposes. You can have 3½ years expressed as 1,260 days or as 42 months.⁶¹ However, it does not work in real time. Calendar years are not 360 days nor are months 30 days. They differ because of the earth's movement around the sun. Also weeks do not fit exactly into months and years. These messy facts can drive accountants, like my friend Tony, mad. But it is wonderful if you print calendars every year for a living.

Fortunately, although symbolic days are not 24-hour days, our study of prophetic times and seasons is untainted. For symbolic days and months are full of meaning. They serve as a figurative means of communicating the reality that God has ordained a particular day without revealing the actual date. Some people are sure that Daniel and Revelation contain a cryptic code for date-setting, but there is no secret formula to arrive at the day of Christ's Return. Every prediction has been based on a misunderstanding of symbolic time. And that is why their predictions are always wrong.

Prophetic days, weeks, months, and years stand in place of real time periods. The actual day is not for men to know in advance. Therefore, attempts to correlate symbolic time with actual time periods are fruitless.

⁵⁸ Daniel predicts Christ's Return. (Dan. 7:9-14) ⁵⁹ Preterits look for a literal past 3½ years, while Futurists look for a future 3½ years. They wish to be literal, and yet separate Daniel's 70th Week from his 69th by an interval far greater than the whole of the 70 Weeks. They say Daniel makes a break, but he makes three breaks without the sequence interrupted; the divisions in the weeks simply mark great events in Israel's history. So why place an interval of 2,000 years between the 69th and 70th Week? ⁶⁰ Matthew Henry's Commentary on Daniel 12:7 ⁶¹ Symbolic timeframes do not appear after chapter 13, because once the seventh Trumpet sounds, there is no more delay and thus no pause between the sixth and seventh Bowls. All that was required for the End is addressed. The Gospel has been preached everywhere and all of God's people have been sealed.

Since the terms are strictly symbolic, they do equate to man-made clocks.⁶² But rather, the period, whatever it may be in actual years, is within the knowledge and authority of God to determine.⁶³ A symbolic timeframe is a time or season “which the Father has fixed by his own authority” and is not for us to know. God has a set time to terminate this evil age. That ordained time shall be punctually observed to the exact moment. If we patiently and faithfully wait for it, when it comes, we will have reason to say, “Lo, this is our God, and we have waited for him.”⁶⁴

⑥ REVELATION “TIME” IN “DAYS” “MONTHS” “YEARS”

“The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent’s reach.”⁶⁵ “And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there for a thousand two hundred and threescore days.”⁶⁶

1260 DAYS EQUAL 42 MONTHS

Clearly “a time, and times, and half a time” equals 1,260 days. This 1,260 days is also found in chapter eleven. *“And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days.”⁶⁷* This same period is expressed as 42 months *“But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.”⁶⁸* Finally, this period of 42 months is found regarding the Beast who *“was given power to continue forty and two months.”⁶⁹* Below is a complete listing of passages in Revelation that deal with these equal timeframes.

- **Time, Times and Half of Time** - Revelation 12:14.
- **1260 days** - Revelation 11:3; 12:6.
- **42 Months** - Revelation 11:2; 13:5.

⑦ WHY DAYS AND MONTHS FOR THE SAME TIMEFRAME

Why refer to the same period of time in different ways? Is there a reason? Certainly, every word, number and letter in Scripture is significant, and these different expressions are meant to reveal not conceal. We have seen that they have a common origin and that they reinforce John’s prophecy. The 3½ years, 1,260 days and 42 months are “a time, times and half of time.”

⁶² Greek words for time display the difference between chronological time and prophetic time. Chronos denotes “a succession of time;” whereas kairos means “a fixed or definite period, a season, an appropriate time.” From Chronos we get chronology. (Vine’s Expository Dictionary). ⁶³ Matt. 24:36; Acts 1:7 ⁶⁴ Isa. 25:9 ⁶⁵ Rev. 12:14 ⁶⁶ Rev 12:6 ⁶⁷ Rev. 11:3 ⁶⁸ Rev. 11:2 ⁶⁹ Rev. 13:5

A MULTIFACETED TERM

“Time, times and half of time” is a multifaceted term. It not only contains symbolic years, days and months, but also beautifully expresses prophetic time in which we have a pattern of events that repeat themselves, moving from partial to complete fulfillment. It connects the past to the present, pointing yet to the future.

“Time, times and half of time” is the inspired answer to the question of “how long?” That allotted time is reckoned in months and days to create a sense of urgency. It is the time the Church witnesses for the Lord while the Beast makes war against her. During this time, the Lord preserves Israel in the wilderness of the nations. It is the time that the Beast is given on earth to create his own following, receive their worship and regulating their lives. It represents a short time before the End, standing for the time between Christ’s ascension to His Return, between the Messiah’s First and Second Comings.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What do think of Daniel’s 70 Weeks?
2. How do you understand the phrase “to bring in everlasting righteousness?”
3. What purpose might a rebuilt Jewish temple and sacrificial system serve?
4. How do you interpret “a time, times and half of time?”
5. What time concepts are hard to grasp?
6. How else could you reconcile these timeframes?
7. Why would God give us timeframes and how might they affect our lives?

“Time, times and half of time” not only produces 3½, a very versatile number, but it also explains that symbolic number, showing its internal structure and its meaning. *“Time, times and half of time”* has a structure of one, two, and a half. So whatever the “one time” represents, the “two

times” also represents, except that there is a doubling, intensifying or prolonging. Likewise, the “half of time” represents the same thing again, but there is a limiting or cutting short. Matthew Henry says, “It shall be for a time (a considerable time), for times (a longer time still, double what it was thought at first that it would be), and yet it shall be but half a time, or a part of a time; when it is over it shall seem not half so much as was feared.”⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Matthew Henry’s Commentary on Daniel 12:7.

YEARS, MONTHS AND DAYS

In line with Revelation's apocalyptic nature, symbolic timeframes describe the character of our times (or kind of era in which we live) rather than its exact length.⁷¹ Three and a half consistently signifies a troublesome timeframe.⁷² It is a time of testing, when God's purposes are being worked out but are yet unrealized. Being a broken seven, three and a half indicates a restless unfulfilled time, between times, before we reach the End.

Three and a half in terms of years is 42 months when it is associated with Satan's evil activity, making war on the saints, persecuting the woman and deceiving mankind. Expressed as 42 months, it is the complete time that Satan is given to work his evil activities among men. For 42 is 6 (evil identified in man) x (multiplied by) 7 (a complete time) = (equalling) 42. It is also 1,260 days when it focuses on God's people, namely the Witnesses and the Woman. Recall, twelve is the number of discipleship.

By realizing the symbolic use of these numbers, we will avoid the limitations of the Preterits, Historical and Futurists interpretations. We will see that the Book of Revelation speaks to the Church throughout her sojourn in this world. John's visions cannot be reduced to only a few literal days, months or years as men reckon them.

In the next chapter, we pick up where we left off in the text of Revelation. In Revelation chapter thirteen John showed us the followers of the Beast and now in chapter fourteen he shows us the followers of the Lamb.

⁷¹ By recognizing 3½ years within "time, times and half of time," we simply relate one symbol to another. We have not turned a symbol into real time. When we find 1260 days or 42 months in 3½ years, these timeframes remain as symbolic as the term from which they are derived. You cannot change them into literal days any more than you can change apples into oranges. ⁷² The 3½ also appears in Revelation as "three-and-a-half days." Time terms in Revelation (Rev. 1:1,3; 2:10; 3:11; 9:5,10; 12:12; 14:7; 17:12; 18:8,10-19)

NOTES

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

LAMB FOLLOWERS

SEVEN ATTRIBUTES OF THEM IN REVELATION 14:1-20

The lyrics of a song, popularized by John Lennon, invite us to “Imagine there’s no Heaven; it’s easy if you try, no hell below us, above us only sky.” The melody is soothing as the song further envisions “no country, no possessions, and no religion too.” Cancel all antitheses, avowed in the Bible like Heaven and hell and you arrive at utopia. That’s a motivating theme of the post-modern era; the erasure of life’s antithesis. Blend opposites and do away with differences is also Babylon’s answer to mankind’s dilemma.

In Revelation, as throughout Scripture, contrasts are numerous and extensive. In fact, the antithesis, which began with Adam’s sin, reaches its zenith in the Apocalypse. Antithesis is John’s chief teaching method, and what a way to learn. Experiences bear out that contrasts are part and parcel of life. We learn what is good by its contrast to evil, light by darkness, life by death, blessing by cursing, and what’s real by what is fake. Not only is the Dragon’s Beast best known in contrast to God’s Lamb – so it is with their followers.

Revelation chapter fourteen shows us the Lamb and His genuine followers. In chapter thirteen, we saw the Dragon, cast to earth, standing on the sand of the seashore. In chapter fourteen, we see the Lamb, caught up to Heaven, standing on Mount Zion. Christians possess upward mobility, but Satan and his crowd are headed down. Satan’s war efforts were exposed in chapter thirteen, but now we behold the victorious saints who overcame him. We saw that the Beast marks his followers too, since the Lamb marks His own. The followers of the Beast and Lamb are as different as the Ones they follow. Here we ponder seven main characteristics of those who follow the Lamb.



LAMB’S FOLLOWERS STAND ON MOUNT ZION

“Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads. And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps.”¹

¹ Rev. 14:1-2

Jesus stands victorious upon “Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God.” With Him are “thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly...the spirits of righteous men made perfect.”² Moses stood on an earthly mount and needed to hold his hands up with a rod for Israel to defeat Amalek. But Jesus has already prevailed, since His hands were stretched out on Calvary’s tree. His victory insures us, we will win our day.³ God Son’s stands on Zion’s holy hill.⁴ There is absolutely no way around Him.⁵

• JOHN SEES THE LAMB STANDING

“*Then I looked*” is a key phrase in Revelation. John is shown seven vivid scenes of the saints in glory.⁶ Although we think of Jesus as seated in Heaven, John saw Him standing. Earlier, John saw the Lamb “*standing in the center of the throne.*”⁷ With Heaven opened, Stephen also saw Him standing, as did James. “You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near...The Judge is standing at the door!”⁸ He stands ready to come again.

James stresses the imminency of the Lord’s Return, using the verb “*engiken.*” The Authorized Version translates it “draweth nigh” (at hand) as if the verb were present tense. Actually, it’s the perfect tense, emphasizing not a continuing action but a completed one. Instead of “draweth nigh,” the verb is best translated “has drawn near.” Christ could come at any moment. If, however, there are many *one time, specific events* prophesied in Revelation, we would not look for the Savior at any moment but for the next event.⁹ But the apostles taught the imminent return of the Lord.¹⁰

To be stimulated and safeguarded by the thought of Christ’s Return, we must believe that it can take place ‘at any moment.’ Carelessness or unconcern enters when an event is far removed. It is for our good that we live with an any-moment expectancy. But whoever may contend with this point is it not an amazing fact that for almost 2,000 years believers have lived in that hope? And yet His seeming delay has not discouraged succeeding generations from having the same hope. Instead, the intensity grows as the years pass!¹¹

• John sees Lamb and Father’s name written on their foreheads.

In chapter seven, the 144,000 were the first group sealed by God, being 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes of Israel.¹² We noted that the Gospel is “first to the Jew and then to the Gentile.” A second group also appeared. “*A great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.*”¹³

² Heb. 12:22-29 ³ Ex. 17:11 ⁴ Ps. 2:1ff ⁵ Ps. 2:9 ⁶ (1.) Rev. 4:1-11 (2.) 5:1-14 (3.) 6:9-11 (4.) 7:9-12 (5.) 11:16-17 (6.) 14:1-5; 15:2-4; (7.) 19:1-8 ⁷ Rev. 5:6; Acts 7:55-56 ⁸ James 5:8-9 ⁹ Matt. 24:44; 25:10; Luke 12:35-36 ¹⁰ 1 Peter 3:14; 1 John 3:3 ¹¹ Rom. 13:11-12 ¹² Rev. 7:4 ¹³ Rev 7:9,14

The 144,000 have Jesus' and the Father's name on their foreheads. God's people are owned by Him, bought with a price, marked and numbered. The worshipers of the Beast, we saw, are marked and numbered too. The Beast's number is 666, representing unredeemed mankind, while God's disciples number 144,000. "Twelve" refers to them. There are "twelve tribes," "twelve stars," "twelve apostles," "twelve gates," and "twelve foundations." Old and New Testament saints are 12 times 12 multiplied by a 1000. Every follower of the Lamb is redeemed but in the beastly system all are enslaved.



LAMB'S FOLLOWERS SING A NEW SONG OF REDEMPTION

John not only sees but hears what sounds like harpists playing their harps.¹⁴ The sound is sweet and soft, high and holy.¹⁵ It reveals another contrast: Lamb worship contrasted to that of the Beast worshipers. We saw the worshipers of the Beast, but now we see the worshiper that the Father has found, worshiping in spirit and truth. *"And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth."*¹⁶

John does not disclose the actual words to this new song, because no one was able to learn it except the 144,000, redeemed. It is surely a song of triumph, a hymn of victory to Christ who made us free. But the sense of triumph must come from the memory of the chain; so no angel can sing it so sweetly as the redeemed can. Yes, there are songs that only the sons of man can fully sing. It is the stain of redemption.

The Unredeemed cannot learn such a song of praise to God. No art can teach them; no rules of voice - only that of a redeemed heart. Beastly worship, on the other hand, comes naturally and is common to mankind. It is the old song of self that Adam sang in Eden, when he sang along with Satan. It is a song that is known by all; by it men are unaware that they worship the Dragon.

CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Our worship, adoration and praise are our response to God for saving us.¹⁷ Whatever we offer to God is not given to earn blessings from Him, but an acknowledgement of what He has already given us. When my children give me a Father's Day present, there is a certain irony in it, because the money they use to buy the gifts, I gave to them in the first place. Christian worship is like that. We give to God the love and trust He has poured out upon us.

¹⁴ Word "like" appear 26 times in A.V. "Like" is a visionary word, used to describe what John sees and hears. ¹⁵ Beastly worship is rancorous. ¹⁶ Rev. 14:3 ¹⁷ "Worship" is an Old English word, meaning "the quality of having worth or value." So "to worship" means, "to ascribe worth to someone."

Biblical worship does involve outward acts.¹⁸ The very Hebrew word is “to bow down.” Worship includes bodies bowing, hands lifted, mouths confessing, lifestyles of giving and many other activities in a group or all alone. Worship according to John is giving “glory, honor and thanks” to God. It is laying down our crowns, singing, praying, and waiting on Him. It is reverential and engages the emotions. “John wept much.” It can mean playing instruments or being completely silent.¹⁹

BEFORE THE THRONE

Worship is before God’s throne. Otherwise, it is done in vain. Jesus warned, “This people honors me with their lips but their heart is far from me.”²⁰ Worship must come from a humble heart that is awe stricken by the majesty of God’s love, power and wisdom.²¹ Such worship is not *of* this world for it is “*before Him who sits on the throne*” and “*before the Lamb.*”²² Too much of what we see in churches today is not worship but a staged, showy performance, done before men to entertain them and receive their acclaim.²³ Equally empty are religious rituals that inspire no one.

Where you worship does not matter. Who and how you worship does. Heartfelt devotion to Jesus and His Father is central.²⁴ So if we do not possess any longing or hope or awe or joy or gratitude or confidence, then we may dutifully sing, recite and gesture as much as we like, but it is not worship. We cannot worship if our “heart is far from Him.” God is glorified when our heart delights in His magnificence and is moved by His Majesty. He is also honored when we feel grief because our hearts are insensitive, which is meant to cause us to repent and seek Him afresh. If God were not gloriously desirable and our highest good, why feel sorrowful for not pursuing Him?



LAMB’S FOLLOWERS ARE BLAMELESS

Churches committed to Jesus must rediscover heavenly worship, because Beast worshipers “have secretly slipped in among you.”²⁵ To discern authentic worship, John outlines for us various fruits of true worship.

*“These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.”*²⁶

¹⁸ OT worship was centered in a man-made temple but NT worship is in God-made temple. ¹⁹ Rev. 4:9-11; 5:8,10; 6:9-11; 7:9-12; 8:1; 11:16; 14:1-5 cp. w. 15:2-4; 19:1-8 ²⁰ Isa. 29:13; Matt. 15:8-9 ²¹ Isa. 57: 15 ²² Rev. 4:10;5:8; 7:9-11,15; 8:3; 11:16; 14:3 ²³ Christian worship does not draw attention to self, is not gauged by appearances but only the heart. ²⁴ John 4:22-24 ²⁵ Jude 1:4 ²⁶ Rev. 14:4-5

When men worship in spirit and truth, God's virtue and glory will cleanse and transform them. They will bear the image of the One they behold. His likeness, reproduced in them, is described by John in a seven-fold fashion:

1. They are not sexually immoral

The redeemed are not celibates, although such are included if redeemed.²⁷ The language is figurative.²⁸ For "marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled."²⁹ John provides a specific example to represent sin in general. And sexual sins head the list of what often defile men. The advertising and entertainment industry uses a woman's body to catch a man's attention. It is an old trick, but today, the images are of real people who move and talk; they are not merely etched on walls or carved on stone figurines.

2. They are pure

"*Undefiled by women*" is followed by a more encompassing description.³⁰ "*They kept themselves pure.*" In their relationships to people and to the things of this world, they keep themselves spotless.³¹ The Church-bride is contrasted to a prostitute with whom men commit fornication.³² Paul said, "I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him."³³ Christ comes for "a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."³⁴ "Purity heads the list of virtues that Christ looks for in His Bride."³⁵

3. They follow the Lamb

They have forsaken a self-seeking life to wholeheartedly pursue their Lord.³⁶ The tense of the verb means "*to follow, and to go on following.*" It stresses continued action. Rev. Tenny calls them 'God Chasers.'³⁷ Mrs. Cowman captures the essence of such lives. "They live a hidden life with Him above, in unspeakable fellowship. Willing to lack what others own (and what they might have had), and to be unlike all others, so that they are only like Him. Such are they in all ages, "*who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.*"³⁸

4. They are purchased

"You were bought at a price," Paul reminds us. Your body, therefore, belongs to the Holy Spirit, who is in you. You are not your own.³⁹ Like the wife's body belongs to her husband so the Church belongs to Christ. She is flesh of His flesh and bone of His bone.⁴⁰

5. They are firstfruits offered to God

Firstfruits are "an offering" made at the beginning. In Scripture, it is applied

²⁷ 1 Cor. 9:5 ²⁸ A doctrine of devils says sex in marriage defiles. (1 Tim. 4:1-3) ²⁹ Heb.13:4 ³⁰ Jehovah Witnesses take the figure 144,000 literally but not their description as virgins. ³¹ James 1:27 ³² Rev. 2:20;17:1-6, 15-18; 19:7; 21:2, 9; 22:17 ³³ 2 Cor. 11:2 ³⁴ Eph. 5:27; Col. 1:22 ³⁵ The ancients regarded courage as the main virtue. Christians regard purity as chief. ³⁶ Mark 10:28-31 ³⁷ Destiny Image ³⁸ (Rev. 14:4) Quoted in Streams in the Desert ³⁹ 1 Cor. 6:19-20 ⁴⁰ Eph. 5:30

to seven things: **(1)** “Israel was holiness unto the Lord, and the firstfruits of His increase.” **(2)** To the act of giving the first portion of one’s income. **(3)** To the resurrection of Christ in relation to all believers who have died. **(4)** To the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. **(5)** To the manifestations of the Spirit within a believer. **(6)** To the initial believers in a country (like Epäenetüs in Achaia), relative to their countrymen who were later converted. **(7)** To believers of this age in relation to the human race.⁴¹

“*Firstfruits*” in Revelation is used as defined in point number seven above.⁴² The implication is that the rest of the harvest will soon come. And before the chapter is out we see this final, great harvest.

6. They are a truthful

No lie is found in the redeemed. They are the emblems of truth, honesty and integrity. Speaking the truth in love is a hallmark of Christian maturity.⁴³

7. They are faultless

Some translations read, “*They were blameless.*” David describes this kind of person. “He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart.”⁴⁴ Such men dwell with Christ in Mount Zion. The followers of the Beast are “*inhabitants of this world,*”⁴⁵ “evil men and impostors who go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”⁴⁶

CHRIST-LIKE CHARACTER

To fully contrast Lamb and Beast followers would take a library of books. This illustration, though, highlights a core difference. Picture an older lady in a faded gingham dress and her gray-haired husband in a worn suit. They step off a train in Boston. Without an appointment, they walk into the reception area of the President of Harvard’s office. His secretary at once imagines that such backwoods people have no business at Harvard. She frowns. “We want to see the President,” the man says softly. “He’ll be busy all afternoon,” the secretary snaps. “We don’t mind waiting,” the lady replies. For two hours they wait, as the secretary ignores them, hoping they will go away. They don’t.

The frustrated secretary finally disturbs the president. “Maybe if they just see you for two minutes, they’ll leave?” He sighs in exasperation. Someone of his importance obviously does not have time to spend with them, but he detests the clutter in his reception area. Stern-faced, the president struts toward the couple. The lady informs him, “We had a son who attended Harvard for a year.

⁴¹ Num. 28:26; 2 Chron. 31:5; Jer. 2:3; Hos. 9:10; Prov. 3:9; Jer. 2:3; Rom. 8:23; 1 Cor. 15:20,23; Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:15; 2 Thes. 2:13; James 1:18 (Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words). ⁴² Like Stephanas’s household was the firstfruits of Achaia, so the 144,000 are the firstfruits of mankind. (1 Cor. 16:15) ⁴³Eph. 4:15 ⁴⁴Ps. 15:2 ⁴⁵ Rev. 3:10;6:10;8:13;11:10;13:8,12; 17:2,8 ⁴⁶ 2 Tim. 3:13

He was happy here. But a year ago, he was killed in an accident. My husband and I would like to erect a memorial to him on campus.” Untouched, the president gruffly says, “Madam, we can’t put up a statue for every person who attended Harvard and died. If we did, this place would look like a cemetery.” “Oh, no,” she quickly clarifies, “not a statue. Something more – maybe a building.” The president rolls his eyes, glances at them and at his watch and exclaims “a building?” “Do you have any idea how much a building costs? We have over 7 ½ million dollars in buildings.”

For a moment the lady is silent. The president looks pleased. He can see them off now. But she then turns to her husband and calmly says, “Is that all it costs? Why don’t we start our own?” Her husband nods and takes her by the hand. The proud president’s face wilts in bewilderment. And Mr. and Mrs. Leland Stanford walk away, traveling to Palo Alto, California, where they established the university that bears their son’s name, a memorial to a son that Harvard no longer cared about.⁴⁷

We must remember that we are followers of a humble Lamb, not a proud Beast. One day the Father will measure every life and every deed by Him.



LAMB’S FOLLOWERS PROCLAIM HIS MESSAGE

“Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come.”⁴⁸ Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.”⁴⁹

The call to worship goes out to all of God’s creation. But how? Is this flying messenger today’s satellite television? Missionologists tell us television can not reach the four categories of the human race listed here (every nation, tribe, language and people), because most people live in Third World countries, and do not even have electricity in their homes - not to mention television sets. Before the End, however, all of mankind shall hear the Gospel.⁵⁰

GOSPEL MESSAGE

“The beginning of the gospel” is a call to repent “for the forgiveness of sins.”⁵¹ John prepared the way for Christ’s First Advent, and the Elijah witness of the Church brings a message of repentance for sins and faith in Jesus. All who hear respond in obedience or in defiance. There is no middle ground.

⁴⁷ Seven years later, Stanford University opened in memory of Leland, Jr. ⁴⁸ Josh. 7:19; John 9:24 ⁴⁹ Rev. 14:6-7 ⁵⁰ Angels open the way for the fulfillment of God’s purposes. ⁵¹ Mark 1:1-4

“In the past God overlooked such ignorance (the worship of images made by man’s hand and design), but now He commands all people everywhere to repent for He has set a day when He will judge the world.”⁵²

Faith and repentance honor God.⁵³ Someone pointed out that we march to Heaven on two feet. The one foot is called ‘repentance’ and the other is ‘faith.’ Bunyan’s allegory, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, illustrates this process. Christian repented because he believed that the City of Destruction was doomed. He read his Bible, which led to more faith. Faith led to more repentance, which soon led him to leave the City of Destruction. With these two feet of repentance and faith, Christian marched forward until he came to the Cross where his sins were removed. After that he went forward to the heavenly city, repenting and believing all the way.

An intriguing character in literature is Dr. Faust. He is based on a German legend about a man who made a pact with the Devil. He surrendered his soul in exchange for youth, knowledge and magical powers. One artist put the legend onto canvas, depicting the story as a grim chess game. On one side of the table sits Faust, a symbol of men and women who have traded their souls for what cannot satisfy or last. Faust’s face is contorted in despair. On the other side, the Devil sits back in his chair gloating over his apparent victory. The artist titled the painting “Checkmate.” While studying the painting, a chessmaster discovered that Faust still had one move. And while men still have breath, it is not too late to repent and disappoint the Devil.

NOW IS THE TIME

This final call to repent is given, because the hour of judgment has come. Paul understood the time and taught “now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation.”⁵⁴ The Lamb is standing ready to come as Judge. “In just a very little while, He who is coming will come and will not delay.”⁵⁵ A recurring theme in Revelation is judgment time. This theme becomes more frequent and intense as the book progresses: “*The great day of God’s wrath has come.*” “*The time has come to judge the dead.*”⁵⁶

Until then, as always, the issue is worship. That is the real battle in the Bible. Who will you worship? Men are commanded to repent of worshiping idols and to worship God alone, as He has ordained. This brings us to another central theme in Revelation - the deceit and demise of Babylon.

⁵² Acts 17:30 ⁵³ When God intervened on behalf of the Witnesses, their adversaries were terrified and “gave glory to the God of heaven.” ⁵⁴ 2 Cor. 6:2 ⁵⁵ Heb. 10:37 ⁵⁶ Rev. 6:16;14:15-16;16:17-21;19:11-21;20:11-15



LAMB'S FOLLOWERS OVERCAME BEAST AND BABYLON

“A second angel followed and said, “Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great... A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: “If anyone worships the beast...he, too, will drink of the wine of God’s fury...He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb...This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.”⁵⁷

This is the second of two specific calls for patient endurance.⁵⁸ The endurance theme runs from the start of Revelation throughout the book.⁵⁹

BABYLON INTRODUCED

Here is John’s first reference to Babylon and it concerns her fall.⁶⁰ Exhibiting her importance, Babylon occupies two full chapters, which is an equal number to that of the seven churches.⁶¹ John starts with her obituary. *“Fallen, fallen is Babylon which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.”* The cry “fallen is Babylon” is also found in the books of the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel.⁶² This is not historical Babylon. She fell as predicted. It is the adulterous spirit of this world, which in every age acts like intoxicating wine to lure people away from God.

Babylon’s fall is pre-recorded.⁶³ If only men could read their obituary beforehand like the Swedish chemist Alfred Nobel did. He awoke one morning to read his obituary in the local newspaper: “Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite, who died yesterday, devised a way for more people to be killed in war than ever before, and he died a very rich man.” It was Alfred’s older brother who had died; a reporter had bungled the epitaph. The account, however, had a profoundly sobering effect on Nobel. He decided he wanted to be known for something else. He instituted the Nobel Prize, the award for scientists and writers who foster peace. Nobel said, “Every man ought to have the chance to correct his epitaph in midstream and write a new one.”

WRATHFUL WINE

Most men do not stay sober long enough to consider their end. It is not the influence of literal alcohol. It is another kind of wine. *“The nations drank her (Babylon’s) wine; therefore they have now gone mad.”⁶⁴*

⁵⁷ Rev. 14:8-12 ⁵⁸ (Rev. 13:10) Two specific calls for wisdom. (Rev. 13:18; 17:9). ⁵⁹ Rev. 1:9; 2:3; 3:10; 2:1-3:22 ⁶⁰ First reference to Beast highlighted his main activity of making war on the saints. ⁶¹ Seven Churches in chapters 2-3. Babylon chapters 17-18. ⁶² Isa. 21:9; Dan. 4:30 ⁶³ Call to repent is sobering for, like Babylon, the fall of sinners is unavoidable if they refuse to repent. ⁶⁴ Jer. 51:7

The reason for the insanity is the mystery of iniquity at work. Like the effect of alcohol, it deadens man's moral senses, making him bold to do what he would otherwise shun.⁶⁵ With restraint gone, all manner of sin is possible. At the same time, Babylon's undiluted mixture awakens in man sinful passions like a harlot; yet, men is not even aware of its demonic influence over them.⁶⁶

The images of judgment that follow are terrifying: tormented by fire and brimstone,⁶⁷ absorbing God's undiluted anger,⁶⁸ no rest day or night.⁶⁹ In contrast to the wicked, the righteous rest.



LAMB'S FOLLOWERS REST AND AWAIT THE HARVEST

*"Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor; for their deeds will follow them." I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one "like a son of man" with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested."*⁷⁰

REST IN PEACE

Death for Christians is like sleep at the end of a busy day.⁷¹ They wait for the dawn, anticipating a reward for their labors.⁷² And so Jesus spoke of death. Concerning a young girl who died, "The maid is not dead, but sleeps." Jesus woke Lazarus from a dead sleep. "Our friend Lazarus sleeps; but I go that I may awake him out of sleep." Death is but sleep from which there will be an awakening. But his disciples misunderstood him, taking his words literally.⁷³ Had Jesus not awoken Lazarus, he'd a slept till "last day resurrection."⁷⁴

When our children retire for the night, do we sorrow over their condition? Of course not, because we know that they will awaken in the morning. The mother tucks her darling into his crib, sings to him a soothing lullaby until his eyes close and he enters the land of forgetfulness. Then she tiptoes quietly out of the room, happy in her love for him. She knows she will hear the delightful prattle of her child the next morning. There are no tears, no aching heart, and no lonesomeness. Her child is merely sleeping. In the morning, his brightness will again permeate the home.

⁶⁵ Rev. 14:8,10,19-20; 16:19; 17:2; 18:18; 19:15 ⁶⁶ Pro. 23:29-35 ⁶⁷ Rev. 14:10 ⁶⁸ Rev. 14:10 ⁶⁹ Rev. 14:11 ⁷⁰ Rev. 14:13-16 ⁷¹ Sleep is a very apt illustration for body is temporarily inactive. The soul, however, does not sleep; it breathes and dreams. ⁷² 1 Tim. 5:24-25 ⁷³ John 11:11-14 ⁷⁴ John 11:24

With such an assurance, be comforted when a loved one dies. They are secure in the Father's bosom. While we may be sad because of the temporary separation, we are certain of a reunion, though the night may be long.⁷⁵

Winston Churchill's funeral illustrated the sleep of death and the awakening on resurrection morning. As he planned beforehand, a bugler, positioned high in the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral, intoned after the benediction, the sound of "Taps," the universal signal that the day is over. But then came a dramatic turn; after "Taps" was finished, another bugler, placed on the other side of the great dome, played the notes of "Reveille" – "Its time to get up. Its time to get up in the morning." That was Churchill's testimony that at the end of history, the last note will not be "Taps;" it will be "Reveille!"

When I read the dates and epithets on tombs of some that died but yesterday, alongside of others who died hundreds of years ago, I cannot but think of that great day when we shall all be contemporaries and make our appearance together. Then each one of us will hear the Lord's own verdict on our life.

CONTRASTING HARVESTS

The judgment at the end of the age is represented by a harvest. The wheat and the tares, having grown up together, will experience the sickle at harvest. The word "*sickle*," a symbol of harvest, occurs seven times in this chapter. It signifies the complete penetration of God's judgment. And there are two sickles, two individuals wielding them, and two types of produce: ripe grain and ripe grapes. The parallels and contrasts continue. In the first picture of the harvest "*one like a son of man*" is seated on a white cloud. Clearly a picture of the Lord Jesus, who said, "In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting ... and coming on the clouds of heaven."⁷⁶

Jesus told his disciples that apart from the Father no one, not even the Son, knows the day or the hour of the end.⁷⁷ What Jesus taught, Revelation teaches in a dramatic visionary manner; we read: "*Then another angel came out of the temple (with instructions from the Father) and called in a loud voice to him (Jesus) who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and (now) reap."*



LAMB'S FOLLOWERS DO NOT FEAR JUDGMENT

"Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe."

⁷⁵ 1 Thess. 4:13–14 ⁷⁶ Matt. 26:64 ⁷⁷ Matt. 24: 36; Mark 13:32; Acts 1:7

The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia."⁷⁸

When Christ returns, angels participate in gathering the saints and casting away the wicked.⁷⁹ There is a positive and negative aspect to the harvest. Those crushed are compared to grapes, gathered and thrown into the winepress. Those saved are wheat harvested into barns. Jesus' parables illustrate the same. "The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels...The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father."⁸⁰

GREAT WINEPRESS

The symbolism of the harvest continues as men ripe for judgment like clusters of grapes are thrown into the great winepress of God's wrath. The winepress is always a symbol of judgment.⁸¹ Isaiah asks, "Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress?" The reply, "I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing. For the day of vengeance was in my heart...my own wrath sustained me. I trampled the nations in my anger; in my wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground."⁸²

As the grapes of wrath are trampled under-foot, the red colored juice, representing the lifeblood of the wicked, begins to flow. The judgment is complete as the blood fills an area of 1600 stadia to the height of a horse's bridle.⁸³ This equals 180 miles but the figure is not given for literal purposes. It shows the full extent of the judgment. The number 1600, being 40 x 40, represents the created order, for the life of the old mortal creation is completely put to death at the End.⁸⁴ Flesh and blood cannot inherit God's Kingdom.⁸⁵

Some claim that a God of wrath is Old Testament, and a God of love is New Testament, as though God converted. Revelation teaches otherwise. J.I. Packer says, "People who do not actually read the Bible confidently assure us that when we move from the Old to the New Testament, the theme of divine

⁷⁸ Rev. 14:17-20 ⁷⁹ Matt. 13:39; 24:31 ⁸⁰ Matt. 13:38-43 ⁸¹ Lam. 1:15 ⁸² Isa. 63:2-6 ⁸³ (Rev. 19:11-21). A horse's bridle portrays warfare, which coincides with Christ coming on a white war-horse.

⁸⁴ Four is the number of the created order. "Outside the city" (New Jerusalem) the blood flows. In Bible times, judgments were executed outside the city. ⁸⁵ 1 Cor. 15:50

judgment fades into the background; but if we examine the New Testament, even in the most cursory way, we find at once that the Old Testament emphasis on God's action as Judge, far from being reduced, is actually intensified. The entire New Testament is overshadowed by the certainty of a coming day of universal judgment."⁸⁶

Ironically, the message of God's wrath is urgently needed, but churches today seems less prepared to declare it. In spite of that fact, the seven Bowls of wrath

have been filling since John's day and depict the final judgments on a Christ-rejecting world.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why is there a tendency to be indifferent when an event is far removed?
2. What is most vital in real worship?
3. Why is character so vital in worship?
4. How's your repent and faith walk?
5. What is "maddening wine"?
6. Why do you think the harvest is viewed here in two parts?
7. What do you like best and what do you like least about sleeping?

John's next two chapters, fifteen and sixteen, depict God's wrath released. Jonathan Edwards provides a fitting picture of this in keeping with the imagery of Revelation.

He says, "It is like

great waters that are dammed for the present; they increase more and more, and rise higher and higher, till an outlet is given; and the longer the stream is stopped, the more rapid and mighty is its course, when once it is let loose. It is true, that judgment has not been executed yet; the floods of God's vengeance have been withheld; but man's guilt in the meantime is constantly increasing, and men are every day treasuring up more wrath; so the waters are constantly rising, and waxing more and more mighty."⁸⁷

In part six titled, "Babylon," we see against whom God's wrath is released. We read of the seven Bowls of wrath. We are told of Babylon's relationship to the Beast, and her judgment at the end of the age when the White Horse rider returns.

⁸⁶ (Packer, *Knowing God* pg. 137). Dr. Boice has calculated that there are over 600 significant verses in the Bible that relate to God's wrath. So biblical Christians must affirm the truth of God's wrath.

⁸⁷ "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" J. Edwards

NOTES

PART SIX

BABYLON

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: SEVEN BOWLS
(Rev. 15:1-16:21)

CHAPTER NINETEEN: BABYLON AND BEAST
(Rev.17:1-18)

CHAPTER TWENTY: SEVEN SOLUTIONS
(Rev. 17:1-18)

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: BABYLON'S JUDGMENT
(Rev. 18:1-24)

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO: WHITE HORSE RIDER
(Rev. 19:1-21)

The Bowls of Wrath are poured out as the Dragon releases Unclean spirits, represented by three frogs. These deceive the inhabitants of the earth to go to war against Christ.



**The picture is compiled from pictures by
John Hus and Christoph Weigel**

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

SEVEN BOWLS

GOD'S WRATHFUL JUDGMENTS IN REVELATION 15:1 - 16:21

Businessman Lindsay Clegg tells the story of a warehouse that he was selling. The building had been empty for months and needed repairs. Vandals had damaged the doors, smashed the windows, and strewn trash on the floor. As he showed a prospective buyer the property, Clegg took pains to say that he would replace the broken windows, bring in a crew to correct any structural damage and clean out the garbage. “Don’t worry about the repairs,” the buyer said. “When I buy this place, I’m going to build something completely different. I don’t want the building; I want the site.”

Efforts to save the earth are like fixing up a warehouse slated for the wrecking ball. God’s intention for our planet is not mere renovation. In Revelation chapter twenty-one, we see God’s plan is a New Heaven and a New Earth. But first, in chapters fifteen and sixteen, we see God’s wrecking ball for this trashy world. We cover these chapters as a unit, since the angels are introduced in chapter fifteen and in sixteen they pour out their seven Bowls of wrath.

“I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues - last, because with them God’s wrath is completed.”¹

Seven angels with Bowls bring about this demolition of warehouse earth. Each Bowl deconstructs a different realm of creation. The Bowls are the last cycle of the three series of seven. We saw that the Seals revealed judgment on “*the fourth*” part of the earth, while the Trumpets affected “*one third*.” Up until now, earth has experienced partial judgments.² With the Bowls, however, the judgments on the earth are complete and final.

SONG OF MOSES AND THE LAMB

After last chapter’s harvest of good fruit and before the Bowls are released, we are again shown the overcomers who refused to worship the Beast.

“And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb: “Great and marvelous

¹ “I saw” appears 42 times in Revelation. John saw in part and prophesied in part. ² Rev. 6:8; 8:7

are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."³

Revelation is full of songs. In the last chapter, we read of the song of 144,000; now, with harps again, we hear the Song of Moses and the Lamb. The song of Moses reminds us of the song the Israelites sang, having crossed the Red Sea. They sang of God's marvelous work of deliverance through the mighty waters that brought judgment on Egypt. God had thus made known His justice to the nations.⁴ It was a song of victory. Moses' song is coupled with the Lamb's song since the saints of old are included in Heaven's choir.⁵ Moses, the Lawgiver and builder of an earthly tabernacle, is cited, since John sees into Heaven's Tabernacle where God's law calls forth just and true judgments.⁶

HOLY OF HOLIES

*"After this I looked and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened. Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed."*⁷

John's vision of the Ark introduces seven angels who are authorised to discharge plagues. In the earthly tabernacle, the Ark contained the Ten Commandments and the angelic cherubim.⁸ Breaking God's law called forth judgment, administered by angels.⁹ God said, "if you remain hostile to me and refuse to listen to me, I will multiply your afflictions seven times over, as your sins deserve."¹⁰ Such is the punishment due to the Great Prostitute.¹¹

These seven angles wear clean and glistening linen that epitomizes holiness. When these angels come from the Holy of Holies no one is able to enter there until the seven plagues are over.¹² Time for mercy has expired. The hour of judgment has come. And the seven Bowls follow one after another with no break between them. They constitute the final judgments upon the earth at the end of the age.

³ (Rev. 15:2-4) The overcomers who came out of great tribulation appear also between the sixth and seventh Seals. ⁴ Ex. 15:1ff ⁵ Words in the song in OT (Ps. 86:10; 111:2; 139:14; 145:17; Jer. 10:7). Several hymns dedicated to the Lamb. (Rev. 5:9-10, 12, 13; 7:10). ⁶ Heb. 3:1-14 ⁷ Rev. 15:5-8 ⁸ The heavenly Holy of Holies is the reality which the earthly Ark was but a shadowy type. ⁹ Ex. 31:18 ¹⁰ Lev. 26:21, ¹¹ Angels show John the blessings of the Bride. (Rev. 17: 1-18; 21: 9-27) ¹² Four Living Creatures give angels the Bowls. As representatives of creation they also participated in the Seals (Rev. 6:1-8). "No one could enter" reminds us of the OT regulation concerning the Holy of Holies.



POURED ON LAND AND BEAST WORSHIPPERS

“Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever...Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, “Go, pour out the seven bowls of God’s wrath on the earth.” The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image.”¹³

First Bowl produces bad boils but only on those that the Beast has marked.¹⁴ Recall, the locust plague could not harm those who had the seal of God. Moses’ plague of boils also did not harm the Israelites but only the Egyptians. Five of the Bowls are similar to the plagues on Egypt: boils, water turned into blood, darkness, frogs and hailstones.¹⁵ The plagues on Egypt were an expression of God’s wrath against men who had mistreated His people.

The boils drive home the fact that men would not repent of their sins. As my mom would say, “He who does not listen must feel.” The boils bear witness to sin’s inner anguish and awful ugliness, depicting also the hurtful outward consequences of sin.¹⁶ What is in the human soul cannot be hidden forever. William James, a psychologist, maintains, “Every physical sensation and every contact that man has with the outside world, leaves a permanent trace on a thousand million cells in his brain.” Men sorely need their sins blotted out and their conscience purged by Christ’s blood.

PROGRESSIVE PARALLELISM

The seven Bowls parallel the seven Trumpets. The difference is that the Bowls increase in intensity and are the last cycle of judgment with no letup or pause.¹⁷ The parallels in Revelation are not repetition without progress, but what has been called ‘progressive parallelism.’ The chart below shows this.

1 st Trumpet	Rev. 8:7	1 st Bowl	Rev. 16:2	“On the Earth”
2 nd Trumpet	Rev. 8:8-9	2 nd Bowl	Rev. 16:3	“the Sea”
3 rd Trumpet	Rev. 8:10-11	3 rd Bowl	Rev. 16:4-7	“Rivers, Fountains”
4 th Trumpet	Rev. 8:12-13	4 th Bowl	Rev. 16:8-9	“Sun, moon, stars.”
5 th Trumpet	Rev. 9:1-12	5 th Bowl	Rev. 16:10-11	“Seat of beast bottomless pit.”
6 th Trumpet	Rev. 9:13-21	6 th Bowl	Rev. 16:12-14	“Euphrates.”
7 th Trumpet	Rev. 10:7 [11:15-19]	7 th Bowl	Rev. 16:17-21	“It is finished.”

¹³ Rev. 15:1- 16:1 ¹⁴ Rev 9:4 ¹⁵ Ex. 7:19 8:6; 9:10,23-24; 10:22.



POURED OUT ON THE SEA AND EVERYTHING IN IT DIES

“The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died.”¹⁸

Like the second Trumpet, the second Bowl kills the sea. It turns it to blood. Unlike the second Trumpet, however, that killed only a third of the sea creatures, the second Bowl brings death to all living beings in the sea. It is total and complete. Life in the sea is over. *“The first earth had passed away and there was no longer any sea.”¹⁹*

COMPLETE DECONSTRUCTION OF SEA

To appreciate the significance of the Bowls, recall that the Seals and Trumpets did not reveal specific events that would have a one-time fulfillment. They signified kinds of events: wars, famines, earthquakes and every plague whether man-made, natural or demonic that effects the earth and people. These recurring troubles were meant to warn men of the nearness of the End. They also call men to repentance before it is too late. The prophets of old warned men so they might repent so that God would relent.²⁰

The Bowls, however, are not warnings, but complete destruction. The second Bowl destroys the oceans and everything in them. Rather than speculate as to what future disaster could bring this about, let us not miss the main point. All the sea turned to all blood is the end of the natural order. It clearly marks the end of human history, which only God can fully bring about. There is no further judgment upon the sea.²¹ The next Bowl tells us why the water is turned to blood. Evil men have shed the blood of God’s saints.



POURED ON RIVERS AND SPRINGS FOR MEN TO DRINK BLOOD

“The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: “You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve.” And I heard the altar respond: “Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments.”²²

The third Trumpet and Bowl affects the rivers and springs, causing them to turn to blood. The drinking of water is finished! The Egyptians had a taste of this plague, because they murdered innocent Israelite babies. Mankind

¹⁶ Men fail to repent, willing to rather die. But death eludes them. ¹⁷ Rev. 7:1-17; 10:1-11; 14 ¹⁸ Rev. 16:3 ¹⁹ Rev. 21:1 ²⁰ Jer. 1:10; 18:7-8 ²¹ Ezekiel’s “prophecy against” the mountains, rivers and the land itself (Ezek. 6:2-3; 14:13; 15:7-8; 21:2ff; 38:2ff). ²² Rev. 16:4-7

still commits such atrocities. Daily abortions shed a river of innocent blood. Their number worldwide per year is a staggering 46 million. That amounts to 126,000 per day or two lives every second of every day.²³ Over half of these are performed with the legal backing of society.²⁴

LAW OF RETRIBUTION

The bloodthirsty inhabitants of the earth receive exactly what they deserve. As the ancient Proverb says, “These men lie in wait for their own blood!”²⁵ Men must pay with their lives. God executes vengeance. And there is a “Yes” response from the place where the martyred souls cried out, “*How long, oh Sovereign Lord, holy and true, will you not judge and avenge our blood from those who dwell on the earth?*”²⁶ God judges whoever spills the blood of man as though it were water. No one can escape nor can anyone accuse God for being hasty in His judgment. He has demonstrated extraordinary patience.

Harvest time means that men will reap what they sow.²⁷ That law is universal and applies individually and enmasse. News reports from Iraq, Palestine and everywhere affirm its scope. Take for instance the two Israeli soldiers who were attacked by a mob in the West Bank. At a local police station the mob broke in, beat and stabbed them to death. Their bodies were tossed out of the window, while one attacker waved his bloody hands at the crowd in triumph. Men sowed hateful violence. Soon they reaped Israeli missile attacks from helicopter gunships that claimed more lives. Violence continues the world over, but God will soon end the bloody cycle in a final global harvest.



4 Poured on the Sun and Men Scorched with Heat

“The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.”²⁸

In the fourth Bowl and Trumpet, the sun is the common denominator. With the Trumpets, a third part of the sun was struck so that darkness ensued.²⁹ With the fourth Bowl, the sun is not eclipsed but shines with increased heat. No longer a source of life-giving warmth, it becomes a destructive power.

The cover story of National Geographic, “Sun Bursts,” caught my eye. The subtitle was “Hot News From Our Stormy Star.” While I waited at the dentist’s office, I filled my time reading this July 2004 issue. Although the

²³ Imagine, the moment by moment cry before God’s throne in heaven, from unborn babies. ²⁴ Center for Bio-Ethical Reform. ²⁵ Prov. 1:18-19 ²⁶ Rev. 6:10 ²⁷ Gal. 6:7-9 ²⁸ Rev. 16: 8-9 ²⁹ Rev. 8:12

article did not contain any predictions of the sun heating up, it did point out how our knowledge of the sun has expanded of late. With the use of sophisticated equipment we can observe the layers of the sun, its plasma, internal movements, hot spots, dark spots, its effect on weather in space and the earth's atmosphere. How the sun will end its ministry to mankind, however, is not within the scope of science. It is a matter of revelation.

TURN THE HEAT UP

The Bible has much to say about the sun. Isaiah says, "The sunlight will be seven times brighter, like the light of seven full days." But this is not a disaster for God's people since the prophet says, "When the LORD binds up the bruises of his people and heals the wounds he inflicted."³⁰ God promises His people the day is coming, when "neither heat or the sun (will) beat upon them."³¹ "The sun will not harm you."³² In contrast, "the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land."³³

In the previous water to blood plague, evil men were given blood to drink. Now they go from the proverbial 'frying pan into the fire.' God's sun is made to shine on the wicked with tormenting results.³⁴

REFUSAL TO REPENT

As the water to blood plague shows God's coming payback for violence, the sun plague highlights mankind's refusal to repent. With the bright lights and the heat on and now their feet put to the fire, you would think it would produce a change of heart. Men realize that God has power over this plague. But instead of repenting, people blame God. They also blaspheme His name. They show that they are real followers of the Beast who himself blasphemes. Man's rebellion will know no end. And so God must make an end.³⁵

Mankind did not heed the Trumpets calling them to repentance. Like Pharaoh, they harden their hearts in spite of many plagues.³⁶ It reminds us of Abraham's words to the rich man, who experienced fiery flames and asked, "Let him (Lazarus) warn them (my brothers at home) that they will not also come to this place of torment." Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them." "No, father Abraham," he said, "but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will *repent*." "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."³⁷ Man's failure to repent is a repeated theme with the remaining plagues.

³⁰ Isa. 30:26 ³¹ Isa. 49:10 ³² Ps. 121:5-6 ³³ Ps. 68:6 ³⁴ Matt. 5:45 ³⁵ What is more consistent and enduring than the sun? The answer is man's rebellion. ³⁶ Rev. 9:20-21; Ex. 8:32 ³⁷ Luke 16:28-31



POURED ON THE BEAST'S THRONE, BRINGING DARKNESS

“The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.”³⁸

The fifth Bowl brings darkness as did the sounding of the fifth Trumpet. Recall, a third of the sun, moon and stars were darkened when smoke arose from the Abyss and darkened the sky. This plague seems to only affect evil men again. For it is poured upon the seat of Satan’s empire; and since his domain is darkness, it is expected that his realm will go headlong that way into outer “darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”³⁹ Charles Spurgeon said, “Those who have loved darkness rather than light shall abide in darkness. Eyes which see no beauty in the Lord Jesus, but flash wrath upon Him, may well grow yet more dim, till death which is spiritual leads to death which is eternal.”

GROSS DARKNESS

We see the level of intensity increases from Seals, to Trumpets to Bowls. There is an advance in action within each series. The interplay between God’s judgments and man’s reactions reaches a crucial climax now. For man’s defiance is proven by his failure to turn to God, which opens him to terrible deception. This leads to a final confrontation with God, called the battle of Armageddon. Such deception is hard to rationally explain. And Babylon’s beguiling power is best illustrated by human history.

Nazi Germany from 1933 to 1945 is an example of such deep deception. Josef Goebbels, who served Hitler like the False Prophet does the Beast, effectively brainwashed the German masses, maintaining that anything could be peddled as truth.⁴⁰ And virtually everything the Nazis said or did for public consumption was meant to mislead.⁴¹ The Winter Aid Campaign was said to deliver assistance to those in need; yet, the state plundered well-intended citizens’ contributions of goods and monies. Jews being ‘resettled’ were instructed to bring their most precious belongings - making their organized theft easier. More obscene, surviving relatives, not yet deported, were charged ‘burial costs’ for family members murdered in death camps. In its 12-year reign, the Nazi machinery hardly made a move not masked in fraud; yet, till the end, ordinary citizens stubbornly clung to a plethora of patent lies, which plunged the world into its darkest hour.

³⁸ Rev. 16:10-11 ³⁹ Matt. 22:13; 25:30 ⁴⁰ A Tsar has his Rasputin. ⁴¹ *Kraft durch Freude* Program.



POURED ON EUPHRATES, MAKING WAY FOR ARMAGEDDON

“The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty... Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.”⁴²

The book of Revelation refers to several different places: Babylon, Egypt, Sodom and the Euphrates River. During the sixth Trumpet, angels were loosed at the Euphrates to make way for an army of 200 million. Now we read that the same river is dried up to make way for the kings of the East who meet kings from the whole earth at a place called Armageddon.

ARMAGEDDON AND EUPHRATES

The sixth Bowl introduces the infamous battle of Armageddon, which is thought to be a localized place in Palestine. By transliteration, we arrive at either Harmageddon, which is translated “*mount (har) of Mageddo*” or Armageddon “*city (ar) of Mageddo.*” The root word means “*to cut off*” or slaughter.⁴³ The City of Megeddo was located on a plateau overlooking the Plain of Esdraelon. Many ancient battles were fought here like the one against Sisera as well as the Six-day War in 1967.⁴⁴ In apocalyptic language, no other place would serve as well for a final battle. It is the Waterloo of the Bible.

The Euphrates River is the other geographical place mentioned in this passage. It is an ancient river, marking the natural boundary line which divides East from West.⁴⁵ It flows for 1,740 miles from modern-day Turkey, below the Black Sea, through Syria into Iraq. It then flows into the Persian Gulf. It is also the eastern boundary line of the Promise Land when God made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates.”⁴⁶

The drying up of the Euphrates River allows a huge army to advance unhindered from the East. Its drying up has an interesting historical antecedent. The Persians destroyed Nebuchadnezzar’s magnificent city of Babylon in 539 B.C.. According to Salam Yacoub, the guide from the Iraqi Ministry of Information, they managed to capture Babylon because of the

⁴² Rev. 16:12ff ⁴³ Fausset’s Bible Dictionary. ⁴⁴ Judg. 5:19; 2 Kings 9:27; 23:29; 2 Chron. 35:22; Zech. 12:11. ⁴⁵ Euphrates in Eden (Gen. 2:14). ⁴⁶ Gen.15:18; Deut.1:7;11:24; Josh.1:4; 1 Chron. 18:3.

treachery of the Jewish Community. Tipped off by the Jews, the Persians built earth dams to block the nearby Euphrates, thus depriving the city of its natural defences.⁴⁷ “The ancient historian Herodotus provides additional information. Cyrus diverted the water of the Euphrates River into a canal upriver from Babylon so that the water level dropped ‘to the height of the middle of a man’s thigh.’”⁴⁸

Syria and Iraq are concerned that it could dry up again due to Turkey’s Southeast Anatolia Project. The project, which began in 1997, includes more than 20 dams and 17 electric power plants, and will eventually supply over half of Turkey’s electricity requirements. Filling the reservoirs behind these dams will reduce the flow of the Euphrates downstream to Syria and Iraq, although Turkey must assure that the river meets minimum levels per its agreements with its neighbors.

The Euphrates has had international coverage in the two Gulf Wars. During the first Gulf conflict in 1991, virtually the entire world gathered against the aggressor, Saddam Hussein. Then again in 2001, Iraq and its main river were in the news as that dictator was overthrown. Were these two wars a dress rehearsal for the battle of Armageddon? Will the drying of the Euphrates make way for W.W. III? Will the Chinese invade the Middle East in a great oil war? Should we expect the river to literally dry up?

SYMBOLIC PLACES AND APOCALYPTIC IMAGES

Anything is possible but I do not expect the Euphrates to dry up until the very End.⁴⁹ I see a figurative significance to the river like I do for John’s Babylon. Elsewhere in Scripture, Isaiah removes the Euphrates River as a natural boundary line. He says it will be broken into seven streams, making way (not for kings to war), but for the Israelites in Assyria to return home.⁵⁰

I see the drying up of the Euphrates as a fitting image and Armageddon as a meaningful symbolic place. This image and place provides a powerful prophetic message, conveying what befits the End. There is a final apocalyptic battle to remove Satan and his men from planet earth.

The Euphrates’ nonliteral significance is also seen in that the river is linked to the Dragon’s deceptive work under the image of three frogs. Frogs and dry places are apt images for Satan’s subtle operations. Jesus used the latter figure in the Gospels. He said, “When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it

⁴⁷ Michael Dobbs in the San Jose Mercury News. ⁴⁸ *The Rise of Babylon*, Charles Dyer. ⁴⁹ John’s Babylon is not the historical city on the Euphrates River, for she is said to sit on many waters (“peoples, crowds, nations and languages”) not just on the Euphrates. (Rev. 17:15). ⁵⁰ Isa. 11:11-16

goes through arid (“dry”) places seeking rest and does not find it.”⁵¹ Dry places represent Satan’s domain and the place from which He tempts mankind.⁵²

FROG-LIKE SPIRITS AND THE FINAL BATTLE

The drying up of the Euphrates and the release of three frog-like spirits tell us that the obstacles and restraints are removed. The Dragon, the Beast and the False Prophet are free to act, revealing the deceptive powers of an unholy trinity.⁵³ The three unclean spirits are not literal frogs; they simply “*look like frogs*.” Frogs are classified in the Old Testament as unclean. Deception is slick and slippery; it is something like touching the skin of a frog.

These spirits perform lying signs to deceive those in authority; they in turn pass on the lies to the citizens of their countries. These lies become the basis for fighting against the Lamb and His saints. Revelation is clear that this last battle is, and has been, fought with more than tanks and mortars. It is against unseen evil, spiritual forces.⁵⁴ Satan has been waging war all along against the saints and that war becomes more intense as his short time elapses.

I have maintained that the Seals and Trumpets are not one-time, events. They reveal trends. Christ’s Return and the End itself is *the only* one-time, historical event, prophesied in Revelation. Everything else simply points to that End. When Christians see various calamities and comment on the nearness of the Lord’s Return, they are not pointing, per say, to the earthquake in Pakistan or the war in southern Lebanon, as the fulfillment of a specific Bible prophecy. They are saying that these events are in keeping with prophetic trends.

When it comes to the actual End, we will see that a battle, which John calls Armageddon, is the most accurate image possible. That battle is not a strictly physical event. Nor is it merely a spiritual battle. When Christ comes, every dimension to this war will be fully brought to light for all of mankind to see. Every opposing force and power will be overthrown and totally destroyed. The dead are raised to life and the last enemy is abolished, which is death.⁵⁵

The kings of the earth and their armies who join the Beast represent Paul’s “every opposing dominion, authority and power.” John depicts this as a battle, because Christ destroys these antagonistic forces. Jesus’ words. “*Behold, I come like a thief!*” are linked to Armageddon, since the battle climaxes when Christ comes, riding on a White Horse with the armies of Heaven.⁵⁶

⁵¹ (Matt. 12:43) “Then they will say to the mountains, “Fall on us!” and to the hills, “Cover us!” (Matt.23:31). ⁵² “Into the desert to be tempted by the devil” (Matt. 4:1). ⁵³ Imitation of the true God, revealed in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 29:19 cp. w. Jesus’ baptism in Matt. 3:16-17) ⁵⁴ Armageddon fulfills God’s purposes to bring an end. ⁵⁵ 1 Cor. 15:23-26 ⁵⁶ Rev. 19:11-21

The ushering in of the end for all to see, will conclude on an holistic note, and the only fitting image for such an awesome event is *“the battle on the great day of God Almighty.”*⁵⁷

“Look, I come like a thief!” Jesus addresses believers on earth who remain in this world until He comes. His voice calls them to be alert; figuratively speaking, to stay awake and keep their clothes on. They are to withstand temptations and avoid shameful, sinful acts. *“To clothe yourself that the shame of your nakedness not be revealed.”*⁵⁸ If they had been Raptured and were all in Heaven, returning with Christ, these words would not be necessary.

In Narnia, a boy must ride his horse on a strange path over a mountain pass in the dark of night. He cannot even see the head of his horse. But as he goes, he senses a presence alongside him; he speaks to it and it speaks to him. As the night draws on, he comes to trust the unseen voice. Then the light breaks and he sees that it is Aslan, the great Lion-king. He discovers, as he sees his path for the first time, that it was the presence of Aslan alongside him that kept him from plunging off the narrow way and down the mountainside. Christians live like that; we are near catastrophe but also in the presence of Christ, who keeps us from our deadly fall. And at any moment the light may break, and we will be able to see Him who has been our guardian along the way.



POURED INTO THE AIR SIGNALLING THE END

*“The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, “It is done!” Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake. The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found.”*⁵⁹

INTO THE AIR

The number seven takes us to the End again. *“It is done”* is not from the verb ‘to do’ but ‘to become.’ This is significant considering what this final Bowl signifies. Before the words *“to become”* are announced, the Bowl is *“poured into the air.”* Air is the lifeline for all living beings, signifying an even deeper, unseen lifeline. The word ‘air’ can mean natural air as well as spirit.⁶⁰ Air joins, if you will, the seen with the unseen.

⁵⁷ Battles invariably feature in apocalyptic literature for God’s awesome intervention. ⁵⁸ (Rev. 3:18) “Understanding the present time... put on the armor of light... clothe yourselves with the Lord” (Rom. 13:11-14). ⁵⁹ Rev. 16:17-21 ⁶⁰ Satan is “the ruler of the kingdom of the air.” (Eph. 2:2).

The Bowl “*poured out into the air*” is thus an image well suited to conclude the Bowls. It brings the Prince of the Power of the air to an end. And the air is where we meet the Lord when we are caught up in the clouds.⁶¹ It is where we “*become like Him, seeing Him as He is,*”⁶² when “*the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ.*”⁶³

The seventh Bowl also has flashes of lightning, peals of thunder and a great earthquake. These phenomena occur at the consummation of the age. And here is the last “*earthquake*” of the seven that appear in Revelation. “*Great earthquake*” “*severe earthquake*” and now “*no earthquake like it since man has been on the earth.*”⁶⁴ The earthquake is so great that it splits “*the great city*” “*into three parts.*” But that is not all for “*the cities of the nations fell.*” The great city refers to Babylon and the next two chapters concern her fall.⁶⁵ The three parts into which the city is split illustrates the nature of the city, a mixed multitude that only God’s judgment can separate.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why show the saints in glory so often?
2. What is your response to the idea of judgment quickly approaching?
3. What do you think about the statement “he who does not listen must feel?”
4. What do the waters to blood mean?
5. How do you explain that in spite of these plagues men refuse to repent?
6. How do you understand the Euphrates drying up and the battle of Armageddon?
7. What of the 7th Bowl poured “into the air” and the greatest earthquake ever?

After this greatest earthquake of all time, apocalyptic language takes over. Every island fled and the mountains could not be found. This is reminiscent of the sixth Seal that also portrayed the End. But the last Bowl not only removes the mountains: “*the mountains could not be found.*” Wow!

I have seen my share of movies that depict great upheavals. They range in causes from nuclear war to huge asteroids hitting the earth. When the cities of the nations collapse, however, there will be nothing like it “*since man has been on the earth.*” The great deluge in Noah’s day will seem like a spring rain in comparison. All the Bible passages that speak of the cataclysmic end of this evil age will find their fulfillment on that Day. The best way in which human words can depict it are found in Revelation.

⁶¹ 1 Thess. 4:17 ⁶² 1 John 3:2 ⁶³ (Rev. 11:15) Occurs when the seventh angel sounded his trumpet. ⁶⁴ (Rev. 6:12; 8:5; 11:13, 19; 16:18) There will be a complete number of earthquakes (seven) before the End, and the seventh one at the End is “the earthquake.”

CHAPTER NINETEEN

BEAST AND BABYLON

A SEVEN-FOLD ID IN REVELATION 17:1-18

Bruce Willis is David Dunn in the movie, *Unbreakable*. The movie begins with Dunn as the sole survivor of a terrible train crash, from which he emerges without a broken bone. In contrast to Dunn, Elijah Price, the other main character, has brittle bone syndrome. He can break a bone getting out of bed in the morning. For years, Elijah has researched countless disasters to find the ‘Unbreakable One.’ Like comic book heroes and their archenemies, Elijah is the antithesis to David, but he only reveals his identity at the movie’s end. Elijah, we discover, has caused many catastrophes to find Dunn. When asked by Dunn why he destroyed so many lives, Price says, “I could only know who I was by finding out who you are!”

Babylon is the antithesis to the New Jerusalem and known by her lewdness. Revelation angels relate a ‘tale of two cities,’ or two women, one holy and one profane. John tells us the angel’s explanation of Mystery Babylon. This chapter serves as an addendum to the seventh Bowl, where the judgment on Babylon was first mentioned.¹ Chapter seventeen and eighteen greatly enhance our understanding of Babylon’s nature and relationship to the Beast. To understand who she is, I provide a seven-fold identification in this chapter. In our study here, we are like detectives who use forensic science and DNA to establish a positive ID on a person.



BABYLON’S SEVEN INITIAL IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS

“One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute...” Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. This title was written on her forehead: MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished.”²

¹ Rev. 14:8; 16:19; 18:11 ² Rev. 17:1-6

OBSERVE SEVEN INITIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF MYSTERY BABYLON:
1. She is known as mystery Babylon (17:5)

Written on her forehead is “*MYSTERY BABYLON*.” Names on foreheads, like the Beast’s name on his worshipers, denote one’s nature. Her title “*Mystery*” indicates that there are hidden truths regarding her identity and activities.

2. She is a great prostitute, called the mother of prostitutes (17:1)

Babylon’s fornication is infidelity to the Lord.³ She has sold her soul for power and pleasure, and yet she wipes her mouth and says “*I have done nothing wrong.*”⁴ As the antithesis of Christ’s Bride, she is called the mother of harlotries, for she embodies every idolatrous manifestation.⁵

3. She sits on many waters, which represent nations (17:1)

Mystery Babylon does not just sit on the banks of the Euphrates, but on many rivers, signifying “*the people and the crowds and nations and languages.*”⁶ Her influence is worldwide like the Bride, whose members are “*from every tribe and language and people and nation.*”⁷

4. She rides a beast and commits adultery with earthly kings (17:2)

Her infidelity is aptly displayed by her riding upon a Beast.⁸ She has intimate relations with those in authority who possess power. Like Jezebel, she uses her charms to position herself closely to kings for her own selfish ends.⁹

5. She intoxicates multitudes with her compromises (17:2)

The prostitute holds a golden cup, which contains every abomination.¹⁰ “*Abomination*” describes practices acutely offensive to God such as worshiping idols, sexual perversions and violence.¹¹ The cup is held out to others who are seduced to drink its contents. When they do, they become prey to “every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.”¹²

6. She is robed in purple and scarlet (17:4)

Babylon’s clothes are seductive, which stand in contrast to the white garments that the wife of the Lamb wears. Babylon dresses for her worldly lovers.¹³ She is decked out with gold jewelry, diamonds and expensive pearls.¹⁴ By her manners and lifestyle, she lures her lovers, offering them what she possesses in exchange for their soul.¹⁵ She is dressed to kill!

7. She persecutes the saints and is yet greatly admired (17:6)

Babylon gets away with murder.¹⁶ She uses rulers to do her dirty work as Jezebel of old; yet she is the patron behind the blood-letting. She has been active throughout the ages, continuing to this present moment.

³ James 4:4 ⁴ Prov. 30:20 ⁵ Rev. 19:7ff; 21:2ff ⁶ Rev. 17:15 ⁷ Rev. 5:9 ⁸ Rev. 14:8 ⁹ Rev. 12:3, 9; 13:1; Isa. 1:18; Matt. 27:28 ¹⁰ Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11 ¹¹ Deut. 27:15; Lev. 18:22; 20:13 Deut. 18:10, 11 ¹² Eph. 4:19 ¹³ Rev. 21:2 ¹⁴ Scarlet dye costly ¹⁵ Jer. 2:20; 3:7; 4:30; 51:1ff; Ezek. 23:2-3 ¹⁶ John 16:2



BABYLON ASTONISHES MANKIND

“Then the angel said to me: “Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns.”¹⁷

Since Babylon astonished the apostle, we should not be surprised if she is not recognized by the world for her true character.¹⁸ She may appear noble to men when in fact the opposite is the case. For she is as deceptive as sin.¹⁹ To grasp *“the mystery of the woman”* requires an angelic explanation.

KINGDOM CAPITAL OR CHURCH

Before we note the angel’s words, many claim Babylon is an apostate church. For Paul likens Christ’s union to the church as that of a husband and wife. Paul calls their relationship a great mystery.²⁰ Churches bear the feminine gender in Scripture.²¹ So with the description of the woman as a prostitute, they argue that Babylon represents false churches. Genuine churches bring people to Christ, but the Great Harlot keeps men from Christ.²² She embodies all the hypocrisy Jesus confronted in religious leaders.²³

Other commentators see Babylon as an empire’s capital city.²⁴ Some see her as both a capital city and an apostate church, appearing as one. This would be like Jerusalem standing for God’s congregation as well as the city capital of the Israelite Kingdom. She is thought to be like the Women in chapter twelve as Israel and the Church at the same time. Those who hold this view allege that Babylon stands for Rome and the Roman Catholic Church.

SHE IS EVERYWHERE

We will see, however, that Babylon cannot be limited to any particular city, empire or institution. Her enticements are found the world over, and have been present throughout history, not just in Babylon, Jerusalem or Rome. She is everywhere in our world, calling out to the simple at the top of every street corner. You will find her in the Americas, Asia, Europe and Africa.

Babylon is attractive because she offers mankind a way to save his soul.²⁵ But her relationship and way is illegitimate like that of an adulteress. She professes but does not possess. She is a lover of self, money and pleasure more than a

¹⁷ Rev. 17: 7 ¹⁸ A.V. says, “he wondered with great admiration.” Bewilderment fits better than esteem. ¹⁹ 2 Thess. 2:7 ²⁰ Eph. 2:22-32 ²¹ Rom. 7:2ff; Gal. 4:26; 1 Peter 5:13; 2 John 1 ²² John 12:34; Matt. 12:39; 16:4 ²³ Matt. 23:2-39; Rev. 2:1-3:22 ²⁴ Empires called by capital city. Babylonian and Roman Empire, which would be like referring to the United States as “Washington.” ²⁵ Prov. 11:22

lover of God. Therefore, when necessary, she employs violence to maintain her position as queen; all the while, she holds to a form of godliness.²⁶ In short, Babylon is man-made religion.²⁷ She is today's tower of Babel, which includes every false religion and ideology. She has ever sought to usurp Jesus and destroy His Church. Let us consider the angel's words that follow.



BABYLON RIDES A BEAST

“The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come.”²⁸

To get Babylon's ID right means we must also identify the Beast she rides. The Beast's consistent claim to fame, as pointed out by the angel, is that he *“once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss.”* This is the sword-wounded Beast of chapter thirteen who was healed. The language is similar and the world's astonishment identical. His threefold timeframe is also found in both contexts. *“Was...is not...and will come.”²⁹*

BEAST FROM THE ABYSS

Some say that the king of Babylon *fits* the prophecy of the Beast, because he *“once was”* but *“now is not,”* and was sentenced to *“the Abyss.”* Babylonian kings also *feature* over two hundred times in the Old Testament prophets. They are also *found* in the right (or should I say wrong) place. *“You (king of Babylon) are brought down to the depths of the pit (abyss).”³⁰* Babylon's kings, however, were not the only ones put in the pit. Tyre's, Egypt's, Assyria's, Elam's and all wicked kings were brought down to the pit.³¹

We saw that the Beast of chapter thirteen stands for devil-inspired governments. The kings of Babylon like Nebuchadnezzar, Roman emperors like Nero and many other rulers fit the bill, since they demanded worship and assumed prerogatives that belong exclusively to God. Such rulers demonstrate that they follow the Dragon. God, therefore, judges their blasphemy by consigning them to the pit.³² So the question is not which particular king comes up out of the pit but what does that image convey.

²⁶ 2 Tim. 3:1-9 ²⁷ “The world” is personified by John. It has a soul alienated from God. The world, is said to loves its own. But it destroys man's soul. (John 1:10,29;7:7;8:23;12:31;14:17,27,30;15:18-19;16:8-11, 20, 33; 17:6-16). ²⁸ Rev. 17:8 ²⁹ Rev. 13:3, 12-14; 17:8 -11 ³⁰ Isa. 13:1-14:15 ³¹ Ezek. 26:20; 28:8; 31:14-16; 32-18-29; Ps. 9:15; 94:13 ³² One person is not the seven-headed Beast.

EVIL REVIVED

“Once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss” means that evil has an ability to resurrect. This is what makes it such a deceptive and destructive foe. Evil’s re-emergence from the abyss is a recurring theme in John’s prophecy. We already saw Satan, as a fallen star, “given the key to the shaft of the abyss.”³³ When he opened it, a demonic horde was released to wreak havoc in the earth. John also tells how the Dragon, thrown into the Abyss with a lock and seal over him, is set free for a short time.³⁴

New converts are alarmed when, after a wonderful conversion, they continue to struggle with their sin nature. If that is true for Christian individuals, how much more is it the case for unregenerate men collectively? Although the Gospel sword slays the Beast and consigns him to the Abyss, he rises again. For he has a complete number of (seven) heads.³⁵ The Dragon was defeated by the Man-child, but he is allowed to bring up the Beast from the abyss, because of man’s refusal to repent in spite of the many warnings. The Beast’s new lease on life (or should we say on sin and death) permits him to imitate God’s Son, “*who was, and who is to come.*”³⁶ Like a Jack-in-the-Box that pops back up again or a cat with nine lives, he returns to mislead the nations.³⁷ And he has the right to imprint his nature on all who follow him.³⁸



BABYLON SITS ON SEVEN HILLS

“*This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits.*”³⁹ ...*The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.*”⁴⁰

The seven hills pointed John’s readers to the city of Rome because:

- (1) That city was known from antiquity as *the city of seven hills*.⁴¹
- (2) Rome was *the capital of an evil empire* active in John’s day.
- (3) The angel says, “The woman you saw is *the great city that rules.*”⁴²
- (4) The city of Rome⁴³ was also known in the early church as *Babylon*,⁴⁴ a title used by both Jews and Christians.⁴⁵
- (5) Revelation uses symbolic *names*⁴⁶ for cities elsewhere.⁴⁷
- (6) What Babylon *represented*, a world united in rebellion against God had not ceased but lived on in the city of Rome and its empire.
- (7) *Rome fits the first part of the puzzle but it does not complete the oracle.*

³³ Rev. 9:1 ³⁴ Rev. 20:1-3 ³⁵ Abyss is Satan’s place now as heaven is God’s. ³⁶ Rev. 1: 4, 8,18; 2:18;4:8

³⁷ Satan’s attempts to be like the “I am.” (Ex. 3:14; John 8:58; 2 Thess. 2:4). ³⁸ Rev. 13:16 ³⁹ (Rev. 17:9) “Orê” is rendered “mountain,” seven times. Only here is it translated “hills.” Mountains equal empires (Isa. 2:2; Jer. 51:25; Dan 2:35; Zech. 4:7) ⁴⁰ Rev. 17:18 ⁴¹ Roman coins depict the goddess Roma sitting on *the seven hills*. ⁴² Rev. 17:18 ⁴³ Babylon refers to Jerusalem according to Preterists.

⁴⁴ 1 Peter 5:13 ⁴⁵ Peter was in Rome but Babylon was destroyed. ⁴⁶ Rev 11:8 ⁴⁷ Rev. 11:8

Rome fails to complete the prophecy and bring us to the return of Christ.⁴⁸ Whereas, Babylon, as a universal symbolic city, satisfies John's description, covering the entire Christian era, and fitting many different places and times. When we understand what Babylon and the seven-headed Beast represent, we readily see why they transcend any one evil city, empire or church.

BABYLON'S BACKGROUND

Babylon was the earliest city famous for its rebellion against God. Its rebellious history and excessive pride is well documented in Scripture. First, in attempting to build a Tower to Heaven that resulted in the confusion of tongues. Then as the first city to exercise tyranny over men, having begun with Nimrod.⁴⁹ Babylon also led the Jews captive and held them in miserable bondage.⁵⁰ From antiquity, Babylon has symbolized an evil world at enmity with God. She gave birth to mankind's first corporate rebellion against God. So she is called "*the mother of harlots and the abominations of the earth*" as Eve "was the mother of all living."⁵¹

Babylon, as the first rebellious city after the flood, possesses a 'larger than life' significance in Scripture.⁵² Isaiah refers to her evil influences as present up to the End and God's final judgment.⁵³ In John's day, the Roman system could be likened to the hardware of a computer and Babylon to its software. The hardware varies but the program is downloaded many times in different places. No one empire can thus fully embody Babylon's rebellion.⁵⁴ John's brain-twister, which follows, makes that more clear.



BEAST'S RIDDLE PREDICTS THE ADVENT OF SEVEN KINGS

*"They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction."*⁵⁵

We need godly insight, "*a mind that has wisdom,*" to interpret John's riddle.⁵⁶ In chapter thirteen, wisdom was also required to calculate the number of the Beast. This need is due to the fact that the riddle has multiple facets.

⁴⁸ The city of Rome as Antichrist's political and religious capital is the only option left if Babylon is simply Rome. ⁴⁹ Babel (Babylon) was Nimrod's first city but other cities were established (Gen. 10:8-9) ⁵⁰ Babylon's tyranny, idolatry and lust has been emulated by many cities. (Gen. 11:1-9) ⁵¹ Gen. 3:20 ⁵² "Nimrod excited them to such an affront and contempt of God, and was gradually able to change the government into tyranny. (Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, Bk. 1, 4:2,3). ⁵³ Isa. chps.13-14. ⁵⁴ Book of Enoch. "I saw seven dignified mountains all different one from another...their heights all resembled the seat of a throne." (Enoch 24:1-4; Jude14). ⁵⁵ Rev. 17:10-11 ⁵⁶ Samson's (Judg. 14:4) "riddle" is "*hida,*" an enigmatic saying, question, or story whose meaning must be

Following multiple facets are why we have different interpretations:

- (1) Seven heads are *seven hills* as well as *seven kings*.
- (2) Of the seven, *five have fallen*, that is they are past.
- (3) *One is present*, that is the sixth, since five are past.
- (4) Another one, a seventh, *is future* but will appear for a short time.
- (5) The Beast who once was, and now is not, is an *eight king*.
- (6) He *belongs to the seven* and goes to his destruction.
- (7) The *ten horns* are kings who have not yet received a kingdom.

The climax of the riddle and its most puzzling part concerns the Beast, who once was, and now is not. He is an eighth king; yet, somehow he belongs to the other seven. With whom did these kings or kingdoms commence and when do they end? Preterists claim they are Roman Caesars of John's day. Futurists look for a future dictator. We look at these views next chapter.

For now, how does this riddle fit with the rest of Revelation? In the Seals, Trumpets and Bowls, we saw that John covered similar ground. We have seen that Revelation repeats its themes, using varying imagery and adding more details. It is like the ocean tide as it comes in. It does not roll in all at once. The waves come in and they go out, back and forth, again and again. The tide creeps forward up the beach gradually. Over time it comes in completely.

We pointed out how the language of visions and dreams has repetition. Recall how Pharaoh's dream repeated itself with cows and corn. Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams, because Joseph's own dreams about his future had come in more than one image. His brother's sheaves bowed down to his, and again with different images, the sun, moon and eleven stars bowed down to him.⁵⁷ The Beast's and Babylon's judgment, part of the final Bowl judgments, also demonstrate repetition, envisioning the same rising tide of judgment as it affects man's political, religious and economic world.



BEAST HAS TEN KINGS WHO SUPPORT HIS WAR EFFORTS

*“The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers. Then the angel said to me, “The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages.””*⁵⁸

determined.” (Dan. 8:23). (E. Yamauchi, *Riddle*, Theological Wordbook of OT Vol. 1, pg. 267).⁵⁷
 Gen. 37:1-11⁵⁸ (Rev. 17:12-15) Places where the waters symbolize the people. (Isa. 8:7; 11; Jer. 47:2; 51:13). Phrases found elsewhere. (Ezek. 16:39; 23:29; 26:19; Hos. 2:5-7).

Computers once scared me. Not because I thought the Beast would use one to mark me, but because I thought I would never master their mysterious functions. My first few times trying only confirmed my fears. Necessity and effort, however, paid off. After a normal learning curve, I actually learnt my way around its complex features.

The Beast and Babylon are difficult because of their multiple configurations. These serve her multiple functions and manifestations. The Beast's seven heads are seven mountains and seven kings. Some have fallen while one has not yet risen. One is present and one is future. The future one is an eight but is part of the seven. Then there is the prostitute who rides the Beast and who the Beast will ultimately destroy. And do not forget there are ten horns on the Beast as well, which are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom.

TEN KINGS - HORNS

Asking the right question helps us to get the right answer. So instead of asking *who* these ten kings are, let us ask *what do they stand for?*⁵⁹ John tells us that the ten kings have not yet received their kingdoms. This precludes identifying the ten kings with subordinate rulers in the Roman Empire or with Parthian governors, because they are kings with no kingdom yet.

*"They receive authority for one (and the same) hour as kings with the beast and that they give their authority and power to the beast to wage war against the Lamb."*⁶⁰

Horns always symbolize power and the number ten indicates full power. The horns of the Beast war against the Lamb due to their allegiance to him. Their time, however, is short-lived.⁶¹ John thus predicts future powers that are hostile to Jesus and that are linked to Satan, and these cannot be limited to Rome's vassal kings. The ten horns also tell us that Satan delegates will be united yet distinct in the future. This has been the case since John's day. No one empire has exercised all of Satan's power. Despite Babylon's increasing influence to unite, this will continue to be the case until the end of the age.

True also to history is that we are told that the Beast and the horns hate the whore, make her desolate, strip her naked and burn her with fire. These words describe the fate of the apostate church and false religions. The world, with whom she commits adultery, turns on her and destroys her. Such is a fitting sequel to her lack of fidelity to Christ as her savior.

⁵⁹ Daniel's and John's ten horns differ, for Daniel's little horn comes up after the ten horns. He uproots three horns. John has no little horn. (Dn. 7:8,24) ⁶⁰ Bullinger, *Companion Bible*, note on Revelation 17:12. ⁶¹ They receive authority for one hour, which can be longer than what we might

Human powers that formerly supported the woman will be the means of destroying her. God's judgment on apostate Israel is a fitting parallel.⁶²



BEAST AND COMPANY HATE AND RUIN BABYLON

“The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God’s words are fulfilled. The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.”⁶³

The woman is called “*the great city.*” She occupies a central position by sitting on **(1)** many waters, **(2)** a scarlet Beast and **(3)** seven hills. This city with dominion over the kings of the earth in John’s day was none other than the city of Rome.⁶⁴ John could not be clearer unless he were to come out and name Rome, which is something he avoids unless he wishes to bring more persecution on the churches than they are already enduring. Yet, we said, there is another reason not to name the city. It is because Babylon cannot be limited to Rome or any one historical city.

Two cities in Revelation embody more than any two earthly cities could personify. One is the New Jerusalem that comes down out of Heaven from God, and the other is the earthly city of the world controlled by Satan and known as Babylon the Great.⁶⁵ These two cities have their own citizens, their own rules and laws and their own destinies. The one is a city of light, the other a city of darkness; the one is known because of its purity, the other because of its deceit. In the one, God and the Lamb dwell with their people; and in the other, Satan, the fallen angels and their followers reside.

The New Jerusalem and Mystery Babylon simply carry on the contrast found throughout Revelation. Augustine made considerable use of “city” imagery. In his major work, *The City of God*, he spoke of two cities: a heavenly city, which he called the city of God, and an earthly city. The the city of God is made up of individuals who live by the love of God; whereas, the earthly city is made up of individuals, who lived by love of self.⁶⁶

suspect, even as long as the Christian era. “We know it is the last hour.” (1 John 2:18) ⁶² Ezek. 16:37; 23:22 ⁶³ Rev. 17:15-18 ⁶⁴ The city of Rome was well known by that title not only by Greeks, such as Irenaeus, but by most of the Latin writers, Tertullian, Ambrose, Victorinus, Jerome and Augustine. The ‘Eternal City’ was known by all the learned to be the city of Rome, wherein the Emperors were called ‘gods,’ and the people flattered them with altars and blasphemous titles of divine powers. ⁶⁵ Rev. 3:12; 21:2; 10; 22:2-3 compare with 11:8; 14:8; 16:19; 17:5 18:2, 10. ⁶⁶ (Book XIV Chap. 28 Of The Nature Of The Two Cities, The Earthly And The Heavenly). Augustine traces the history of two cities or states from the beginning of the world.

Babylon and the New Jerusalem remind me of Charles Dickens' classic, "A Tale of Two Cities." Not because London and Paris are so different. Nor because of the novel's theme of revolution and resurrection. But because every earthly city possesses a tale of two cities, of darkness and light, of love and hate.

John's Babylon is not unlike our large, modern cities that boast of their great financial districts, their beautiful theaters, their elegant restaurants and up market districts. They may even boast of their great churches and cathedrals. But at night these same places are dark and fearful, wretched and filthy. The youth riots, which started in Paris in 2005, continued for weeks and spread across the country to other cities.⁶⁷ Thousands of cars were torched. Angry, violent people were seen to live a life of torment in the city of lights.

We have all spent our share of time in Babylon, where our fellow citizens are demons and darkness and nightmares and all the things that go with them. They are the tormented souls of this world. But the Good News is that there is a city that knows no night but only the brightness of light and where the

day knows no sorrow or end. That is where we are headed, and where we must arrive before long.

Having seen John's vision of Babylon and heard the angels explanation, we are in a better position to consider seven popular views concerning Babylon's identity in the next chapter.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What has been the greatest contrast that you have experienced in your life?
2. Why do you think God hates adultery?
3. When is deception most likely and strongest – when have you seen its power?
4. How has sin sought to reassert itself in your life after you thought it was gone?
5. How can the Beast turn on Babylon if Satan's kingdom is not divided?
6. Why do you think every city on earth contains a tale of two cities?
7. What aspect of the riddle of the Beast is most difficult for you to understand?

⁶⁷ News of riots in France in November of 2005 were carried worldwide.

CHAPTER TWENTY

BEAST AND BABYLON ANSWERS SEVEN SOLUTIONS IN REVELATION 17:1-18

The roller coaster at King’s Island in my hometown, Cincinnati, is called “The Beast.” And the introduction to Revelation in my son’s “Teen Devotional Bible” invites us to “Remember your first roller coaster ride? You wondered if you could handle the speed, the shaking, the twists and turns of this awesome ride. Even its name was scary... You did not know everything that would happen on your first roller coaster ride, but the view before you gave you a feel for it and issued a challenge to ride. That is exactly what the book of Revelation does.”¹ The outline for Revelation provided in this study Bible continues the Roller Coaster analogy.

Welcome, roller coaster riders. (Revelation of Jesus, Chpt.1).

Instructions for your safety (Letters to Seven Churches, Chpts 2-3).

Climbing the first big hill (View in Heaven, Chpts. 4-5).

The big dive downward (God’s Judgments, Chpts. 6-10, 15-16).

Twists and turns (Battle of Good and Evil, Chpts. 11-14)

The Corkscrew (Defeat of False Religion, Chpts. 17-18)

Back to the terminal (Return of Jesus, Chpts. 19-20)

Let’s do it again (New Heaven and New Earth, Chpts. 21-22).

We have ridden the track of Revelation for seventeen chapters. We have climbed the first big hill, taken the big dive downward and experienced the twists and turns along the way. In the last chapter, we encountered “The Corkscrew” of false religion. Riders of Revelation hold very different opinions about that leg of the ride. So, as we did earlier, with the debated 666, we need to consider other views, which has been one of our aims throughout our study. Let us ponder seven solutions to Babylon and the Beast. Remember these views must:

- (1) Explain who or what Babylon represents
- (2) Differentiate between Babylon and the Beast she rides
- (3) Decipher the Beast’s riddle “five have fallen and one is”
- (4) Interpret the coming eighth one in relation to the other seven
- (5) Account for the ten kings who are allies of the Beast
- (6) Relate how these make war against the Lamb
- (7) How they destroy Babylon and are themselves destroyed

¹ Pgs. 1448-1449, Zondervan Pub., Grand Rapids, Michigan, copyright 1999, NIV Bible.



PRETERISTS SEE ROME AND JERUSALEM

Preterists say John wrote about events of his own day. And John's Beast is the city of Rome and Babylon stands for Jerusalem.² The seven heads of the Beast are Roman emperors. "*The five that are fallen*" refer to emperors such as Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius and Nero. One is present, Vespasian. The seventh, which reigns for a short time, is Titus, the destroyer of Babylon. Nero then reappears in Domitian, who is the eighth head.³

There is, however, no agreement, among them, as to who the "*five fallen*" Roman Emperors are, because **(i)** It is not clear with which emperor they should start counting: Julius Caesar, Augustus, Nero or who? **(ii)** Also what emperors should be counted? Should they count the very brief reigns of Galba, Otho and Vitellius? **(iii)** They differ sharply as to whether Babylon refers to Rome or Jerusalem.

Preterists respond by saying that those who received John's book knew where to start counting, since they knew who the reigning emperor was. Therefore, although we cannot, they could clearly interpret John's riddle. They argue that John does not want to name the Emperor, but he does want the saints to know what he represents. John was concerned that his fellow Christians might not discern that the power behind the empire was demonic. He also wanted Christians to reject Rome's rival claim to ultimate allegiance.

A larger problem for Preterists is the relationship of Babylon to the Beast. Most Preterists say that the Sea Beast is Rome. But what then of Babylon? This is a highly underrated difficulty, because Revelation clearly distinguishes between Mystery Babylon and the Beast; they are *two distinct characters*. The Whore is depicted as *sitting* on the Beast, and he burns her with fire.⁴ To differentiate between them by making Babylon the city of Rome and the Beast the Empire is one possibility. The other is a more pragmatic solution.

JERUSALEM AS BABYLON

Some Preterists claim that Babylon is the figurative name for Jerusalem. From their writings I cite seven pieces of evidence that they offer.

(1) The first and most important occurrence of "*the great city*" in Revelation reads, "*the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.*"⁵ It is indisputable that "*the great city,*" as

² The Prostitute being hated by her former lovers and burned with fire are reminiscent of OT descriptions of the divine judgment falling on the harlot city of Jerusalem (Ezek. 16:39-40; 23:25-27; 28:18). ³ Although lists of emperors vary, they consistently point to the Nero myth. ⁴ (Rev. 17:16) The idea that the Harlot is another image of the Beast is difficult because the two clearly interact.

identified here, is Jerusalem, where Jesus was crucified. This alone sets a powerful precedent for the term, “*the great city*,” before we come to chapters seventeen and eighteen where Babylon is called “*the great city*.”⁶

(2) Revelation uses metaphorical names for Jerusalem, specifically names of Israel’s enemies. This tells us two things: (i) we should not be surprised if John does it again, and (ii) earthly Jerusalem is revealed as an apostate city. Paul writes, “Hagar stands for the present city of Jerusalem. That is because she and her children are slaves (like when they were captives in Babylon). But the Jerusalem that is above is free. She is our mother.”⁷

(3) Earthly Jerusalem has shed the blood of God’s saints. Jesus explicitly states her blood guilt in the deaths of all the martyrs and “the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation.”⁸ The same is said of Babylon. So Jerusalem is Babylon.⁹ God’s main reason for judging Babylon is to vindicate His saints.¹⁰

(4) In addition to shedding the blood of the saints, the other main reason for God’s wrath against Babylon, which makes her Jerusalem, is her infidelity. Revelation describes “*Babylon*” with Old Testament “*harlotry*” imagery that almost always speaks of Israel. The most obvious is Jeremiah, when God says of Israel, “You had a harlot’s forehead”¹¹ This is a theme throughout the prophets in which God condemns Israel for her covenant unfaithfulness.

(5) John also arrays Babylon in the colors and jewels of the Highpriest. The combination of words in the Greek is *identical* to the LXX description of the Highpriest’s garments. In other words, the city is being represented as having the role of Highpriest, which sets her over the nations and yet she has used her authority to seduce the nation rather than lead them to God.¹² “For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”¹³

The evidence seems strong, but how could Jerusalem be called the great city that “reigns over the kings of the earth?” In light of First Century history that does not fit lowly Jerusalem at the time of Roman dominance. Preterits respond from a Jewish theological perspective, which sees Jerusalem as the chief city among the nations. The Old Testament is replete with texts speaking of her in such lofty language.¹⁴ In chapter eighteen, however, Babylon is a great economic center with extensive commercial traffic along the sea-lanes, which also does not fit with the city of Jerusalem.¹⁵

⁵ Rev. 11:8 ⁶ “Great city” is used only twice without an *explicit* reference to Babylon. It would be a logical step, though shocking, to say old Jerusalem has become Babylon. ⁷ Gal. 4:25-26 ⁸ (Luke 11:50-51; Matt. 23:34-35 cp. w. Rev. 18:24) “Jerusalem has become Babylon” theme, they say, *originates with Jesus*. ⁹ “*Say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan*.” (Rev. 2:9) ¹⁰ Rev. 3:9 ¹¹ Jer. 3:3 ¹² Ex. 25:3-7; 28:5-9, 28:15-20, 35:6; 36:9-12; 36:15-21 LXX. ¹³ Rom. 2:24 ¹⁴ Some expect Jerusalem to reign over a Millennial Kingdom due to these OT passages. ¹⁵ Rev. 18:11

A final objection is that Peter calls Rome (not Jerusalem) Babylon. “She who is in Babylon...sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark.”¹⁶ But Peter’s location of writing, and his “Babylon” could be Jerusalem since (i) Peter’s life-long calling was an apostle to the Jews. (ii) When the Jerusalem Christians were scattered after Stephen’s martyrdom, Peter remained in Jerusalem. (iii) Peter was in Jerusalem when Agrippa imprisoned him. (iv) Paul went to Jerusalem to see Peter and stayed with him fifteen days, implying this was his home. (v) When Paul returned to Jerusalem fourteen years later, Peter is still there. (vi) If “Mark” in Peter’s salutation from Babylon is John Mark, we know that he lived in Jerusalem. (vii) Silvanus, bearer of Peter’s epistle, was a prominent member of the Jerusalem church.¹⁷

(6) A sixth reason Preterits believe Babylon stands for Jerusalem is that Revelation portrays Babylon as being violently laid desolate by the Roman Beast, which is exactly what happened to apostate Jerusalem. Ezekiel sketches the portrayal of the harlot’s desolation. “Your survivors will *be devoured by the fire*...they will *also strip you of your clothes*...and they will deal with you in *hatred*...and leave you *naked and bare*. And the nakedness of your harlotries will be uncovered...they will *burn their houses with fire*.”¹⁸

(7) A final reason is that Babylon is removed to make way for the true bride. John calls the Bride the *New Jerusalem*. God dismisses old Jerusalem, that is Babylon, as an unfit wife for Christ. Jerusalem’s rejection of her Messiah sets the stage for the Messiah to take another bride. And this new bride is called the “*New*” Jerusalem; the obvious corollary is that the former, unfaithful woman was the *old* Jerusalem.¹⁹ This, Preterits claim, ties the two sections together perfectly and logically, and suddenly creates a very natural harmony of purpose and flow of thought for this whole section of Revelation.



FUTURISTS FORESEE A WORLDWIDE EMPIRE AND RELIGION

Futurists see Babylon as a global, religious system that deceives mankind. Her adultery is infidelity to the Lord in the form of false doctrines and idolatrous worship. For them, Babylon’s parental lineage can be apostate Judaism and Christianity and she can come out of the genuine, but Futurists would not view Jerusalem as Mystery Babylon. Babylon is still future and not past.

Today’s New Age Pop Psychology, some claim, are her chief doctrines. Others, following the Protestant Reformers, identify Babylon with Roman Catholic doctrine, which they claim will find fulfillment in the World Council of Churches, being a deceptive mix of everything from Christianity to

¹⁶ 1 Peter 5:13 NASB ¹⁷ Gal. 1:18; 2: 2:1-9; Acts 8:1;12:3,12;15:22-32 ¹⁸ Ezek. 23:25-29, 47;16:37-41; Hos. 2:3; Jer. 10:25; 41:22; Micah 3:3) ¹⁹ The LORD is “divorcing” Israel for harlotry (Jer. 3:8).

animism. It is, they maintain, an ecumenical conglomeration, a Babylonian mixture, which will eventually include Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and every other 'ism' and religion.²⁰ Examples of such a mixture abound today.

The San Francisco Chronicle headlines read, "Religions of World Celebrate with Prayers to Dozen Deities." This celebration took place in San Francisco in honor of the fiftieth birthday of the United Nations, which had its beginnings in this city. The article began, "Political and spiritual leaders filled Grace Cathedral yesterday...to challenge the religions of the world to end violence and oppression in the name of God. Bright sunlight illuminated the magnificent stained-glass windows of the cool, cavernous cathedral on San Francisco's Nob Hill as prayers, chants and incantations were offered to a dozen deities."²¹ I think the headline could have read "Babylon bows her heart and knees to a dozen lovers." Jesus is professed as one among many.

Dr. Cook exposed Babylon's deceit at a Parliament of Religion in Chicago. There the faiths of the world were represented. One by one leading men spoke for Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism and Islam. Then Cook spoke for Christ. "Here is Lady Macbeth's hand," he said, "stained with the foul murder of Duncan. See her as she perambulates through the halls and corridors of her palatial home, stopping to cry, 'Out (cursed) spot! Out I say! Will these hands ne're be clean?'" Then turning to those seated on the platform, he said, "Can any of you who are so anxious to propagate your religious systems offer any cleansing efficacy for the sin and guilt of Lady Macbeth's crime?" They all maintained an oppressive silence while Cook proceeded to preach that Jesus' death on the Cross can alone atone for our sins.

EUROPEAN UNION

Futurists interpret the seven-headed Beast as seven worldwide empires. Pagan Rome was the sixth.²² The seventh wounded head that recovers is a revived Roman Empire. Others take the wounded head as an individual man, the Antichrist, who supernaturally recovers from an attempted assassination. Many Futurists, however, look to the European Union.²³ Europe, they believe, is destined to emerge as the last great World Empire, and the ten horns are its ten key member states.²⁴ Others look with great suspicion on the United Nations and see that body evolving into the Beast.

²⁰ Futurists think Babylon will have headquarters in Rome or Jerusalem, but some, who take everything literally, say it will be in the actual city of Babylon in Iraq. All consider it to be an amalgamation of the world's religions. ²¹ June 26, 1995 San Francisco Chronicle ²² Rome, at the time John wrote. Number seven is yet to come. ²³ Both the European Economic Council and World Council of Churches began unity proceedings in 1948, which is the same year Israel became a nation. ²⁴ Eighth king is an outgrowth of the seventh kingdom (Revived Roman Empire).

To sum-up the Futurists position, the Beast would be a world empire and the Antichrist would be its final ruler. The puzzle of the eighth head, “*he ascends out of the bottomless pit and goes to perdition,*” is normally taken literally. The final world-ruler is an individual that is really Satan incarnate - the Beast from the abyss. He is not merely another expression of a human ruler through whom the power of evil finds ample expression, but he is the one whom Paul refers to as the Man of Sin, the Son of Perdition, the Lawless One.²⁵

The Antichrist appeals to man’s hopes and dreams for peace and prosperity. Perhaps, he negotiates a peace settlement between Israel and Palestine. Some see his miraculous recovery from an assassination attempt as the catalyst for him receiving worship. (It would be as if John F. Kennedy had recovered from his fatal head wound and united the world under one governing body). The Antichrist then shows his true colors by declaring his deity in a rebuilt temple at Jerusalem. Since the religion of Babylon enjoys great influence, the world worships him. What follows is an electronic system of buying and selling with his number. Shortly after this, he plunges the world into nuclear war, turning on the city of Babylon and destroying her with weapons of mass destruction.²⁶ Christ then puts an end to the madness with His Return.



HISTORICAL INTERPRETERS POINT TO ROMAN CATHOLICISM

While the Preterits interpreted the seven heads of the Beast as past emperors, the Historical School, like the Futurist, sees a succession of seven kingdoms. So, “*five that have fallen*” do not refer to five Caesars but to five past empires, normally identified as Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia and Greece. The “*one*” that “*is*” brings us to the Roman Empire, when John wrote Revelation. That leaves a future, seventh kingdom, and here is where the Historical and Futurist part ways.²⁷ The Historical School says that the future kingdom did appear on the stage of history in the form of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Reformers saw Imperial Rome as the sixth head of the Beast. It suffered a deadly wound that heals. Rome thus reappears - not as pagan Rome but as baptized, Papal Rome.²⁸ Those who hold this view believe the prophesies concerning the Antichrist have found their fulfillment in the succession of Popes who rose to power in Rome. The Popes sit in God’s spiritual temple, usurping Christ’s prerogatives as head over the Church. “To whom the most blasphemous titles have been given, as *Dominus Deus noster papa* – Our Lord God the Pope.”²⁹ The Roman Catholic Church, they say, thus becomes the fulfillment of the Beast’s universal kingdom.

²⁵ 1 Thess. 2:1ff ²⁶ LaHaye, Van Impe and Lindsey have popularized this position. ²⁷ These positions are generalized. ²⁸ Wyclif, Huss, Luther Calvin Knox, Zwingli, Tyndale and Wesley all believed that the Pope was Antichrist. ²⁹ Matthew Henry Commentary on 2 Thessalonians 2:4-5, pg. 798 Vol. 6.

RESTRAINING FORCE

The Historical School applies Paul's striking Antichrist passage to the Papacy. Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica of a restraint that would be taken away so that Antichrist would appear at his appointed time.³⁰

"Don't let anyone deceive you in any way," Paul wrote, "for that day (Christ's Return) will not come until the rebellion occurs ("falling away" KJV) and the man of lawlessness is revealed... he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved."³¹

Paul refers to a restraining force that keeps Antichrist from being revealed. He does not openly name it but says, "you know what is holding him back." Paul clearly taught them what it was when he was there and reminds them of this. But he does not want to call it by name in his letter to them. According to early Christian writings, Paul's restraining force was the Roman Empire under the Caesars, the fall of which would bring on the Antichrist.

"Justin Martyr in his Apologies, stated that "the Christian's understanding of the time caused them to pray for the continuance of the restraining Roman Empire, lest the dreaded times of Antichrist, expected to follow upon its fall, should overtake them in their day."³² Chrysostom says, "one may naturally inquire, What is that which withholds?" He answered that it was the Roman Empire, for "when the Roman Empire is taken out of the way, then he (Antichrist) shall come. And naturally for as long as the fear of this empire lasts no one will willingly exalt himself, but when that is dissolved, he will attack the anarchy, and endeavor to seize upon the government both of man and God."³³

³⁰ Futurists say the 'restraint' Paul spoke of is the church or the Holy Spirit. Yet, Paul told the Thessalonians that the church would be around when Antichrist appears. John taught likewise. (1 John 4:3). Also if the restraint was the Church, there was no reason why Paul would not have openly told the Thessalonians that it was their presence that restrained Antichrist. ³¹ 2 Thess. 2:3-10 ³² Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, pg. 16. ³³ Chrysostom, *Homilies*, pgs. 388-389.

As Rome succeeded Greece, so Antichrist succeeded Rome.³⁴ The Encyclopedia Britannica says “the power which was universally believed by the Christians to be that which was retarding the revelation of the Antichrist was the Roman Empire.”³⁵ Clarke’s Commentary asserts, “the united testimony of the church leaders of those first centuries was that the restraint which was to be removed was the Roman Empire.”³⁶ This is why Paul did not come right out and name it.³⁷ To teach ‘eternal Rome’ could fall from power would have only added to the charge that Christians were anarchists. Saint Jerome said, “Paul believed the restraint was the Roman Empire and that if he had chosen to say this openly, he would have foolishly aroused a frenzy of persecution against the Christians.”³⁹

Looking at Paul’s prophecy, we notice he included not only “what” withholds, but also “he” who restrains. “He” is masculine and is said to refer to Caesar and “what” refers to the Empire. So if Caesar would have to be taken out of the way, we realize that the man of sin would rise to power in Rome. It could not be said that he was in his way, unless he occupied the same place that the man of sin would occupy. To illustrate, let us say we wanted to build a house on a certain piece of property, but another building occupied the stand. It could not be said the old building needed to be removed, unless it was where the new one would be built. It would not be in the way, if the new house was to be built elsewhere. So Caesar could not be in the way, unless the place he occupied was the location where Antichrist would come to power.

Barnes sums up this position: “To any acquainted with the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, nothing can be more manifest than the correspondence of the facts in history respecting the rise of the Papacy, and the statement of the apostle Paul here. The mighty Caesars had fallen; Augustus, Domitian, Hadrian, Diocletian, were gone; even the Constantines and Julians had passed away. The seat of sovereignty had been removed from Rome to Constantinople. Goths and Vandals had overthrown the Western Empire; Caesars were no more, and Rome had an actual desolation. Then slowly on the ruins of old imperial Rome rose another power and another monarchy - a monarchy of loftier aspirations and more resistless might, claiming dominion, not alone over the bodies, but over the consciences and souls of men; dominion, not only within the limits of the fallen empire, but throughout the entire world. Higher and higher rose the Papacy, till in the dark ages all Christendom was subjected to its sway.”⁴⁰

³⁴ Who followed the Caesars in Rome? What worldwide power rose there? It is the Papacy. There is no other power that rose up at the time and place specified by the prophecy. ³⁵ Vol. 2, pg. 60 (1961 edition), article: Antichrist. ³⁶ Clarke’s Commentary on 2 Thessalonians 2:1ff ³⁷ Like John, Paul is careful not to write anything against the Empire. ³⁸ Paul was especially careful in writing to the Thessalonians, because unbelieving Jews there had accused Christians of doing things “‘contrary to the decrees of Caesar’ and that ‘they believed in another king, one Jesus.’” (Acts 17:7) ³⁹ Jerome, Commentaria, Book 5 Chapter 25. ⁴⁰ Guinness, Romanism and the Reformation, pg. 61.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

The Historical School argues that the prophecy in Revelation speaks for itself. For example, the love-hate relationship between the Whore and the Beast speaks of the Vatican's love affairs with earthly kings. Secular rulers at times have used her religion as the 'glue' to hold their kingdoms together until they were in a position to do without her. At the same time the Papacy has used secular rulers to subdue "*peoples, multitudes, nations and tongues,*" especially those who refuse to bow to her form of worship.

The kings, however, inevitably turn on the Prostitute. This relationship is well documented by secular historical sources. For example, during Napoleon's Italian campaign of 1796-98 A.D. every religious fund was confiscated. The churches, priests and objects of religious reverence were openly insulted by the French troops. The Pope himself was removed and replaced.

Additional support for this view is found in the clothing of the Whore, which would be seen to exemplify pompous worship in Catholicism, or perhaps the actual colors of the robes of the popes and cardinals. One Reformer wrote: "Its copes, vestments, miters, crosses, chalices, censers, patens; and by its gilding and decking of images, shows nothing else but a certain pomp of great riches, of purple, crimson, silk, silver, gold, precious stones and pearls, all of which things the Christian religion has no need whatsoever. But, on the contrary, the Roman religion cannot stand without them. For take away from the priests these actors' costumes and jewelry which blind the eyes of the uninformed, and one will find nothing at all of value in the Church of Rome. For as common harlots, when their precious apparel is pulled off them, are frequently seen to be deformed, so, too, will the popish religion appear naked and deformed when stripped of her deplorable attire."⁴¹

The charge of adultery, they allege, fits an institution dedicated to God. It has fallen from grace into perdition. Her drunkenness from the saints' blood align with Rome's violent persecution of Protestants. E. B. Elliott writes: "Although the Roman Church has not with her own hands made the gallows, swords, fires, and other deadly weapons, wherewith the Saints have been taken away, histories do witness by what cunning endeavors the Roman Antichrist has stirred up Christian Kings and Princes to rage even against their own bowels, and those chiefly under the names of Waldenses, Albigenses, Leonists, Wickliffites, Hussites, Lutherans and Huguenots, they condemned as heretics because they refused to take in the venom of her whorish cup. Read the Books of Martyrs of the French, German and English, and principally the acts of the Spanish Inquisition."⁴²

⁴¹ W. Fulke Revelation Commentary 1573 AD. ⁴² E. B. Elliott Revelation Commentary 1847 AD

In recent times, the Historical View has lost popularity. Today it is seen as a natural but extreme Protestant outgrowth of the Reformation controversies. For me, the problem with this position is that it places a one-time fulfillment of Babylon on the doorsteps of Roman Catholicism. Also does the Pope qualify as someone, who “will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped?”⁴³ And would the churches throughout history, see it that way or just those who gave themselves to the Reformation?



SYMBOLIC VIEW INTERPRETS IT SYMBOLICALLY

Are we to confine Babylon to the past as pagan Rome or apostate Jerusalem? Is she the Roman Catholic Church? Should we look for a future fulfillment somewhere someday? According to the Symbolic View, the different opinions on this passage are mainly due to an inconsistent approach to the book as a whole, particularly regarding the use of symbolic images and numbers.

Seven heads is a way of including all rulers and empires.⁴⁴ Seven is a representational number, and that is how seven is used throughout the book. But those who try to take it literally are headed down the wrong path and end up with many speculations. It does not refer to seven successive emperors or exactly seven worldwide kingdoms. The Beast has seven heads, which is just another seven in a long line of sevens in Revelation: seven candlesticks, churches, angels, lamps of fire, horns, eyes, seals, trumpets, thunders, bowls, plagues, mountains, and kings - seven, seven, seven!

The Symbolic view says Babylon represents all religious deceptions that have been embraced by fallen mankind throughout the ages. These have sought to usurp the true Church. Babylon is a generic umbrella for the religious world of men, just as the Beast stands for all evil governments that oppose Jesus.⁴⁵

The obvious advantage with the Symbolic position is its inherent inclusiveness. By its very nature, it can incorporate other sound observations. Others argue, however, that the numbers in Revelation are not entirely symbolic. For example, the seven churches of Revelation were seven actual churches. Likewise, they argue that when Revelation says that the great city sits upon seven hills, these are literally seven hills and the city is Rome. The seven kings or kingdoms, which is a second interpretation of the seven heads, are called seven because they are just seven in number. For if the seven heads simply represent every evil power, then why say, “*five are fallen, one is.*”

⁴³ 2 Thess. 2:4 ⁴⁴ Commentators identify the seven kings with either (1) seven Roman emperors (2) seven different world kingdoms or (3) the total number of kingdoms throughout human history. ⁴⁵ (1 John 2:16) Love of the world is cited by John as related to the spirit of Antichrist.



UNSEALED BOOK SEES MERIT IN EACH BUT THERE IS MORE

Before we look at what is meant by “*five are fallen*,” I agree that seven is a complete number, a view which makes this passage understandable. This is particularly the case when seven is used with another symbol. For instance, the Lamb, a symbol of Jesus, has seven horns. All commentators agree that the seven horns on the Lamb simply connote complete power, and none of them try to figure out which specific powers are represented, since whatever list of seven powers you generate, you will have left out other powers. Perhaps, more pointed, the Lamb has seven eyes, which connote that He is all seeing or knowing. Would it not be silly to try to list what each eye represents.⁴⁶ In a similar manner, the Beast is described as having seven heads, which speak of all his various manifestations throughout the ages.

I also believe that Revelation is an unsealed book and can be understood. As the Psalmist declared, “The entrance of God’s Word gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.”⁴⁷ It is simple to understand the seven heads to be every evil empire that would appear on the stage of history. The Dragon’s beastly powers are not wielded only seven times in history. As the prophet gazes into the future, he sees many forms assumed by the Beast, and it helps us to know that he reappears regularly.

RIDDLE AND END

Since seven stands for all, “*five are fallen, one is*” tells us that we are at number sixth, which is always a prelude to the End. This statement thus reinforces Revelation’s theme that the End is near. In which case, the five that have fallen are not meant to be a specific number of past empires or emperors. That is too limiting. The point is that with five fallen, we stand at the sixth, which throughout Revelation is the number that precedes the climax, whether we talk of the seven Seals, Trumpets or Bowls. Six comes just before seven. Seven stands for all that will come.

By placing the contemporary ruler as the sixth out of seven, John reveals that time is running out and our current point in history is near the End. This is a prophetic way of signifying that the End is near in 2 Esdras where history is divided into twelve parts, of which 10 ½ have already passed.⁴⁸ In the Apocalypse of Weeks, Enoch divides history into ten periods, seven of which are already passed.⁴⁹ The single purpose of the writer in all such outlines is to show that the end of the age is soon approaching.

⁴⁶ Seven horns equals Christ’s omnipotence. His “seven eyes” reveal His omniscience. (Rev. 5:6).

⁴⁷ Ps.119:130 ⁴⁸ (Esdras 14:11) In 2 Baruch 56-74, black and bright waters symbolize the span of time between Adam and the coming Messiah. ⁴⁹ 1 Enoch 91:12-17

John has five evil heads past, a six current head, and a short-lived seventh, because Jesus is coming soon. That is Revelation's core message. And so the seventh only continues for a little while. But until the seventh comes, the sequence is not complete and the Beast is not fully done. There is more that the saints must endure and overcome.

The total fulfillment of Revelation's imagery and numbers all await the final curtain of the human drama. It is not over until it's over – and there's no fat lady that is going to sing before it's over – only a Beast who must show us all of his ugly heads. No matter how many specific manifestations there are of the Beast, when it is all said and done each of them were “*of the seven*.”⁵⁰ Practically speaking, there is no way then to determine which is the seventh, just as there is no way to say exactly when the end will come, except to always say, like John, that it is near.

WAS AND IS NOT AND IS TO COME

What about “*the beast is an eighth king*.” And again, “*The beast will come up out of the abyss and go to his destruction*.”⁵¹ What does this verse predict? That the “*eight*” was one of the previous seven who went to the abyss and will come up from there? Or does it point out that he is simply part of the complete number of the Beast's seven heads? And do not all of them originate from the abyss and end up destroyed?

Many interpret “*the eighth king is of*” (“belongs to” NIV) *the seven*” to mean that he is one of the previous seven. If one takes the seven heads to represent exactly seven kings then, as reason would have it, one of the kings will rule twice to add up to eight kings. By taking the seven heads to be emperors, Preterits have John subscribing to a myth about Nero, an interpretation that is unacceptable to anyone who believes in the integrity of Scripture.

“*The eighth is part of the seven*” means that he is part of a full number. It also proves that the Beast is not limited to seven specific heads, since he reappears after his fatal wound as an eighth. The eighth shows that within the seven heads of the Beast there is a renewal, a type of death and resurrection. There is, however, no need to identify one particular eighth king. Eight is the number of new beginnings, just as seven is the number of completeness. The early church understood the significance of the number eight. After the seventh day, a Sabbath, Christ rose; so the Beast reappears as an eighth, indicating again his aim to imitate the Lamb.⁵²

⁵⁰ ⁵¹ Rev. 17:11, 8 ⁵² Pattern of seven-to-eight-and back to one was familiar to those raised in Sabbath worship. For on the eighth day – the day Jesus rose - a new week began. Each of the series of sevens in Revelation follows this pattern of the seventh in the series becoming the first of a new series;

“*The beast that was and is not and will come*” is the Dragon’s aim to usurp Christ “*who was, is and is to come.*” In his war against the Lamb, he appears again after his apparent defeat. By reinventing himself like the latest fad, he causes the world to wonder and is able to deceive those who do not love the truth. His eighth ruler is still but one of the seven – the full number of his manifestations. The eighth highlights his revival after defeat, like his ascending from the Abyss highlights his release after a binding judgment.⁵³



MUSLIM NATIONS AND ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISTS

When we considered *Seven Approaches* to the Beast, we considered Islam. For Islam is also a possible solution to the *Beast and Babylon*.

WAXED GREAT

Daniel chapter eight is often applied to the Antichrist. It says that an evil ruler will arise within the bounds of the third empire to which Antiochus belonged. In light of that specific ethnic identification and geographical territory, some point to Mohammed’s Islamic Empire. The Preacher’s Homiletic Commentary says, “The power was the Mohammedan for its head, and might be called the Anti-Christ of the East.”⁵⁴ For “he waxed great toward the south, and toward the east, and toward the pleasant land.”⁵⁵ Such an advance was true of Islam and by the 7th Century, Caliph Omar possessed Jerusalem and built a magnificent mosque on the site of the ancient temple. On entering the Holy City and seeing it, the Christian Sophronius is quoted as muttering the words of Daniel, “the abomination of desolation is in the holy place.”⁵⁶

The empire to follow Rome is Islam. With the sword in one hand and the Koran in the other, Mohammed erected his throne on the ruins of Rome and apostate Christianity. By the 7th Century, Christianity had relapsed into pagan superstitions, venerating relics and images. When Mohammed encountered Christianity, it was a mere shell, possessing a form of godliness, but lacking power and sound doctrine. The Beast thus overcame the saints!

Islam’s religious-political empire has impressed a lasting character on the nations of the globe down to this very hour. Applying the test of Daniel chapter eight, Mohammed is said to magnify himself against the Prince of the host by calling himself a greater prophet than Jesus.⁵⁷

thus seven to eight equals one. ⁵³ The demonic comes up from the Abyss four times in Revelation to operate in the world of men again, though it reappears only to its own ultimate destruction. (Rev. 9:1-11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1-7) ⁵⁴ The Preacher’s Homiletic Commentary Vol. 19 on Daniel page 173. ⁵⁵ Dan. 8:9 ⁵⁶ The Preacher’s Homiletic Commentary Volume 19 on Daniel pg. 174. ⁵⁷ The “little horn” is also said to understand dark sentences and the Koran contains many such sayings.

Encyclopedia Britannica has this to say about one empire of Islam. “The Ottoman Empire, one of the most powerful states in the world during the 15th and 16th Centuries, spanned more than 600 years and came to an end only in 1922. At its height it included most of southeastern Europe to the gates of Vienna, including modern Hungary, Serbia, Bosnia, Romania, Greece, Ukraine, Iraq, Syria, Israel, Egypt and North Africa as far west as Algeria, and most of the Arabian Peninsula.”⁵⁸

CHANGED LAWS AND TIMES

Considering Islam’s influence, we should not be surprised that she is in Bible prophecy. The prophet says, “He will speak against the Most High and oppress the saints and try to change set times and the laws.”⁵⁹ Who else changes to Sharia laws and dates time from A.D. to A.H.. Who else kills Christians and Jews by beheading, thinking that they do God a service? Who else has a term, Jihad, that spells ‘war on the saints.’⁶⁰

Like the Beast who was wounded and healed. Islamic nations are rising again like never before. Islam and the nations she controls fit John’s image of a Woman, which is a religion, riding the back of a beast, that is evil governments, which persecute God’s people. And she is admired by many, like Osama Bin Laden, although she is drunk with the blood of the saints. In our next chapter, we view John’s description of the economic dimension of Babylon, which also fits oil rich Muslim countries.



WHAT MAY COMPLETE THE ORACLE OF BEAST AND BABYLON

The Beast and Babylon will always represent the satanic powers behind evil empires and false religions, which war against Christ. Their hostilities are nothing new. Long ago the prophet asked, “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against His Anointed One. “Let us break their chains,” they say, “and throw off their fetters.”⁶¹

Their battle against Christ is spoken of in Revelation 16:12-16 and is enacted in Revelation 19:19-20. It is called the battle of Armageddon. We will cover this battle at length for such battles always rightfully feature in images of the End of the age and the Last Judgment.⁶²

⁵⁸ Encyclopedia Britannica Vol. 28, pg. 945 ⁵⁹ Dan. 7:25 ⁶⁰ It is held that the nations addressed by Ezekiel in the great battle against the land of Israel are mainly today’s Islamic nations. ⁶¹ Ps. 2:1-4 ⁶² There are two types of ‘God at War’ passages in Scripture: one in which God wins the victory alone (Ex. 14:13-14; 2 Kings 19:32-35; Isa. 37:33-36; 2 Chron. 20) and the other where the angels and saints participate in winning the victory (Joel 3:11; Zech. 14:5). Both types of ‘God at War’ occur in the Book of Revelation (Rev. 2:26-27; 17:14; 19:14).

The hostility of worldly rulers is directed at Christ and His people for the same reason that the Beast wars against them. They aim to stay in power at all cost. They think their power is endless, but really it is but a fleeting moment

in history, nothing more than “*one hour.*”

In contrast to the authority of the horns for one hour, given them by the Beast, the saints are given authority by the Lamb to reign forever and ever.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What merits or demerits do you find in the Preterits view?
2. What about the Futurists view?
3. What about the Historical view?
4. What merits or demerits do you see in the Symbolic view?
5. What about the Unsealed Book?
6. What merits or demerits do you find in the view of Islam as the Beast?
7. Where do you see Babylon today and where might you see it tomorrow?

In conclusion, our interpretation of the Beast and Babylon hinges on our understanding of

seven in Revelation and the role of Antichrist in Scripture.⁶³ Seven means a complete sequence, and Antichrist, who appears between the two comings of Christ, includes every individual and group that does not confess Jesus as Lord. Secular humanism qualifies as a current manifestation of this Beast, for it places man in God’s temple, declaring him to be god.⁶⁴ It was the first and oldest Antichrist religion known to man after his fall. Man judges what is good and evil and he becomes his own savior.

When we look at Babylon’s judgment in the next chapter we find additional insights into her nature and end. We will also understand more fully why she associated herself to the Dragon to her own destruction.

⁶³ Paul in 2 Thessalonians on Antichrist does not conflict with John since they both (1) Warn against deception. (2) Predict ongoing rebellion against God. (3) Expect embodiments of Antichrist. (4) Describe him as one who exalts himself and opposes God. (5) Comes with counterfeit miracles. (6) Continues until the coming of Christ. (7) And is destroyed at Jesus coming! ⁶⁴ What causes many to assume Antichrist is a specific individual is (1) His titles: Man of Sin and Son of Perdition. These, however, could be taken as titles for sinful mankind. We see the use of titles for groupings of people in Scripture like “The Virgin Daughter of Zion...The Daughter of Jerusalem.” (Isa. 37:22). (2) His setting himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God. The issue is how you interpret God’s temple. In NT, three temples of God feature. Futurists apply temple to (i) the place Israel worshiped in Jerusalem (Matt. 4:5), which was not called God’s temple after Christ’s resurrection. Paul teaches that God’s temple is: (ii) the Human Body (2 Cor. 6:16) and (iii) the Church (1 Cor. 3:16). Men act like Antichrist in churches, which is God’s temple, when they usurp Christ’s headship. Here the Historical School indicts the Roman Catholic Church, but there are many ‘churches’ where men assume Jesus’ prerogatives – many mini popes if you will.

NOTES

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

BABYLON'S JUDGMENT

SEVEN JUDGMENT SILHOUETTE IN REVELATION 18:1-19:3

Fyodor Dostoevsky, the great Russian writer, asks, “What is hell?” In “The Brothers Karmasov,” the monk, Elder Zosmia, says, “I think it is the suffering of one who can no longer love... This is why the creature was given life on earth, and with it, time and space. And what happens? The privileged creature rejects that priceless gift, fails to appreciate it, does not even like it, sneers at it, and remains unmoved. When such a creature leaves the earth...he is filled with suffering at the thought that he will appear before the Lord never having loved and will be brought into the presence of those who have loved him but whose love he has scorned.”

Babylon has spurned God's love like an adulterous wife. She fully embodies the moral failure Christ confronted in His Church. “*You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen!*”¹ Since Jesus' love is the very highest love fathomable, to fall from it is a bottomless fall.² Babylon's fall means she is left with nothing.³ Her prestige, her love of money, her lusts for the world have all passed away. As a result, she is full of “woe.” “*Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great*” is the cry of Revelation chapter eighteen. We thus outline Babylon's awful judgment in seven silhouettes.



BABYLON'S JUDGMENT MAKES HER HOME FOR EVIL SPIRITS

*“After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. With a mighty voice he shouted: “Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries.”*⁴

In chapter fourteen, Babylon's approaching judgment was first foretold. Revelation's progressive revealing now exposes the prophetic details of her overthrow. John uses the phrase “*after this*” nine times to transition from one vision to the next.⁵

Notice the wording: “*Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great. She has become.*” Babylon *becomes* the exact opposite of how she had appeared to the world. Before her fall, she sat as a queen, in beauty, luxury and power.

¹ Rev. 2:4-5 ² Eph. 3:18 ³ 1 Cor. 13:1ff ⁴ Rev. 18:1-3 ⁵ Rev. 1:19;4:1;7:9;9:12;15:5;18:1; 19:1; 20:3.

Revelation makes clear that in the end each of us “become,” for all to see, what we have chosen to be along the way. Early on, Babylon chose the things of men and not the things of God.⁶ And just as the saints are resurrected at Christ’s Return to “become” like Him, so Babylon’s fall causes her “*to become*” the prison of every unclean spirit, hated bird and wicked beast.

A Demonic Cage

The angel uses two different words here to describe her final, fixed condition. The first word literally means a “*dwelling place*.” It is translated “*a home*” in the New International Version and “*a habitation*” in the King James Bible. The other word is rendered “*a haunt*,” “*a hold*” and “*a cage*.” It carries the idea of guarding as in a ward. Taken together the point is clear. Babylon has become a place where demons are consigned and remain.⁷

The verb “*to fall*” is in the past tense to state the certainty of this event.⁸ For Babylon’s downfall was predicted long ago. “Look, here comes a man in a chariot with a team of horses. And he gives back the answer: ‘Babylon has fallen, has fallen! All the images of its gods lie shattered on the ground!’”⁹ The false gods were images dedicated to demons who sought man’s worship. And now Babylon, who gave them a place, becomes their exclusive dwelling, a fitting judgment upon both them and Babylon for worshiping them.

Added to idol worship, the reasons for her fall are pride and seduction.¹⁰ Not only did Babylon give place to these evil spirits, she boldly exported them to the nations, leading them also into idolatry. Figuratively, the nations drank the wine of her spiritual fornication. That has provoked God to implacable wrath.¹¹ But before God pours out plagues upon her, there is a call for God’s people to get out of Babylon. This call is like the call that the angels made to Lot before the fire fell on Sodom and Gomorrah.



GOD’S PEOPLE ARE TO LEAVE BABYLON BEFORE JUDGMENT

“Then I heard another voice from heaven say: “Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes. Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double...as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself.”¹²

“My people, come out of her” echoes prophetic words found in the prophets.¹³ *“Leave Babylon, flee from the Babylonians!”¹⁴ “Depart, depart!”¹⁵*

⁶ Matt. 16:23 ⁷ Isa. 13:19-22 ⁸ (Rev. 14:8) “Fallen” is repeated for emphasis. ⁹ Isa. 21:9 ¹⁰ Isa. 13:11ff; 14:4ff; 47:1ff ¹¹ Rev. 4:10; 16:19 ¹² Rev. 18:4-6 ¹³ Jer. 51:45 ¹⁴ Isa. 48:20 ¹⁵ Isa. 52:11

The Old Testament is full of lessons for God's people not to intermingle with the heathen, because their idolatry would ruin them. This was Solomon's downfall and also led to Judah's exile and captivity in Babylon.

SEPARATION FROM SIN

Jesus' seven letters to the churches call us to depart from Babylon's iniquity. The sins of the Nicolaitans, Balaam and Jezebel have their roots in pagan worship and sexual immorality. The challenge for followers of Jesus has always been to break with the world's idolatrous life-style. Although the Bible does not teach a life of isolation from the rest of mankind, we are not to indulge in sinful behavior or live like unbelievers.¹⁶ Paul asks, "What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God... Therefore *come out from them and be separate*, says the Lord."¹⁷

God gave Babylon, like Balaam and Jezebel, time and opportunity to repent.¹⁸ But because they continued in sin, God says, "I will repay them double for their wickedness and their sin."¹⁹ Babylon's sins call for a pay back in kind. "*Mix for her double in the cup in which she has mixed.*" The double payback is also based on a principle that James enumerates, which applies to teachers.²⁰ Having taught it is acceptable to sin, her sins have piled up, one by one, until they reach Heaven.²¹ Like the people who built the tower of Babel, they sought to make a name for themselves and a name they made. In the end, however, it became a name that is synonymous with rebellion.

MYSTERY OF MIXTURE

Babylon's sinful mixture leads to apostasy and that is just how Israel fell. Israel never rejected the worship of God outright; they simply mixed it with pagan practices. Such was the case when they worshiped the golden calf. They committed acts of gross sexual immorality; yet, they claimed this was a "feast unto the Lord," literally to Jehovah or Yahweh, the true God.²² Mixing became the norm for their entire forty years in the wilderness. For example, they were not content to carry only God's tabernacle through the wilderness; so they made a Babylonian tabernacle (images of Moloch and Chiun), that they also carried. God says, "Therefore will I cause you to go into (Babylonian) captivity."²³

¹⁶ 1 Cor. 10:27-28 ¹⁷ 2 Cor. 6:14-18 ¹⁸ "The way of Balaam" means to prostitute one's spiritual gifts for personal gain (2 Peter 2:14ff). "The error of Balaam" is to compromise one's standard of morality to accommodate those of his patrons (Jude 11). "The doctrine of Balaam" is to use one's teaching gift to persuade others to do likewise. (Rev. 2:14). God's people are to "remember" Balaam's tragic end (Num. 31:8). ¹⁹ Jer. 16:18; Isa. 40:2 ²⁰ James 3:1 ²¹ 2 Peter 2:1-22 ²² Ex. 32:5 ²³ Amos 5:25-27

Stephen was martyred for exposing Israel's idolatrous worship. He refers to the incidents cited above and adds, "They brought sacrifices to it and held a celebration in honor of what their hands had made. But God turned away and gave them over to the worship of the sun, moon and stars."²⁴ Because they mixed images of the sun-god Baal and the mother goddess Astarte in their worship, their songs, sacrifices and offerings were defiled and rejected. Worse still, the Israelites performed secret cultic rites, built high places, used divination and even sacrificed their children to the fire.²⁵

Jeremiah confronted Israel's false worship. "Behold," God said, "You burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods and...make cakes to the queen of heaven...and come and stand before me in this house."²⁶ In Ezekiel's day, an idol was placed right at the entrance of the temple, and priests offered incense to false gods that were painted on the walls. Women wept for Tammuz and men worshipped the sun at dawn from the temple area.²⁷ "When they had slain their children to their idols," God says, "then they came the same day into my sanctuary."²⁸ So God drove them out of the land He had given them.²⁹

Their sins, although taking on new forms, continued after they returned from Babylon. Jesus called the religious leaders of his day "blind guides."³⁰ Their vain traditions made God's Word of no affect.³¹ Their emphasis was all wrong. "You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel." They were hateful. "Snakes! A brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?"³²

Considering Israel's syncretism, why should we be surprised to find it in churches?³³ Satan does not appear as a monster with horns, a long tail and a pitchfork. No, instead he appears as an angel of light. He's the proverbial "wolf in sheep's clothing." Satan disguises himself in the outer garments of Christianity. Such deception is the most potent of all. It is like removing the warning label from a bottle of poison and substituting a peppermint candy label in its place - the contents are deadly just the same.

It is not only Islamic suicide bombers that are deceived. Deception has overtaken Judaism and so-called Christianity at times. Before his conversion, the well-educated Saul of Tarsus was deceived to the degree that he consented to the murder of Christians, as his serve to God.³⁴ The Sanhedrin on the other hand murdered out of jealousy to protect their position. Most, however, simply compromise with iniquity. Therefore, whether in misguided zeal or sinful concessions, mixing truth and error characterizes Babylon.

²⁴ Acts 7:41-42 ²⁵ 2 Kings 17:9ff ²⁶ Jer. 7:2, 8ff ²⁷ Ezek. 8:1ff ²⁸ Ezek. 23:38,39 ²⁹ "Howbeit every nation made gods of their own...So they feared the Lord and served their own gods!" (2 Kings 17:30ff).

³⁰ Matt. 23:16 ³¹ Matt. 15:6 ³² Matt. 23:13-38 ³³ Syncretism is the combination of differing beliefs or practices in religion in an attempt to compromise. ³⁴ John 16:2-3



BABYLON SITS AS A QUEEN UNTIL HER JUDGMENT DAY

“In her heart she boasts, ‘I sit as queen; I am not a widow, and I will never mourn.’ Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her. “When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: “‘Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come!’”³⁵

Filled with pride in her heart, Babylon makes exaggerated boasts. Never expecting that she will lose out on anything, her end is even more staggering. Burning fires come on her in one hour - devastatingly swift.³⁶ People will not even “save themselves from the flame.”³⁷ It all happens “in a moment, in a single day.”³⁸ Like the ancient city of Babylon fell in a day so will Mystery Babylon fall. And all the cities of the nations will fall too.

BABYLON’S IMPORTANCE AND EXPANSION

Most folk know that Israel is the nation that is most spoken of in the Bible. But do you know which one is second? It is Babylon! No other kingdom, except Israel, has more history and prophecy associated with it. She is “*the great city,*” because of her global influence and prophetic significance.

From Babylon, men were scattered over the face of the earth.³⁹ As they went with their new languages, they took their old religion with them. Herodotus, the historian of antiquity, witnessed Babylon’s mystery rites in numerous countries. He said, “Babylon was the primeval source from which all systems of idolatry flowed. Egypt’s religion was derived from Asia and “the primitive empire in Babel.”⁴⁰ Babylon’s idolatry took on various forms and went by different names in the countries to which it had gone.⁴¹

Rome assimilated the gods and religions of the various countries she ruled. Since Babylon was the source of ancient idolatry, the religions of Rome were particularly Babylonian. In the city of Rome, long-standing Babylonian practices were mixed with Christianity. Because of the clever ways these were mixed, her influence became hidden, a “mystery, Babylon.” By the time of Emperor Constantine, the emperor cult was given a Christian interpretation and the title of Pontifex Maximus was applied to the bishop of Rome.

³⁵ Rev. 18:8-10 ³⁶ Rev. 18:10,17,19;17:12. ³⁷ Isa. 47:14 ³⁸ Isa. 47:9; Jer. 50:31 ³⁹ Gen. 11:9 ⁴⁰ Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, pg. 12. ⁴¹ Dr. Layard points out in “Nineveh and Its Remains,” that the united testimony of sacred and profane history is that idolatry originated in the area of Babylonia.

ROME'S SYNCRETISM

Roman Catholics acknowledge that their church evolved from such a mixture. But from their point of view, these things were triumphs for Christianity. The Catholic Encyclopedia states, "We need not shrink from admitting that candles, incense and lustral water, were commonly employed in pagan worship and in the rites paid to the dead. But the Church from a very early period took them into her service, just as she adopted many other things."⁴²

Having served as a missionary in Africa for twenty years, I can easily understand how certain practices are mixed with Christianity.⁴³ Throughout Africa, large religious groups possess a mixture of Christianity and traditional, animistic practices. Although I do not believe that any one religious group embodies the full deceit of Babylon, I am concerned because members of such groups seldom possess the assurance of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus. My aim is not to shame anyone, but to proclaim the Gospel to all men that they might be saved.⁴⁴

Having been raised a Roman Catholic, I know that it is possible to attend church for years and still have no assurance of salvation. I did. Many Protestants are in the same boat. My assurance of the gift of eternal life only came through a clear proclamation of what Jesus accomplished on the Cross for me, and not by my good works or my participation in dead rituals.

With respect to my Roman Catholic and Protestant friends, who have personally placed their trust in Jesus as their Savior, I rejoice.⁴⁵ The danger, however, is that diluted religion can provide a false sense of security, keeping one from a genuine relationship with Christ. It can act like a vaccine that inoculates people against catching a real, full-blown case of faith in Christ. Since John's Apocalypse exposed Babylon in his day, we must not fear exposing her in our day wherever she is found.

⁴² Other things include a 'mother goddess,' as Mary is venerated and called Co-redeemer. 'Gods' associated with various occupations were retitled patron "saints." So the inscription to the god Apollo is not erased, but rather an 's' is added to read Apollos in honor of that early saint. The use of statues, relics, and the idea of purgatory and the mass have pagan origins. Hislop, in *Two Babylons*, extensively covers the origin of many Roman Catholic practices like the pagan origin of the Papal Office. The supreme pontiffs of paganism, wearing the tiara, the fish god mitre corresponds to Dagon worship with its pallium. The Pope became the Father of fathers, even though Jesus told us to, "call no man father!" (Matt. 23:9) There are roughly 950 million Roman Catholics who are taught that their church is the true, apostolic church and that these practices are righteous and good. She remains, however, the most important religious conduit through which a Babylonian mixture of doctrines and practices has projected its influence for the last 1,500 years. ⁴³ Missionologists call this syncretism. ⁴⁴ Jude warns of certain men who have crept into the church and were substituting things that were not part of the original faith. (Jude 1:3,4) ⁴⁵ Gallup Poll 13 million Catholics in US profess to be 'born-again.'



BABYLON'S CARGO INCLUDES THE SOULS OF MEN

“The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more - cargoes of gold...and bodies and souls of men. “They will say, ‘The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your riches and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered.’ ... “Every sea captain...will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out: “‘Woe! Woe, O great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin!’”⁴⁶

In its heyday, Rome was the storehouse for every product in the old world. John's list of products number twenty-eight articles, ranging from luxury items to household staples, from dry goods to livestock.⁴⁷ The list illustrates the city's prosperity. *“Fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls.”* Rome's wealth throughout her history is an indisputable fact; yet, it became her idol through covetousness and misuse.

Many cities, besides Rome, fit Babylon.⁴⁸ Rome is but one in a long series: Thebes, Nineveh, Jerusalem, Tyre and countless others.⁴⁹ For Babylon consist of man's world, alienated from God; she includes every man-made system that has ever misled and enslaved men. In her most dangerous garb, Babylon is religious, sitting as queen over every human religion and offering men a pseudo-salvation - something other than Jesus. The Babylonian religions of the world, be they Roman, Greek, Indian, African, American⁵⁰ or Chinese, are always arrayed in gold, precious stones and costly array.⁵¹

WEALTH AND WORLDLY SORROWS

Babylon is rich in material goods. The manufacturing and trading of goods is desirable; it meets basic human needs. Within a just society everyone's quality of life can improve. John is not against commerce, but it is the love of money and pride in possessions that will ruin a person's soul.⁵² Babylon's strange mixture is thus deeply seductive. She claims God's blessings but she ends up captivating the body and the soul of men. Her materialism panders to man's covetousness and she avoids sacrificial love. She must wear designer clothes, drive the smartest cars and live in the most beautiful houses, which is just as bad as bowing down to an idol, because greed is idolatry.⁵³

⁴⁶ Rev. 18:11-19 ⁴⁷ Short list compared to the 40 products in Ezekiel's Tyre. (Ezek. 27:12-22). ⁴⁸ She has many children as mother of all harlot systems. ⁴⁹ Parallel to Revelation and same Harlot figure for Nineveh (Nah. 3:4), Tyre (Isa. 23:16-17), and Jerusalem (Ezek. 16:15ff). ⁵⁰ Babylon's ambition to make a name for herself is seen in many churches. ⁵¹ Many Christians are preoccupied with success and acquiring wealth. Paul strongly warned against this and encouraged contentment. (1 Tim. 6:5-11) ⁵² 1 Tim. 6:9-10 ⁵³ Col. 3:5-6

In ancient times, the volume of traffic on the sea was phenomenal. There were no planes, trucks or trains to deliver shipments of goods. The seas were the highways. Owning a ship thus proved to be a profitable enterprise. Babylon's merchants, therefore, cry the loudest, because they became powerful, wealthy men, but now they had lost their sales and profits.⁶¹ The deeper problem was that they trusted in their great wealth and by their riches they were deceived into thinking that they did not need God.

Six times, in three sets of two, we hear the word "woe." The phrase "stand far off" occur three times. Nothing can be done to prevent Babylon's collapse. Men can only shrink back from the heat, fully aware that their doom is next. Their shedding of tears is accompanied, in typical Eastern style, by beating their chest as an expression of grief. This kind of mourning is not "godly sorrow," but "the sorrow of the world."⁶² It is not the mourning of love, which grieves over those who are loved, but the mourning that agonizes over personal loss. The former results in the outpouring of the "Spirit of grace and supplication," but the latter tends only to death.

*"Look, He is coming with the clouds...and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of Him."*⁶³ At the Lord's coming, the thought of all will concern their relation to Him, not their bank balance.⁶⁴

The time is near, when the world will no longer deliver the goods. Riches will disappear suddenly in a moment. Money will become meaningless in a split second.⁶⁵ Babylon's stock market will crash, never to recover.⁶⁶ Economic loss is God's just reward upon the world for depriving the followers of the Lamb their right to buy and sell.⁶⁷ Now they themselves are denied that right.



BABYLON IS JUDGED FOR HARMING GOD'S PEOPLE

"Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you." Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: "With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again...In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth."⁶⁸

⁶¹ (Ezek. 26:16-17; 27:1-36) The cry of the merchants in Ezekiel as Revelation is saturated with allusions to the Old Testament. Ezekiel features more frequently than Daniel and Jeremiah. ⁶² 2 Cor. 7:10 ⁶³ Revelation 1:7 is partly quoted from Zechariah 12:10. (see also John 14:37; Zec. 11:10). Zechariah tells us that those who pierced him "shall bitterly mourn as for an only son." Israel shall mourn in a godly sorrow that leads to repentance. ⁶⁴ Pro. 23:5 ⁶⁵ Then "what good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26). ⁶⁶ Matt. 6:20 ⁶⁷ Rev. 13:17 ⁶⁸ Rev. 18:20-21,24

In contrast to the mourning of the merchants, sea captains and sailors, the saints, apostles and prophets rejoice over God's judgment on Babylon. For it signals the end of the age and the ultimate vindication of the saints. The End is thus a time of great mourning for those related to Babylon, but a time of great rejoicing for those who belong to the Lamb.⁶⁹

DIVINE VENGEANCE

Babylon had shed the blood of the saints, and violence against God's people is one of the most provocative of all sins. Here is the ultimate reason for Babylon's downfall. Her hands are stained with blood. Historical Babylon killed innumerable Jewish people during her siege of Jerusalem in 600 B.C.. Rome did likewise when Titus conquered Jerusalem in 70 A.D.. According to Josephus, over a million Jews were killed and thousands made slaves.⁷⁰

The image of a large millstone is used by the angel. Babylon will be cast down like a millstone into the sea never to be found, heard or seen of again. It reminds us of the prophecy of Jeremiah against Babylon. "When you finish reading this scroll, tie a stone to it and throw it into the Euphrates. Then say, 'So will Babylon sink to rise no more because of the disaster I will bring upon her. And her people will fall.'"⁷¹

The millstone is a fitting symbol since sea trade is in view and since Jesus uses millstones to illustrate the weight of certain offenses. Offences that Babylon is particularly guilty of committing. "But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!"⁷²

BABYLON FURTHER DEFINED

When John wrote Revelation, Babylon, as a city and empire, was in ruins.⁷³ The religious practices, however, that originated in Babylon continued. From Babylon to Rome these practices were exported in their most potent form to many cities of the world and even packaged in a Christian format. Nevertheless, Babylonian societies have certain common characteristics. Wherever and whenever the seven characteristics on the following page have been manifested, there is a strong appearance of Mystery Babylon.

⁶⁹ A call for Heaven's population to rejoice was issued in light of Satan's removal from Heaven. (Rev. 12:12). In contrast, the earth could not rejoice at that time due to an angry Devil coming down to wreak brief havoc, while the woeful judgments upon his kingdom follow. ⁷⁰ Josephus War 6.9.3 §420. ⁷¹ Jer. 51:63-64 ⁷² Matt. 18:6-7 ⁷³ Isa. 13:19-22; Jer. 51, 52

(1) Royal dignity and splendor combined with **(2) Prosperity, overabundance and luxury** (Revelation 18:3,7,16-17 compared with Jeremiah 51:13; Ezekiel 16:13, 49; Nahum 2:9). **(3) Add Self-trust or boastfulness** (Revelation 18:7 compared with Isaiah 14:12-14; Jeremiah 50:31; Ezekiel 16:15, 50, 56: 27:3; 28:5). **(4) Plus Violence, especially against God's people** (Revelation 18:10, 24 compared with Jeremiah 51:35, 49; Ezekiel 23:27; Nahum 3:1-3). **(5) And Oppression and injustice** (Revelation 18:5, 20 compared with Isaiah 14:4; Ezekiel 16:49; 28:18). **(6) Top those off with Idolatry and (7) Witchcraft** (Revelation 17:4-5; 18:3; 19:2 compared with Jeremiah 51:47; Ezekiel 16:17, 36; 23:7, 30, 49; Nahum 1:14). It all equals Babylon!

Having manifested herself in many ways at different times, Babylon is like an evil creature in a science fiction movie that can readily change its form. She can morph into a new form to suit her purposes. She is versatile and adaptable. She is like evil itself, the deep mystery of iniquity. She resides in man's sinful nature, and will manifest herself one way or another. But her end is in sight and never again will she hurt or deceive anyone.



BABYLON'S JUDGMENT IS OUTLINED AS "NEVER AGAIN."

"The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. No workman of any trade will ever be found in you again. The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again. The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again. Your merchants were the world's great men. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray." "They will say, 'The fruit you longed for is gone from you.' All your riches and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered." "With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again."⁷⁴

Babylon's end is summed up in two words "*never again*." Never again is held in contrast to every day life in Babylon before her judgment. Everyday life is taken from the artistic, economic and social realms. Babylon has a legacy of fine arts and skilled craftsmen that will vanish. Her music will be silenced. People working with wood, leather, metal, bricks, stone and glass will end. The millstone grinding grain will cease. The lamps no longer burn; life is cast into darkness. The voices of a groom and bride are no longer heard.

Each of these activities could be enlarged upon for their spiritual significance. But Revelation's point is that Babylon ceases and New Jerusalem continues. Babylon has become like the streets of old Jerusalem after her destruction. There, on a heap of stones, the weeping prophet Jeremiah sat and lamented.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Rev. 18: 22-23,14, 21 ⁷⁵ Jer. 7:34; 16:9; 25:10; Lam. 1:1ff

For old Jerusalem, there is a promise of renewal and continuation in the New Jerusalem. Babylon, however has had her new Babylon, which was seven times worse than her first state - a habitation of evil.⁷⁶ So *“the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee.”*⁷⁷ And can never be found again.

MAGIC SPELLS

Why has all this happened to her? Because she deceived the nation with her sorcery and those that she could not deceive she persecuted unto death. Murders and magic arts, along with fornication and adulteries, were her sins.⁷⁸ The Greek word for magic arts is “pharmakia.” It primarily means the use of drugs, accompanied by incantations and appeals to occult powers.⁷⁹ It is listed as one of the “works of the flesh” – man’s sinful nature. Those who practice these things will have their part in the Lake of Fire.⁸⁰

Throughout history, the Church has struggled against satanic powers. The “foolish Galatians” had been “bewitched.” Bewitched is the strongest English word for deception, speaking of a supernatural component to deception. Satan’s messengers beguiled the Galatians. They appeared as angels of light and servants of righteousness. They caused the Galatians to lose sight of the truth of the Gospel that a man is justified by faith in Christ alone.⁸¹

Paul knew that “a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.” And that this heresy was deadly, because it nullified the truth of the Gospel.⁸² He therefore confronted it in the strongest possible terms.⁸³ The truth of the Gospel plainly tells us that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus.⁸⁴ Paul compares the Old and New Covenants to two women. One bears children who are slaves; the other bears those who are free.⁸⁵



BABYLON’S JUDGMENT CAUSES HEAVEN TO REJOICE

*“After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: ‘Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants.’ ‘Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.’”*⁸⁶

After Babylon’s dirge of judgments in chapter eighteen, we now come in chapter nineteen to songs of praise, which are raised by a heavenly multitude.⁸⁷

⁷⁶ “Seven other spirits more wicked than itself.” (Matt. 12:45) ⁷⁷ Rev. 18:14 ⁷⁸ Rev. 9:21 ⁷⁹ Vines Dictionary ⁸⁰ Gal. 5:20; Rev. 21:8 ⁸¹ Proofs of justification by faith. (Gal 3:1ff) ⁸² Gal. 1:7-9 ⁸³ Gal. 5:7-10 ⁸⁴ Gal. 2:3-16 ⁸⁵ Gal. 4:24-26 ⁸⁶ Rev. 19:1-3 ⁸⁷ Songs by 24 elders (Rev. 19:4), a voice from the throne (Rev. 19:5), and a great multitude (Rev. 19:6-8).

How amazing that the same event can cause one to mourn and another to rejoice, although that was the case at the Red Sea when Israel crossed over on dry ground, and the Egyptians were drowned in its depths. It has been the case in all wars and it is the note on which all wars will end. The closing line of a great poetic drama expresses the rejoicing of the Redeemed at Babylon's fall.

*“Through all the vexed land, let every heart bound at the joyful tidings.
Thus from the frowning height the tyrant falls like a dark mountain,
whose interior fires, raging in ceaseless tumult,
have devoured its own foundations.
Sunk in sudden ruin. To the tremendous gulf, in the vast void.
No friendly rock rears its head. To stay the dreadful crash.
The traveller point the hollow vale.
Where once it stood!*

The contrast between the wailing of those who are doomed and the rejoicing of those who are redeemed is most striking in that it continues for eternity. It is the contrast between the destiny of the Bride of Christ, who enjoys pleasures forever more, and Babylon whose torment is ongoing.

“The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.”

Three times in chapter eighteen we read of Babylon's torment, and it is the same torment as those who worship the Beast.⁸⁸ Torment for the wicked in Revelation increases with the intensity of judgment. At first it was for only *“five months.”* That agony was compared to the agony one senses when stung by a scorpion, but now it is like the torment of being blistered by burning sulfur. It is a torment that deprives people of rest both day and night.⁸⁹

UNTIL THE END

Like the Beast, Babylon is active until the end. Just in our day alone, the Beast has appeared in many places: Hitler's Nazi Germany, Stalin's Soviet Russia, Mao's China and Idi Amin's Uganda. Today, the Beast is seen in oppressive governments in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

What is true of the Beast is also true of Mystery Babylon. She appears often. Radical Islam seeks to control governments in many parts of the world to enforce and advance their brand of religion.⁹⁰ The good news is that such violent evil is self-destroying. That is evident in that Babylon is hated by her former lovers.⁹¹ God uses evil forces as instruments of judgment. History

⁸⁸ Rev. 14:11 ⁸⁹ Rev. 9:5;14: 10-11; 18:7,10,15:21:8 ⁹⁰ Isa. 2:2; Jer. 51:25; Dan. 2:35; Zech. 4:7

is replete with examples. The Jewish rulers used Rome to crucify Christ. Rome destroyed the Jewish nation. In a similar fashion, God uses the Beast to bring judgment on the Great Prostitute. At the same time, He judges the Beast and his followers.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to spurn someone's love? Have you ever spurned love? Why?
2. How do people become what they become?
3. When have you seen religious deception or experienced a strange mix of Christianity?
4. What do you consider to be the biggest idol in America and in the churches there?
5. How would you summarize Jesus' teaching on our relationship to money?
6. When is it vital to discern the kind of sorrow a person shows and how might you know if it is to life or to death?
7. How do you understand the riddle of the Beast and its relationship to Babylon?

Babylon's destruction, is not a mere temporal burning that she suffers. Any historical antecedents like Jerusalem or Rome set on fire are simply foretastes of Babylon's end in the Lake of Fire.

Satan has used many earthly instruments, the sum of which are greater than any historical equivalents. Evil spirits embody these earthly manifestations with Satan's fullness -

similar to how Christ embodies His church. So, when the Beast and Babylon are finally judged, it is understood that the principalities and powers and the rulers of the darkness of this world are also judged. That happens in a great eschatological encounter with Christ at His coming.⁹² This showdown features much in Revelation, especially in the next two chapters.

⁹¹ Ezek. 16:39-40; 23:25-27; 28:18 ⁹² "Kings from the east" "Kings of the earth." "One hour" corresponds to the "little while." Promise of brevity brings comfort. (Rev. 16:12-14, 16).

NOTES

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

WHITE HORSE RIDER

SEVEN REALITIES IN REVELATION 19:1-21

“Ancient religions, such as the Roman paganism of Jesus’ day, believed that the actions of gods in the heavens above affected the earth below. If Zeus got angry, thunderbolts shot out. Like kids dropping rocks off highway bridges onto cars below, the gods rained cataclysms onto the earth. ‘As above, so below,’ went the ancient formula.” Philip Yancey observes that Jesus “inverted that formula: ‘As below so above.’” He points out that “a believer prays, and heaven responds; a sinner repents, and the angels rejoice; a mission succeeds, and Satan falls like lightning; a believer rebels, and the Holy Spirit is grieved. What we humans do here decisively affects the cosmos.”¹

What men do on earth really does effect what transpires in Heaven. When the Man-child ascended from the earth, Satan was cast out of Heaven. In the Seals, Trumpets and Bowls, we saw an interconnected Heaven and earth. But the relationship between them is more involved than a cursory glance. It is a two-way superhighway with many lanes and overpasses – a complete thoroughfare whose traffic is hard to measure. The movement is swift and vast. And the interaction between earth and Heaven continues to this hour.²

John’s visions take him from earth to Heaven and then back again.³ He shows us great contrasts between these two realms. In our last chapter, the judgment of the Great Prostitute caused terrible mourning on earth, while there was a roaring applause in Heaven.⁴ The roar was not only because God had judged Babylon and avenged the blood of His saints, but also because the wedding of the Lamb had come. In this chapter we examine (in words that start with “W”) seven interconnected happenings between Heaven and earth.



1 WOE ON EARTH IS CONTRASTED TO REJOICING IN HEAVEN

“After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who ...He has avenged on her the blood of his servants.” And again they shouted: “Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.”⁵

¹ “The Jesus I Never Knew,” pgs. 230-231. ² Rev. 2:5, 16, 21-22; 3:3; 9:19-21; 16:9-11; ³ Rev.3:12 ;4:1ff;5:3,13;8:1ff;10:5-8;11:12-15;12:1-17;13:6ff;14:1-3,7,13,17ff;15:1ff; 16:10-11; 18:1ff;19:1ff, 12*;20:1ff;21:1ff. The interaction becomes more pronounced until it is on earth as it is Heaven. ⁴ At Jesus’ death, the disciples mourned while the world rejoiced. (John 16:20). ⁵ Rev. 19:1-3

The rise and fall of Babylon is such a earthshaking event that John spends a whole two and a half chapters on it. We saw the rise of Babylon in Revelation chapter seventeen and now we see the rejoicing at its fall in chapter nineteen. John's opening words, "*after this,*" denote a shift in focus from one scene to another.⁶ The arena changes from Babylon's devastation to Heaven's great hallelujah chorus. John again sees the heavenly host of angels and redeemed men around God's throne, praising Him, because they will never again have to listen to the deceit coming from the Prostitute.

REVELATORY WORSHIP

John hears a vast multitude in heaven, worshipping God. Imagine John, looking down at Babylon's fall, and then looking up, because he hears a roar of rejoicing. Looking up, after watching distressful events on earth reminds us of Jesus' words. "On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world... When these things begin to take place, *look up and lift up your heads,* because your redemption draws near."⁷

By looking up to Heaven, John receives revelation.⁸ Here is a vital lesson for us in these transitions from the natural to the spiritual realm; we can only understand what is really going on in this world as we catch a glimpse of what is happening in the unseen realms. "Elisha prayed, "O, Lord, open his eyes that he may see." Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha... Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."⁹ Revelation is vitally needed, if we are going to worship God in this present dark age.

John's Revelation hymns contain words that have inspired many songwriters. "*Salvation and praise and power belong to our God for true and just are his judgments.*" These words help us to maintain a right perspective. Receiving a revelation of who God is and what He does will invariably inspire our worship. Babylon had blinded men so that they blasphemed God, rather than worship Him.¹⁰ But the blinders are now removed and ascribing glory to God is unrestrained due to His just sentence on the Great Prostitute.¹¹

Throughout history, men have rejoiced at the downfall of tyrants. Take the Berlin Wall, which for three decades symbolized oppression. Germans had long hoped that the Wall would fall but it seemed invincible. When in 1989, it suddenly crumbled and collapsed hardly anyone was prepared for it.

⁶ Rev. 4:1; 7:9; 9:12; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1; 20:3 ⁷ Luke 21: 25-28 ⁸ "I saw" (Rev. 1:10,12; 4:1; 5:6,11; 7:9; 14:1,2; 15:5; 18:1) "I saw" ⁹ 2 Kings 6:16-17 ¹⁰ Rev. 16: 9,11,21; 17:1-5; 18:3, 7-9 ¹¹ Rev. 15:3; 16:7

Bettina Luscher, who covered the story for CNN, reported, “Five days later it was over. The Wall was open. Berliners were dancing on the Wall, hammering away at the Wall, kissing strangers on the Wall, and driving their “Trabi” cars through the opened Wall.”¹² Another account said, “Tonight was a different country. Over 20,000 East and West Germans were gathered there in a huge party...Germans were drunk with joy.”¹³ Like the Berlin Wall, Babylon robs men of freedom. Unlike the Wall, most are unaware of her subtle bondage.



WORSHIP DECLARES THAT THE LORD ALMIGHTY REIGNS

“The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: “Amen, Hallelujah!” Then a voice came from the throne, saying: “Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!” Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: “Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns.”¹⁴

A worship party continues in Heaven, sounding like many rushing waters. After judging Babylon, God takes up His great power and begins to reign. And so when Heaven’s music comes to earth, it signals the end of the age. Hearing that music calms our emotions and assures us of what is lasting. It causes the things of the world to grow strangely dim and it reduces conflict.¹⁵

Music has a way of pulling on our heartstrings. Country music star Travis Tritt spent many years playing out-of-the-way joints before he made it big. He reports that many of the bars were dangerous places, with drunken patrons starting fights over the smallest matters. But Tritt found a unique way to keep the peace. “Silent Night proved to be my all-time lifesaver. Just when things would start getting out of hand, when bikers were reaching for their pool cues and rednecks were heading for the gun rack, I’d start playing ‘Silent Night.’ It could be the middle of July - it didn’t matter. Sometimes they’d even start crying, standing there and listening to Christmas carols.”

When Christ returns, it will not be to the sound of “Silent Night.” He comes with a great noise that will arrest the attention of the entire world. Then every conflict known to man will immediately stop never to be resumed. In fact, conflicts throughout the ages will be raised in frozen, still frames for all to see and hear the judgment of Him who has seen it all – all along. Oh, what a day that will be, when Jesus comes! It will be awesome beyond description.

¹² CNN Perspective Series: The Wall Comes Down ¹³ A Personal Account of The Fall of the Berlin Wall: The 11th and 12th of November, 1989 Andreas Ramos ¹⁴ Rev. 19:4-6 ¹⁵ Chapter 19 sent praises out first like King Jehoshaphat, for the battle is God’s. (2 Chron. 20:21ff)

WORSHIPING ELDERS

The twenty-four Elders and Four Living Creatures confirm that justice has been served Babylon by adding their “Amen” and “Hallelujah!”¹⁶ A voice also calls out to mankind with two commands: “*fear God and give Him glory.*”¹⁷ No matter one’s age, or gender and status, they can worship God. Those who give God glory in Heaven have first glorified Him on earth.

“*Our Lord God Almighty rules*” is the reason for the jubilation. What righteous men have waited for has now come. God “*has begun to rule*” completely. Although the Lord has ruled throughout the ages, it is now seen and experienced by everyone. Formerly, God’s rule was only known to a remnant by revelation. Now, however, every competing power and object of worship is put down. He reigns fully. It is like people who begin singing softly and increase in volume until their song drowns out every other voice. So the voice of the heavenly multitudes in chapters five and nine now swell to a crashing crescendo of thunderclaps in chapter nineteen.


3 WEDDING OF THE LAMB HAS COME

*“Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)*¹⁸

The arrival of the Lamb’s wedding day is the real reason for worship. And here is the last hymn in Revelation and in the whole New Testament. It is a song of joy to celebrate the union of the Bride and Bridegroom. All of Heaven is delighted at the advent of the Lamb’s wedding. No earthly event, except a wedding, can capture such a community celebration and union of parties. In Scripture, God’s people are portrayed as the bride and the wedding guests at the same time.¹⁹ When using symbolism, images can easily overlap, flowing freely into each other.²⁰ For example, Jesus is both the Lamb and the Lion.

BETROTHAL RITE

The image of a Hebrew betrothal rite appears. At the time of betrothal, the bride is promised to the groom in the presence of witnesses. In Hebrew culture, a waiting period followed from the betrothal to the wedding day while the couple lived separately.²¹ During such times, the terms of the dowry, formerly

¹⁶ We saw the elders first seated on thrones, ruling with Christ and on four other occasions falling down to worship. (Rev. 4:4,10; 5:8,14; 11:16). ¹⁷ Voice may be that of one of the Living Creature, the elders or an angel. Regardless, they call for a proper response to God, found often in Revelation. (Rev. 14:7; 15:4; 16:9; 19:5,7) ¹⁸ Rev. 19:7-8 ¹⁹ Matt. 22:2-14; 25:1ff ²⁰ It would go beyond Scripture to say the wedding Guest is one class of believers and the Bride another. ²¹ Deut. 22:23; Matt. 1:18

agreed upon, were duly paid so that the wedding could take place free from any misgivings. The bride was then brought from her parental home to the groom's own home as he came to claim her as his own.²²

In Africa, I had the honor of doing a number of weddings. I soon learnt, however, that it was vital that the dowry, or "bride's price" as it is called, was paid in full before the bride could be collected from her parent's home. Otherwise, the wedding day would encounter a different kind of hitch. One in which the bride's family would argue with the groom's family over the outstanding amount due for their daughter. She could not leave home until the matter was settled between them. Such contentions have spoilt more than one wedding day, and caused much grief to both bride and groom.

Unlike men, God is fully organized and capable of carrying out His plans. The Bible tells us that Christ's Bride was chosen from eternity and the dowry was agreed upon within the Godhead. Throughout the Old Testament, the prophets announced the wedding and foretold of the Bride's costly dowry. God's Son would come and pay the full price at Calvary. "Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her... that He might present the church to Himself in glorious splendor."²³ After an interval, of "a little while," the Bridegroom will return for His Bride. Before He comes the wedding obligations of the Bride are to be faithful to the Bridegroom and to wait expectantly for His return.

FINE LINEN

Revelation evokes a response in the Church Bride to make herself ready. She "*is given*" but she also "*makes herself ready.*" John's two bridal phrases communicate both the positional righteousness that only God can give through Christ and the practical righteousness that only good deeds can demonstrate. Since all our righteousness is as filthy rags, we must be "given fine linen." Jesus provides us with His own right standing before God when we trust Him. What follows is a person's good works, motivated by faith, which shows one's right standing with God.²⁴ They care for widows and orphans; they feed the hungry, and give the thirsty something to drink.²⁵

Jesus taught that such righteous acts separate the sheep from the goats.²⁶ And so the contrasts between the Great Prostitute and the Bride continue. The Prostitute, who sought her own benefit and used others to gratify her own desire, has now faced irreparable loss. She is left naked and is burned. Jesus' Bride sought the well being of others and is now beautifully adorned. The Bride's servant lifestyle makes her especially attractive to the Groom.²⁷

²² Matt. 25:1ff ²³ Eph. 5:25ff ²⁴ James 2:18 ²⁵ Matt. 25:37-39 ²⁶ Matt. 22:11 ²⁷ 1 Peter 3:5-6

I think this is why the story of Cinderella resonates with so many people.²⁸ Cinderella has two mean stepsisters and a horrid stepmother who try to keep her from attending the Prince's Ball, but Cinderella receives a beautiful dress. Cinderella attends the ball, and she leaves behind a glass slipper. The prince must search and find the woman whom it fits. The stepmother tried to lock Cinderella in the attic. But Cinderella gets out just in time to race downstairs and prove she is the one who is sought. She marries the prince, and they live happily ever after. Do her troubles and happy ending sound familiar?



4 GOD'S WORD, JESUS' TESTIMONY, PROPHECY AND WORSHIP

*"Then the angel said to me, 'Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'' And he added, 'These are the true words of God.' At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, 'Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.'"*²⁹

God's Word promotes genuine worship, exposing what is false and spelling out Jesus' testimony. What would we do without God's written revelation? Everyone would be left to his or her own subjective opinions. Paul taught, "all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."³⁰

TRUE WORSHIP

God's Word calls us to worship only God. Twice John is given this command.³¹ On the first occasion, John *"fell before the angel to worship him who showed me these things."* On the second occasion, John *"fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me."* At first, it appears as if John was going to worship this great angel, but this elect angel would not stand for it. In the second instance, it is clear that John was not going to worship the angel, but simply *"at the feet of the angel."* Still, the angel would not tolerate the confusion that such an event would create.

To worship God, man's bodily form and the content of his heart must agree. The worship of angels, creation, men or images is strictly forbidden. Men must never bow down before these.³² The messenger tells John that he is a fellow servant, a brother, signifying similar status as John. In God's Kingdom, there are no celebrities or superstars, nobility or even clergy. We are all brothers of the same Father who hold the testimony of Jesus.

²⁸ Imagine, five hundred versions of the tale have been found in Europe alone. ²⁹ Rev. 19: 9-10 ³⁰ 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:19 John 1:1 ³¹ Rev. 22:8-9

By their testimony of Jesus, the early Christians were in open conflict with the Roman authorities, who sought to compel them to worship Caesar. They chose to rather suffer martyrdom. If that is our heritage, how can we soft-pedal or compromise our worship today.

Several reasons for worshiping only God in chapter nineteen:

1. **For God saving us from our sins** (Rev. 19:1).
2. **For God judging our enemy in truth and justice** (Rev. 19:2).
3. **For God avenging us in answer to prayer** (Rev. 19:2).
4. **For God taking up His power to reign** (Rev. 19:6).
5. **For God providing our wedding garments** (Rev. 19:7-8).
6. **For God fulfilling His many promises to us** (Rev. 19:3-5).
7. **For God empowering us to overcome the Beast** (Rev. 19:9,20).



5 WHITE HORSE RIDER APPEARS FROM HEAVEN

“I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.”³³

This is the second time in Revelation that John saw Heaven opened. The opening of Heaven in chapter four allowed John entry. Now Heaven’s door is standing open to make way for the Lord and his armies to come out of Heaven. (The only other place in the New Testament that we read of Heaven opened was at Jesus’ Baptism, when the Spirit of God came down from Heaven to rest upon Him).³⁴ Christ comes down from Heaven, seated upon a horse, a symbol of war. Jesus’ horse is white, showing that He wages war to administer justice. White also assures everyone of His victory.

CHRIST’S SECOND COMING

The rider is *“faithful and true.”* He is also known as *“the Word of God,”* a title for Christ in John’s Gospel. This is the same White Horse Rider of Revelation chapter six, which prevailed.³⁵ He overcame the world and rides throughout the earth to deliver His people and execute righteousness. The present tenses of the verbs *“to judge and to make war”* indicate a progressive sense in which Christ judges and makes war. When He completes His circuit, He will forcibly put down all opposition and render Final Judgment.

³² Acts 10:25-26; 14:11-15 ³³ Rev. 19:11-14 ³⁴ Matt. 3:16 ³⁵ (Rev. 6:2) See chpt. on Seven Seals.

John's vision of Jesus' Return in chapter fourteen was that of the Son of Man, seated on a white cloud, with a sharp sickle in His hand, coming to harvest the earth.³⁶ Now John's vision is that of a warrior on a White Horse, making war. Both visions clearly present what the Bible teaches elsewhere.³⁷ Jesus will not come by Himself, but He will lead a myriad of angels and redeemed men. No one will fail to miss such a dramatic event. Every eye shall see Him.³⁸ When He Returns, He reward believers and punish unbelievers.³⁹

UNKNOWN NAME

We know many names of Christ: Lamb, Faithful and True Witness, Lord of Lords, King of Kings, Word of God, Offspring of David, Morning Star, Emmanuel, Mighty God, and, among others, Everlasting Father. Christ has a mysterious name, however, that no one knows. This should not surprise us as an unknown name is given by Jesus to the overcomer.⁴⁰

Since names reveal the nature of the person named, this name must reveal something very special about Jesus. Some commentators think that this mysterious name will be revealed to His people when they meet Him in the air or at the wedding of the Lamb. It makes sense that a further revelation awaits His coming.⁴¹ This unknown name may reveal an aspect of His nature that is hidden and difficult to comprehend. According to this passage, there is a holy wrath to the Lamb that attends His Return, which might be expressed in a name that men do not know, but will experience on the Day of Judgment.

In "The Jesus I Never Knew," Philip Yancey points out that many people feel they know Jesus; yet, the familiar images they have of Him are superficial and meant to serve mere human comfort. Yancey says, "the Jesus, I found (in the Gospels), bore little resemblance to the Mister Rogers figure I had met in Sunday school...For one thing, he was far less tame...How is it, then, that the church has tamed such a character – has in Dorthy Sayers' words, "very efficiently pared the claws of the Lion of Judah, certified Him as a fitting household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies?"⁴²

DIPPED IN BLOOD

Revelation teaches that the Jesus of the Second Coming is far from harmless. This will become only too obvious when He returns, but it is better to know ahead of time who and what to expect than be caught unaware.

³⁶ Rev. 14:14-16 ³⁷ Revelation's different images of Christ's Return mitigate against a chronology in the book. ³⁸ Orthodox churches hold to a literal, physical return of Christ at the end of the age. (Matt 16:27; 24:27,30; Acts 1:11; 1 Thess 4:16; 2 Thess 1:7; 1 Cor 15:22,23; Rev 1:7). ³⁹ Matt 25:31; 2 Thess 1:8,9; Jude 15 ⁴⁰ Rev. 2:17 ⁴¹ Phil. 2:9ff ⁴² "The Jesus I Never Knew," pg. 23.

Jesus is “*dressed in a robe dipped in blood.*” His robe is not spattered but dipped, because His acts are ever purposeful and never haphazard. This image is appropriate for both Jesus’ First and Second Comings, as both the Lamb and the Lion. As the Lamb, the blood on His robe could be understood as His own precious blood, which was willingly shed to overcome Satan.⁴³ However, at Christ’s Second Coming, the Lion of Judah will shed His enemies’ blood. He leads the armies of heaven and treads out the winepress of God’s wrath.⁴⁴ So much for Thomas Paine’s sentiment that “No religion could be truly divine which has in it any doctrine that offends the sensibilities of a little child.” What follows is far from the delicate fur of a little, cuddly lamb.



6 WINEPRESS OF GOD’S WRATH AND THE GREAT SUPPER

“Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.”⁴⁵

Christ quickly cuts His enemies down with the sword of His mouth, which is God’s Word. Those who do not accept Jesus’ words will find that the same words will condemn them on the Last Day.⁴⁶ Using a similiar image, Christ will destroy the Lawless One, another name for the Beast, with the breath of His mouth.⁴⁷ There are many such images in the Holy Scriptures. For example, the Word of God issues forth like fire and the wicked are like stubble. Or it is like a hammer that breaks the hard, stony hearts of men.⁴⁸

WAR AND WINEPRESS

Using another image from ancient warfare, Jesus not only cuts down His enemies, He treads them under His feet. This picture is from Israel’s warfare. It is a sign of complete victory and is combined with an image of treading grapes in a large winepress. “So Joshua and the Israelites destroyed them completely...to a man...When they had brought these kings to Joshua, he summoned all the men of Israel and said to the army commanders who had come with him, “Come here and put your feet on the necks of these kings... This is what the LORD will do to all the enemies you are going to fight.”⁴⁹

The original words are emphatic and literally read, “*He Himself treads the winepress.*” Christ alone leads us in His victorious footsteps. His is the battle, and we tread where He has trod. He graciously includes us in His victory.

⁴³ The Spirit of Christ has fought God’s enemies throughout the ages. (Isa. 63:9) ⁴⁴ Christ ever goes out in front. (Deut. 33:2; Ps. 68:17; Matt. 24:31; Mark 13:27; Luke 9:26; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 2 Thess. 1:7-10). ⁴⁵ Rev. 19:15-16 ⁴⁶ John 12:48 ⁴⁷ 2 Thess. 2:8 ⁴⁸ Mal. 4:4; Jer. 23:29 ⁴⁹ Josh. 10:20-25

Jesus' title reveals that He is the supreme commander of the Lord's host. "*KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.*" These names are equivalent to superlative nouns, "the greatest King", "the greatest Lord." His is the highest possible name in Heaven and on earth.⁵⁰

BIRDS OF PREY

*"And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, 'Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great.'"*⁵¹

The images are multiplied to reveal the uniqueness of the event of the End. John hears a call to the birds of prey. They are summoned by God to consume "*the flesh of all people.*" This image is found throughout the prophets. "Carcasses of this people will become food for the birds of the air." Ezekiel depicts Gog's fate on the mountains of Israel as birds "gorge themselves on you."⁵² The image also appears in David's fight with Goliath.⁵³

This strange 'bird meal' is titled the Great Banquet of God. It parallels the first banquet that is called the Lamb's Wedding Supper. These names refer to the same meal but from very different perspectives. It is the Marriage Supper from the viewpoint of the Redeemed, but for the lost it is the Great Banquet.⁵⁴ We have already seen that the same event can evoke mourning or rejoicing, pain or pleasure, depending on where you stand.⁵⁵

At Christ's Return, confidence or fear, glory or shame, blessing or cursing, life or death awaits each person. These are not possibilities that randomly happen to people, but the things that we become by the very choices we daily make. "It's a serious thing," wrote C. S. Lewis, "to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw them now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or another of these destinations."⁵⁶



WAR ENDS WITH BEAST AND COMPANY THROWN INTO FIRE

"Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast

⁵⁰ Phil. 2:9 ⁵¹ Rev. 19:17-18 ⁵² Isa. 18:6; Jer. 7:33; 12:9; 15:3; 16:4; 19:19; 24:20; 29:5; Ezek. 32:4; 39:4 ⁵³ 1 Sam. 17:46 ⁵⁴ "He shall prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." (Ps. 23:5; Rev 19:9, 17,18). ⁵⁵ Heb. 2:3 ; 12:16 ⁵⁶ "The Weight of Glory," pg. 15.

was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf...The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh."⁵⁷

Satan offered Christ the kingdoms of this world for one act of worship. Jesus rejected Satan's offer, and chose to fight to the death. In contrast, "*the kings of the earth*" accept Satan's offer to rule.⁵⁸ They stand for men who throughout history have unwittingly served Satan to their own destruction. Like the pleasures of sin for a season, their power is fleeting. The kings and their armies watch their master, the Beast, thrown alive into the Lake of Fire.⁵⁹

PERPETUAL PUNISHMENT

The phrase "*thrown alive into the lake of fire*" indicates continued existence. (John does not teach that the wicked are annihilated). "*Thrown alive*" bespeaks of the suddenness, severity and irreversibility of their judgment. The Beast and the False Prophet do not go through the gates of physical death. They go straight to the Lake, where they face the Second Death. "*Alive into the fire*" also confirms that they are powerful spirit entities who operate until the end of the age. For mere mortal men who have served with Satan's Beast are bodily resurrected, before they are cast into the Lake of Fire.⁶⁰

The sword kills the followers of the Beast.⁶¹ Their bodies have neither time nor need for burial. The resurrection and Last Judgment immediately follow. And according to the visionary language of Revelation, they are carried away by birds of prey. "For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather."⁶² "Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left. "Where, Lord?" they asked. He replied, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather."⁶³ These birds of prey represent evil angels, consuming their victims, who are evil men. In their last selfish act, they carry away sinners with them, in their mouths and stomachs, to the Lake of Fire on the Day of Judgment.⁶⁴

Here we have Ezekiel's great multitude, called Gog, who are slain and devoured by birds. In that parallel passage, fiery judgment falls on Gog.⁶⁵ In the next chapter, we see Gog and Magog are deceived to fight against God's people.⁶⁶ This image of war and fire appears throughout Revelation.

⁵⁷ Rev. 19:19-21 ⁵⁸ Rev. 17:12 ⁵⁹ Daniel's beast is thrown into the fire. (Dan. 7:10-11; Isa. 14:3-21; Ezek. 28:18). ⁶⁰ Rev. 20:11-15 ⁶¹ Rev. 19:21 ⁶² Matt 24:27-28 ⁶³ Luke 17:34-37 ⁶⁴ In contrast, the holy angels are said to gather the elect (Matt. 24:31). ⁶⁵ Ezekiel chpts 38 - 39. ⁶⁶ Rev. 20:7-10

The Great Prostitute is burned with fire.⁶⁷ The Beast and False Prophet are defeated in war and thrown into the Lake of Fire. Satan along with Gog and Magog are also defeated in war and thrown there.⁶⁸ So too are those who have worshiped the Beast.⁶⁹ The War and the Lake of Fire references obviously connect, so why separate them and expect them to happen twice before and then again after a thousand historical years? John's images of Satan being bound and loosed also connect to help reveal the nature of the Millennium.

CHRONOLOGICAL ERROR

Before we handle the Millennium controversy, let me say that chapter eighteen (Babylon's Judgment) to nineteen (White Horse Rider) to twenty (the Millennium) does *not* provide a chronological layout anymore than John's previous chapters did. The whole book deals with Christ's Return, not as a chronological sketch, but in a visionary fashion. To assume chronology complicates the book, creates questions and leads to error.

We have seen a cyclical approach in Revelation. Everything from the Seals, Trumpets and Bowls to the Beast and Babylon, to the saints raised and in

glory. We have seen that John speaks of the End repeatedly and adds details on how Christ's Return ushers in that End. Therefore, I read chapter twenty not as events that occur after Christ comes, but yet another sketch of Christ's Return. This last sketch is not of Babylon's history or that of the Beast and his followers, but it is of their overlord, Satan, and his end.⁷⁰

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How would you define the interaction between Heaven and earth?
2. When have you seen opposite responses to the same event?
3. What images of warfare would we find if Revelation were written today?
4. Why do you think the angel was so emphatic with John on his worship?
5. How do you explain the call to the birds of prey and the meals mentioned by John?
6. How might you (as part of the Bride of Christ) get ready for the Groom?
7. What aspect of Jesus' nature do you feel least acquainted with and why?

⁶⁷ Rev. 17:16 ⁶⁸ Rev. 20:10 ⁶⁹ Rev. 14:9-10; 21:8 ⁷⁰ Revelation spent a chapter on the Dragon's origin (Chapter 12), then fills in details regarding his allies, the Beast and False Prophet (Chapter 13), as well as Mystery Babylon (Chapter 17 and 18). It is noteworthy that the order of their judgment is reversed so as to work back to the Dragon's final judgment as the source of the war (Chapter 20).

PART SEVEN

CONSUMMATION

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE: MILLENNIUM QUESTION
(Rev. 20:1-15)

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR: NEW JERUSALEM
(Rev. 21:1-22:6)

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE: CONCLUSION - OUR RESPONSE
(Rev. 22:6-21)

**An angel shows John the New Jerusalem.
She shines like the sun with the presence and glory of God.**



**The picture is by an unknown artist
who in 1712 illustrated Caspar Luiken's book
"Historiae Celebriores Veteris Testamenti Iconibus Representatae."**

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

MILLENNIUM QUESTIONS

SEVEN QUESTIONS FROM REVELATION 20:1-15

I have presented a non-literal, non-linear approach to Revelation, because I am convinced that it consists of parallel visions during the Christian era. Last chapter we saw that the Beast and his forces were completely destroyed, and there was a certain sense of finality to their judgment.¹ But just as John has taken us to the End and back again through successive cycles, so in this chapter the forces of Satan reappear, once more, before their destruction.

Since none of the wicked escaped the judgment of the last chapter to regroup against Christ, this chapter does not follow the previous chapter chronologically. Instead, John provides the same fiery ending as at Armageddon, but with an emphasis in this chapter on Satan's judgment. John saw Satan cast down from Heaven with his time running out. And he now shows us the conclusion to Satan's history in the Lake of Fire. The parallel visions of judgment reach a climax in chapter twenty and the cycle ends.

John's writings contain recurring scenes during this evil age. Evidence for this is found also in 'the war' image. The definite article features in the expression "*the war*" in three places: in chapter sixteen, nineteen and again in twenty.² The word "war" occurs nine times in Revelation, but the last three have the definite article, stressing the culmination of the conflict at the end of time. The wording is nearly identical in its final three uses: "*to gather them for the war*" (16:14); "*gathered to make the war*" (19:19); "*to gather them for the war*" (20:8). It is easy to accept that these passages cover the same war.

Revelation chapter twenty is John's vision of Satan's final judgment. Like each of his visions, it extends from Christ's First Coming to His Second Coming. John saw Satan cast down and diminished in power as a result of Christ's First Coming. Although Satan was bound to the Abyss, he was also released. We are also told that Satan, like the Beast and False Prophet, will be cast into the Lake of Fire. I am convinced that this happens at Christ's Return, and that John reveals to us spiritual realities, during this interim period, between Christ's First and Second Coming. These realities are also presented in visionary language, and said to extend for a thousand years. This period is called "the Millennium." Its nature is greatly debated by scholars.³

¹"And the rest were killed with the sword." (Rev. 19:21) ²Rev. 16:14; 19:19; 20:8 ³Millennium is Latin, mille, meaning thousand; annum, meaning year. Greek is chiliioi and etos.

The Millennium is a theological battleground with three main views:

1. Premillennialism teaches that Christ at His Second Coming will establish His Kingdom on earth, which will last a thousand literal years.

When Christ Returns, He will bind Satan in the Abyss, bodily resurrect the Christian dead, and personally set up God's kingdom on earth. A thousand-year period in history follows, during which God fulfills His promises to Israel.

2. Postmillennialism teaches that Christ returns after the Millennium.

The Millennium is a long (not exact) period during which the Gospel triumphs in this present age. Christianity brings global transformation by converting the nations.⁴ Christ rules through the Church, as the Kingdom promises in the Old Testament are fulfilled in the Church - God's true Israel. At the end of the Millennium, the Antichrist brings about a time of apostasy, but Christ destroys him at His Coming. The general resurrection immediately follows Christ's Return.

3. Amillennialism teaches that the Millennium reign is in Heaven.⁵

The thousand years are not literal nor are they on earth. They represent Jesus' glorious reign at the Father's right hand. Christ restrains Satan's deceptive powers, raises to life all who choose to believe in Him, and rules with sovereign authority in heavenly places. At Christ's Return the resurrection of the body occurs.

Let us now examine the passage, the main difficulties of each position and how I understand the Millennium.



1 How was Satan bound for a thousand years?

“And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.”⁶

“The key,” “a great chain,” and Satan “bound,” are figures of speech. A spirit cannot be shackled with a literal chain, but in Scripture we clearly discover what these symbols mean. Jesus said, “How can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.”⁷ Christ bound Satan by His death and resurrection so as to deliver the souls of men from his domain.⁸

⁴ Postmillennialism was popular in the US before the devastation of two World Wars. Many saw the Church transforming society by abolishing slavery and liberating men economically and politically. By its missionary outreach the Church would also transform the world. The Battle Hymn of the Republic echoes this theology. “He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored...His truth is marching on.”⁵ Unlike Postmillennialists, Amillennialists do not expect the world to experience transformation before Christ's Return. ⁶ Rev. 20:1-2 ⁷ Matt 12:28-29; Mk. 3:26-27 ⁸ “Having the key to the Abyss” points to the Lord Jesus, since he has the keys of hell and death and the key of David to open and shut. (Rev. 1:18 3:7). He also gives keys to others (Matt. 16:20; 18:18-20).

THE CROSS

Jesus' atoning death is the great chain because it alone binds Satan.⁹ The Cross deprived Satan of his authority, leaving him unable to perform as he did prior to its binding effect upon him.¹⁰ Christ "spoiled" or "disarmed" demonic powers by His death.¹¹ "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil?"¹²

Christ's blood bought victory is appropriated by the word of our testimony.¹³ And Satan's deceptive powers are broken over all who believe in Christ. When the seventy disciples returned from their preaching, they reported their success in casting out evil spirits. Jesus replied, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven."¹⁴ Satan's casting down does not await Christ's Return.¹⁵



WHAT DOES 'KEPT FROM DECEIVING THE NATIONS' MEAN?

*"He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time."*¹⁶

If Satan was hurled into the Abyss, how can he be active in the world? Doesn't he go about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour? Here lies the main difficulty with the Postmillennial and Amillennial views. Premillennialists maintain these other interpretations are unrealistic in light of the demonic in this present evil world. Satan seems to have free reign. Turn the news on anytime and see his day's work. And are not individuals and whole nations deceived by Satan?

SATAN'S DECEPTION LIMITED

Amillennialists counter by saying that men misinterpret Satan's binding. Satan's activities are restrained in one particular area.¹⁷ The text tells us, *"that he should deceive the nations no more."* God limited Satan in Job's life saying, "but on the man himself do not lay a finger." And again, "but you must spare his life."¹⁸ If you read these divine limitations without knowing what Job actually endured, you might misinterpret them, making more out of these limitations. Satan's judgment of chapter twelve did not result in peace on earth. On the contrary, the world faced a desperate onslaught of woe, because Satan had been cast down. In a similar manner, although Satan was cast down to the Abyss, he is still very active among men.

⁹ "The Cleansing of the Heavens" is a 237 pg. account of how Satan was bound by the cross. ¹⁰ Binding means restrained. ¹¹ Col. 2:15 ¹² 1 John 3:8 ¹³ Rev. 12:11 ¹⁴ Luke 10:18 ¹⁵ John 12:31 ¹⁶ Rev. 20:3 ¹⁷ Satan's power though limited is not yet destroyed. ¹⁸ Job 1:12; 2:6

Deceiving the nation was Satan's forte throughout the ages. Up until John's day, every nation (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome) was under his deception of idolatry. Only Israel had a revelation of the one, true God.¹⁹ The ascension of the Man-child and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, however, would change all that. The testimony of the martyrs transformed the Roman Empire, because Satan was now kept from deceiving the nations. Old Testament prophesies of Christ "sprinkling many nations," becoming "a light to the nations" and causing "the nations to rally to Him" was happening and evidence that something drastic had changed.²⁰

From the start, the Gospel has had a profound effect upon the world. "The rulers of the city, cried out, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too."²¹ Who can deny Jesus' multitudinous predominance on this world? All the families of the earth find their blessing in Him.²² His Word is proclaimed every year on a wider scale; its powerful effect is felt today in spite of wars, famines and terrible disturbances. And although Satan is bound in his ability to "*deceive the nations,*" God allows him to wage war against the righteous and oppress those who will not receive Christ.²³

Every nation is given an opportunity to respond to the Gospel before the End. During this timeframe, Satan is unable to stop the advance of the Gospel to every nation; he cannot keep the Witnesses from testifying or people from hearing and believing.²⁴ But it is still up to men to believe. When the appointed time elapses, Satan is released from the Abyss in the form of the Beast to silence the Witnesses, substitute his lies and deceive unbelievers.²⁵

A THOUSAND YEARS

The extent of restraint on Satan is coupled with a related place and timeframe. Concerning, the place, Satan is bound "*in the Abyss.*"²⁶ The Abyss is the abode of demons, a supernatural realm out of which they go and come, as they are bound and let loose.²⁷ Concerning its timing, Satan is bound "*for a thousand years.*" Like other numbers in Revelation, a thousand years is a representative number.²⁸ It stands for a vast period of time.²⁹ "May the LORD increase you a thousand times."³⁰ God keeps "His covenant of love to a thousand generations,"³¹ and "the cattle upon a thousand hills."³²

¹⁹ Believers are empowered to make disciples of all nations. (Matt. 28:19-20). ²⁰ Isa. 2:2; 11:10; 12:4; 42:1; 51:4; 52:15; 56:7; 60:3; ²¹ Acts 17:6 ²² Gen. 12:3; Acts 3:25; Gal. 3:8; Rev. 5:9 ²³ 2 Cor. 4:4 ²⁴ Matt. 24:14 ²⁵ Rev. 12:9, 13:14, 16:13-14; 2 Cor 11:3 ²⁶ "Abyss" in Revelation 7 times as it describes an immeasurable depth, not the regions of Sheol. (Rev. 9:1-2,11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1,3). ²⁷ Fallen angel has a key to the Abyss. (Rev. 9:1; 11:7; 17:8). ²⁸ Symbolic numbers in Revelation include 2, 4, 5, 7, 10, 12, 24, 42, 666, 1000, 1260, 1600, 7000, 12000, and 144000. ²⁹ In Revelation a 1000 is multiplied by 144 to signify the totality of God's people, and to 12 furlongs indicating that the New Jerusalem occupies all necessary space. ³⁰ Deut. 1:11 ³¹ Ps. 84:10 ³² Ps. 50:10

Satan's binding is a spiritual act. Its timeframe is understood poetically. The early Church, therefore, interpreted the Millennium based on the Psalm. "A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night." The Psalm highlights man's transitory nature. "You sweep men away in the sleep of death; they are like the new grass of the morning - though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dried and withered...our years quickly pass."³³ A thousand years stand for the extended reign of the saints in Heaven, compared to their short earthly lives.³⁴ Although a thousand years sounds long, it is, in God's sight, "a watch in the night."



WHERE DO THE MARTYRS REIGN DURING THIS TIME?

*"I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years."*³⁵

HEAVENLY SCENE AND REIGN

The place and significance of "thrones" in John's vision is easily identified. Throughout Revelation, John sees thrones in Heaven.³⁶ When John was caught up to Heaven, "surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders."³⁷ Those enthroned are the faithful, departed saints, reigning with Christ. This is a fulfillment of Jesus' promise to the overcomers in the churches.³⁸ At death, their bodies return to the dust, but their spirits sit enthroned with Christ in Heaven.

As in chapter six, in chapter twenty John again, "saw the souls of those who had been beheaded."³⁹ "Beheaded" bodies and "souls" confirm that this is a heavenly scene of the overcomers, although not limited to martyrs.⁴⁰ For the text adds, "and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their forehead and on their hand." This additional clause clarifies the preceding one. With this clarification, John includes all the saints who have suffered for Christ in one way or another.

Paul taught that all godly believers will suffer some form of persecution.⁴¹ Several Christian agencies today identify and campaign against persecution. They report the destruction of churches and the murder of believers.

³³ Compare Psalm 90:4 with 2 Peter 3:8. ³⁴ Ro. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17 ³⁵ Rev. 20:4 ³⁶ Except for Satan's throne and that of the Beast on earth, thrones always point to Heaven. The saints have thrones where it really counts - in Heaven - the 24 elders who rule with Christ. ³⁷ Rev. 3:21; 4:4; 11:16; 20:4 ³⁸ Rev. 3:215:10; 20:4, 6; 22:5 ³⁹ Rev. 6:9 ⁴⁰ John the Baptist was beheaded and James too. John died a natural death, but he is included in this company. All true believers are included. ⁴¹ 2 Tim. 3:12

Much of this takes place under radical Islamic rule. One has only to think of East Timor and the genocide of Christians in Burma and Southern Sudan. Persecution is not something long past or still off in the future. It should not be considered as that nor should we think that those who escape in our day are penalized - for it is our daily commitment to Christ that counts.⁴²

REIGNING WITH CHRIST NOW

Like the binding of Satan, few believers grasp the present reign of Christ. Many consider it future. Peter, however, taught that Christ reigns now from God's right hand. "The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."⁴³ Christ's reign continues, "Until His enemies are made His footstool."⁴⁴ Paul understood that Jesus was reigning from Heaven and bringing all enemies under His feet.⁴⁵ Although unseen, His reign cannot be dismissed or regulated to some future earthly timeframe.

Premillennialists, in contrast, believe these thrones are set up on the earth. But just imagine, during the Millennium, thousands, even millions, of little thrones all over the earth - each with a believer ruling over his little patch. Such is required if these are literal thrones. Thrones are a figure of speech. Their non-literal application should not surprise us since even now "we have been raised up to sit with Christ in heavenly places."⁴⁶ We share His throne and reign in this life.⁴⁷ The trouble is that such an explanation seems rather prosaic against the pictures that have been painted of a glorious Golden Age. The real problem is that the glorious riches of Christ are not believed as being applicable to *this* age.⁴⁸

AUTHORITY TO JUDGE

True riches mean a share in Jesus' heavenly reign. A feature of which includes "*authority to judge*." Although the Final Judgement is committed to Christ, this authority to judge tells us how highly God exalts His saints. The word "judge" has many uses, but one that applies for us today is how it is used in the Book of Judges: one who rules, delivers from oppression and discerns what is right.

The Christian life involves ministering to God's people with a particular aspect of "judging." Just today a man came to me for help. His wife had gone to see a spiritualist medium. This was her second visit, but she had only told him after the fact. He wanted to know what he should do to disassociate his family from her sin and prevent future secret visits.

⁴² "I die daily." (1 Cor. 15:31). ⁴³ Acts 2:33-36 ⁴⁴ Ps. 110:1 is the most often quoted OT verse in the NT. ⁴⁵ 1 Cor 15:25-26 ⁴⁶ Eph.2:6 ⁴⁷ Rom. 5:17 ⁴⁸ Eph. 1:18-20;3:8,19-20

Jesus gave believers authority to “bind and loose.”⁴⁹ He gave the Church authority to discipline its members too.⁵⁰ Paul exercised this authority at Corinth in the case of a member involved in incest. “Do not you judge them that are within? Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.”⁵¹ In Heaven, authority to judge will go beyond what believers have exercised in this world. “Do you not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!”⁵² We will reign with Christ in His Kingdom.⁵³



IS THE FIRST RESURRECTION LITERAL OR SYMBOLIC?

“(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.”⁵⁴

First is “protos” in Greek, meaning foremost in time and order of importance.⁵⁵ Man’s spirit raised to life is the first resurrection in time and importance. This features a lot in John’s Gospel. “Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.”⁵⁶ After speaking of a spiritual resurrection first, He spoke of a bodily one. “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out - those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”⁵⁷

SPIRITUAL LIFE FOREMOST

Since mankind died in Adam, men need to be raised to life spiritually. When Adam sinned, he experienced spiritual death first - years before his body died. God had warned Adam, “You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for in the day you eat of it you will surely die.”⁵⁸ Although Adam’s body did not die until centuries later, his spirit was immediately separated from the life of God. The first death was passed from Adam to all mankind. Paul describes us, before we came to Christ, as “dead in trespasses and sins.”⁵⁹ It is, therefore, the spiritual nature of man, dead in sin, that must first be raised, if men are to live and reign in God’s presence.

⁴⁹ This authority is also exercised in intercession. ⁵⁰ Matt. 18:15-22 ⁵¹ 1 Cor. 5:12-13 ⁵² 1 Cor. 6:2-3 ⁵³ 2 Tim 2:12 ⁵⁴ Rev. 20:5-6 ⁵⁵ KJV Bible translates first: before, beginning, best, chief, first of all, former. ⁵⁶ John 5:24-25 ⁵⁷ John 5:28-29 ⁵⁸ Gen.2:17 ⁵⁹ (Eph. 2:1; 1 Tim. 5:6; Matt.8:22) Appears in the parable of the Prodigal Son. The father’s son who was dead but is alive again (Luke 15:24,32).

The resurrection of the human spirit is a major concept in Paul's theology. Paul taught, "God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions...And God *raised us up with Christ* and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus."⁶⁰ Sounds just like John in Revelation - living and reigning with Christ. Paul wrote much on our spiritual resurrection. "When you were dead in your sins...God made you alive with Christ...Since, then, you have been *raised with Christ*, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God."⁶¹

John writes about spiritual life in his first letter as well as spiritual death. "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death...and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him."⁶² Revelation's first resurrection is the resurrected life John describes in his Gospel and Epistle. And John's readers understood what he meant in the light of his other writings. There are two resurrections: one is spiritual and the other is physical. There are not two bodily resurrections separated by a thousand years from each other.

Evidence that the first resurrection 'raises the saints' to reign in Heaven is: **(1)** This is where the souls are. **(2)** This is where the thrones are. **(3)** This is where Christ now reigns. **(4)** This is the first and most vital resurrection. **(5)** This is how we have now been made a royal priesthood.⁶³ **(6)** Earth and body are nowhere mentioned here by John.⁶⁴ **(7)** This is before the general resurrection, which occurs after the thousand years when all men are raised.

TWO RESURRECTIONS

Premillennialism teaches that both resurrections in Revelation are bodily. They claim that the first resurrection takes place at the Rapture and only includes believers; whereas, the second resurrection takes place at the end of Christ's Millennial reign.⁶⁵ This is a major difficulty for Premillennialism, because in a vast array of Scripture only one bodily resurrection appears. In that one resurrection, the just are raised to eternal bliss while the unjust are raised to condemnation. Too numerous to quote here, the verses are footnoted below.⁶⁶ They all teach, as Jesus did, that this one bodily resurrection includes all men and takes place when Christ Returns on the "last day."⁶⁷

⁶⁰ Eph. 2:4-5 ⁶¹ Col. 2:12-13; 3:1-2 ⁶² 1 John 3:14-15 ⁶³ 1 Peter 2:9 Rev. 1:6; 5:10 ⁶⁴ Rom. 5:17 Eph. 2:6, Col. 2:12, Col 3:1 ⁶⁵ Many Premillennialists have three bodily resurrections: **(1st)** at a Pre-tribulation Rapture **(2nd)** after the tribulation for martyrs when Christ Returns **(3rd)** after the 1000 years. ⁶⁶ Dan. 12:1-4, 12:13; Matt. 22:31, Luke 14:14, 20:35-36; John 5:25-29, 11:24; Acts 23:6, 1 Cor. 15:1ff; 2 Cor. 4:14, Phil. 3:11, 1 Thess. 4:13-18, Heb. 6:2, Rev. 11:18, 20:12-13 ⁶⁷ (John 6: 39, 40, 44, 54 and 11:24) When a believer is "raised from death to life," the second death has no power over him. They are held in contrast to "the rest of the dead" who remain dead in sin.

Beside the two resurrections, separated by a thousand years, Satan's release presents another serious difficulty for Premillennialists.⁶⁸



WHAT DOES SATAN DO AFTER HIS RELEASE?

“When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth - Gog and Magog - to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them.”⁶⁹

HOW ON EARTH?

Premillennialists teach that Armageddon's battle occurred in chapter nineteen. The Beast and his followers are destroyed and Jesus has ruled for ten centuries among men, who have not learnt to make war. This creates a big question. One that bothered me as a Premillennialist. After Christ has ruled on the earth for a thousand years with His saints, how could Satan muster an army to attack God's people - resurrected people at that? Where would such a large number come from and why such open hostility?

The more I studied the Bible, the less convinced I was of a literal Millennium, in which children are born and Jesus and His saints are confined to Jerusalem. I cannot accept the proposition that Satan and his crowd will fight again after Christ's physical return and His presence for a thousand years. I can only accept Satan's great following after the thousand years with an understanding that Christ's reign is from Heaven as we now experience it during this present age. I also consider an earthly kingdom in Israel as a retrogression from the spiritual kingdom established by Christ.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ The other question for Premillennialists is “if the thousand-year reign of Christ is on earth, where else in Scripture is the Millennium taught?” They answer that Christ's Millennial reign embraces every kingdom promise made to Israel in the OT. (Isa. 65:17; 66:22). ⁶⁹ Rev. 20:7-9 ⁷⁰ Early Christian writings, such as the Didache, make no mention of a reign on earth. Hegesippus refers to a tradition that when the grandchildren of Jude were brought before the Emperor Domitian (81-96 AD) and asked about Christ's Kingdom and when and where it would appear, they said “that it was not a temporal or an earthly kingdom, but celestial and angelic; that it would appear at the end of the world, when, coming in glory, He would judge the quick and the dead.” Clement's First Epistle in 98 AD refers to the coming of Christ and a future resurrection, but has no hint of a Millennial Kingdom on earth. Polycarp writes (110 AD) of the resurrection and judgment, but says nothing concerning a Millennial Kingdom on earth. The Epistle of Barnabas (2nd century) speaks of the Day of Judgment and rewards to the righteous. But he speaks in ways of these events that excludes any earthly Millennium. A literal Millennium did not become popular until the 2nd Century. Justin Martyr said that many Christians accepted the doctrine, which he supported by OT Scriptures. But he frankly admits that many pious Christians rejected the idea. An earthly Millennium expectation, however, never died out in the western Church. It was emphasized in the Reformation period by some Anabaptists and remains a basic tenet of several denominations.

“The war,” after the Millennium, is the same war we have seen in Revelation. Satan’s work of deceiving the nations is similar as is the place he attacks.⁷¹ The Devil has been represented by various symbols throughout Revelation. And this last account ends a long line. We saw him as the Great Star Wormwood, which falls from Heaven and goes down to the Abyss. He releases his hordes from there to pollute the world. He goes by the name Abaddon and Apollyon. He empowers the Beast who ascends from the Abyss. He himself also ascends from there as the Dragon to attack the Camp of God. This final image shows him gathering together all who have followed him throughout history. It sums up his deceptive work and his end in the Lake of Fire.

Satan’s ending effort in chapter twenty-two seems to be his greatest, but it is merely the culmination of his career. The power allowed him here also appears to be more than before, but it is simply the gathering of everyone he has deceived so that they receive his same judgment in the Lake of Fire. God allows “the mystery of lawlessness” to work strong delusion upon all that “had pleasure in unrighteousness.”⁷² But we are not to fear, since Satan is only allowed to deceive those who have turned their backs on Jesus.⁷³ Doubtless, this is a great number. “*The number of whom is as the sand of the sea.*”⁷⁴

GOG AND MAGOG

Gog and Magog are the proper names for this great satanic host.⁷⁵ We need not be too inquisitive as to what people groups are meant by these names, since they are assembled from “*the four corners of the earth,*” not from one or two nations.⁷⁶ They are like the Lamb’s followers from every tribe, tongue, people and language.⁷⁷ Taken from the Old Testament, they are symbolic names like Balaam and Jezebel. They stand for the corporate enemy of God and His people.⁷⁸ They are worldwide in scope and anti-Christian in spirit.

Their onslaught is also described in symbolic terms. The phrase “*and they went up*” is generally used of Jerusalem, which is located at an elevation of about 2,500 feet.⁷⁹ But no reference to Jerusalem here follows. Instead, these evil forces march “*the breadth of the earth*” and surround God’s people. The terms “*camp*” and “*city*” serve as a double symbol to express the temporal and eternal nature of the Church. “*Camp*” or encampment reminds us of our temporary dwelling in this world like that of the Israelites in the desert.⁸⁰

⁷¹ Rev 16:14, 17:14, 19:17 ⁷² 2 Thess. 2:7-12; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1 ⁷³ Matt. 24:24 ⁷⁴ Palestine could not sustain such a multitude nor would they be used in today’s hi-tech wars. John’s previous image of blood rising as high as a horse’s bridle and flowing for a distance of 180 miles (Rev.14:20) like those here shout out in their need to be interpreted symbolically. ⁷⁵ Gen. 10:2; Ezek. 38:2 ⁷⁶ “As sand on a seashore” is an idiomatic expression for the innumerable. ⁷⁷ Ezek. 38:17-18 ⁷⁸ Num. 24:17-24; Isa.14:28-32 ⁷⁹ Ezra 1:3; Ps.122:4; John 2:13; Acts 11:2 ⁸⁰ Num. 5:1-4; Deut. 23:14

Over against “*camp*,” which denotes a temporary abode, the term “*city*” is a permanent abode. It depicts the eternal aspect of the church, the beloved city where God and the Lamb are central, and where the saints reside forever.

In His zeal for His people, God rains fire down on Gog, putting an end to him. The battle is brief and ends on a supernatural note. The ruin of Gog and Magog was foretold by the prophets. “I will rain upon him and upon his bands an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, and fire and brimstone.”⁸¹ It sounds like the Lake Fire. For God would, in an extraordinary and more immediate manner, fight this last and decisive battle for His people, that the victory might be complete. This brings us to Satan’s Final Judgment.



WHEN IS SATAN THROWN INTO THE LAKE OF FIRE?

“And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”⁸²

Satan is the force behind man’s rebellion - first to last. And here the Devil appears in the Bible for the last time. It outlines his doom and punishment. He is cast into the Lake of Fire, where his two great officers, the Beast and the False Prophet are cast; where also those who worship the Beast have their part, likened to the Great Prostitute who is burned with fire.⁸³ Or like the fire that comes down and devours Gog and Magog, the fate of the wicked is all the same. Their fate is ongoing punishment in the Lake of Fire.

DAY AND NIGHT FOREVER

The expression “*day and night*” was used by John on two previous occasions. It denotes a continual activity. John saw the four living creatures praising God “*day and night*.” He heard of the Accuser who accused our brothers to God “*day and night*.”⁸⁴ It is coupled with the phrase “*for ever and ever*.” Hence, Scripture nowhere teaches that the torment of the ungodly will eventually come to an end. There is no limit to its time nor possibility of release.

Our great archenemy, the Devil, will never deceive or torment anyone again. And those that he used as instruments will be used no more.⁸⁵ Jesus said, “The eternal fire was prepared for the devil and his angels.”⁸⁶ “The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth”⁸⁷

⁸¹ Ezek. 38:22 ⁸² Rev. 20:10 ⁸³ Rev. 17:16;19:20; 20:9 ⁸⁴ Rev. 4:8 ⁸⁵ (Acts 13:7ff) Elymas, the sorcerer, attempted to keep Sergius Paulus from the faith. ⁸⁶ Matt. 25:41 ⁸⁷ Matt.13:41-43

WHENEVER AND WHEREVER

John's vision is a living oracle, speaking throughout time and into eternity. Its depth of inspiration is found in the words "*when the thousand years are over.*" For the word "*when*" is a compound Greek word meaning "*whenever or wherever the thousand years are over.*"⁸⁸ Like John's prophecy in Revelation, the Millennium does not have a one time, linear fulfillment. It is like the persecutions, wars and deceptions that reoccur until the End.

The Millennial has a realization in various places at different times. It may expire in one locality while it is only beginning in another. It is not the same time everywhere. It could be compared to the light of dawn and the movement of the sun around the globe. The Millennium may be bright in one place but not have dawned in another. When the Gospel shines upon a land, Satan is bound and his agents are put to the sword, like the prophets of Baal in Israel. The Millennium may be past, generally speaking, in Europe. In Africa and Asia, it has yet to dawn. In America, Satan appears to be on the rise again.

Satan cannot keep the Gospel from going to all nations. He will angrily contest it everywhere, using evil governments and false religions, but these always suffer the same fate. With their defeat, Satan is bound and the martyrs reign. Before long though, Satan is again loosed due to man's apostasy. He recovers from his wound, ascends from the Abyss, and deceives all who have rejected Christ. So there are times when the Gospel's influence in a area is extensive, and times when darkness prevails. This cycle continues until the End.

John's Millennial prophecy, like his general prophecy, is soon to End. Our perception of soon, however, differs from God's, as seen in the thousand years. Peter reminds us that "The present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. *But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.*"⁸⁹ Merely two days with the Lord have passed since Jesus ushered in the "last days." "The day of the Lord," that is the last Day of Judgment, alone awaits man.⁹⁰ On that day every prophecy is fulfilled as all men stand before God.


WHO STANDS BEFORE THE WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT?

"Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another

⁸⁸ Greek is *hotan*; in KJV it is translated *when* (-soever), implying uncertainty as to when. ⁸⁹ 2 Peter 3:7-8 ⁹⁰ 2 Peter 3:10, 12-13

book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."⁹¹

Two adjectives, "great" and "white," describe God's judgment throne. The word for great is "megas" from which we get "mega." It is a throne that is truly larger than life. Its white color tells us that it is a righteous seat of judgment. It suddenly appears as God calls to order His courtroom and everyone in it.⁹² Then the books are opened and their recorded testimony is read. Everyone is judged in accordance with what is written in these books.

Two Books

The books contain the record of what each person has done. God knows what everyone has ever thought, intended to do, spoken and actually done.⁹³ After the record is read, "*another book*" is opened.⁹⁴ This the most crucial book of all. A person has eternal life on the basis of whether his or her name is recorded in "*the Book of Life*."⁹⁵ It is necessary, however, in this day of easy beliefs to emphasize that saving faith is evidenced by our actions.

There are clearly two classes of people described here. John says, "*Whosoever was not found written in the book of life.*" Obviously, there were those whose names *were* found written. It is futile to argue, as some, that "the dead" can only be the wicked dead."⁹⁶ They teach this because they have built their entire eschatology upon a literal Millennium with two bodily resurrections. This doctrine of 'everyone lost at the White Throne Judgment' does not come from Scripture, but from the requirements of a man-made system of theology.

REWARD AND PUNISHMENTS

Once a person's name is found recorded in the Book of Life, they are rewarded according to their works. Rewards and punishments vary from person to person. Although only two possible destinies exist, there are levels or degrees of rewards and punishments in both places. Paul beautifully portrays this truth in his great chapter on the resurrection. Not every saint will have the same degree of glory and honour as "star differs from star in splendor."⁹⁷

⁹¹ Rev. 20:11-15 ⁹² Judgment Day envisions multitudes standing before the court of heaven. (Dan. 7:10; 12:1-2). ⁹³ Eccl. 12:14; Matt. 12:36; Rom. 2:16; 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Cor. 5:9-10; Heb. 4:12-13. ⁹⁴ Rev. 2:23; 18:6; 22:12; Ps. 28:4; 62:12; Rom. 2:6 ⁹⁵ Luke 10:20; Rev. 3:5; James 2:14-26 ⁹⁶ Some study Bibles maintain that these verses only apply to unbelievers. ⁹⁷ "The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon...So will it be with the resurrection of the dead." (1 Cor. 15:41-42).

Unbelievers do not all share the exact degree of guilt and torment. For example, not every saint will know the degree of Paul's splendor nor will every lost person undergo the suffering of a Judas. God is perfectly just and each person will be rewarded or suffer precisely what he or she deserves.⁹⁸

When Judgment Day comes, God's creation of earth, sky and universe will undergo a radical change. Space itself will be rolled up like a scroll and

a New Heaven and a New Earth will replace the present Heaven and earth.⁹⁹ The old order will disappear.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How would you explain Revelation's parallel visions?
2. What is your view of the Millennium?
3. What does it mean that Satan is bound and how does that make you feel?
4. When do we reign: now, in Heaven, or later?
5. How do you see the first resurrection and second resurrection?
6. How do you understand Satan's release?
7. Why do you think Revelation is full of judgments?

Here is Peter's fiery meltdown in which the elements of the entire universe burn up, transforming all of creation.¹⁰⁰ Chuck Swindoll says, "Scary stuff, that business about the heavens passing away... that

will result in total wipeout of Planet Earth. Makes me wonder how. Oh, I've heard the same things you have about the super-atomic warheads and World War III. But somehow that never explained how."¹⁰¹

In matters outside our control, we learn to leave the 'how' up to God. Though perhaps, a good analogy is the transformation of our human bodies. The bodies of those who are alive and remain when Christ returns will be changed in an instant; the mortal becomes immortal, the corruptible becomes incorruptible, the natural becomes spiritual, the weak becomes powerful and the dishonorable becomes glorified.¹⁰²

In the next chapter, we see the New Heaven and New Earth that God creates and the New Jerusalem with which He rewards the righteous.

⁹⁸ The phrase "lake of fire" occurs in Revelation a total of six times (19:20; 20:10; 14 [twice], 15; 21:8). John explains the significance of this phrase by identifying it as the second death. ⁹⁹ Rev. 6:14; 16:20; 21:1; 2 Pet. 3:7, 10, 12-13 ¹⁰⁰ 2 Pet. 3:10,12; Rom. 8:21 ¹⁰¹ The Finishing Touch, Charles R. Swindoll, pgs. 536-537, Word Publishing, copyright 1994. ¹⁰² 1 Cor. 15:38-54

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

NEW JERUSALEM

SEVENFOLD VISAGE IN REVELATION 21:1 - 22:5

An old missionary and his wife had worked in Africa for many years. In 1909, they were returning by boat to New York to retire. They had no pension and nothing to take back to show for their many years of labor. When they boarded the boat, they discovered they were on the same ship as President Teddy Roosevelt, who was returning from one of his big-game hunting expeditions in Africa. They watched the fanfare that accompanied the President's entourage as passengers tried to catch a glimpse of the man. No one, however, paid any attention to them. As the ship crossed the ocean, the old missionary said to his wife, "It doesn't seem fair. We have given our lives to serve God in Africa for years. Here Roosevelt comes back from a hunting trip and everybody makes a big deal about it. But nobody gives two hoots about us." "Dear, you shouldn't feel that way," his wife said. "But I do," the old missionary replied.

When the ship docked, a band was waiting to greet the President. The mayor and other dignitaries were there. The papers were all about the President's arrival. The old missionaries' arrival was in stark contrast to the President's. No one noticed them as they slipped off the ship and found a small apartment in town. That night the man said to his wife, "It is just not fair." Equally despondent, she replied, "Why don't you talk to the Lord about it?" A while later he came out of the bedroom, but now his face was completely different. His wife asked, "Dear, what has changed?" "The Lord answered me," he said. "I told Him how I felt that Roosevelt receives a tremendous homecoming, when no one even came out to meet us. After I poured out my heart to Him, Jesus touched me, simply saying, "'But my son, you're not home yet!'"

This earth is not our home. We are just passing through. It will help us along the way to consider that our home is the New Jerusalem. John's preview, in chapter twenty-one and twenty-two, is meant to motivate us in our homeward journey. So let us ponder John's vision of our eternal home in seven manageable points. We shall see that the Holy City is a picture of absolute perfection. We will also discover that we can only appreciate what it is like by contrasting it to what it is not like. When John sees the New Creation he is overwhelmed by the "newness" of it all! So let us have a good look, since we will stay there a lot longer than a beach side holiday house.



NEW JERUSALEM, NEW HEAVEN AND EARTH UNVEILED

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.”¹

The old creation is removed for God to show us the New Heaven and Earth.² This taking away of the old is graphically illustrated in a scene from the movie, “Titanic.” A preacher stands on the sinking ship’s deck and quotes from this portion of Revelation, *“the old order has passed away.”* As you hear those words, you also hear the heavy groan of ship’s steel structure as the large luxury liner begins to turn on its side from the flooding waters. While she turns, you watch vast cupboards of expensive china crash onto the floor in a thousand pieces. In a flash, you witness massive amounts of water rush headlong into her stately cabins. Amidst the sounds of desperate cries, the ship then makes her death plunge, out of sight, into the vast, icy ocean.

OLD WORLD PASSES AWAY

After the wrecking ball judgments of the previous chapters, a perfect world is presented - one that differs radically from this present world. This current world emerged out of the waters of Noah’s deluge; so a New World comes forth from God’s fiery judgment. Peter draws this comparison.³ “Long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth...the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire...But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.”⁴

John uses this term “new” nine times; four of them appear in the first verse of chapter twenty-one. Of the two Greek words for new, John only uses the word “kainos,” meaning “qualitatively new.” It differs from the term “neos,” meaning “not previously in existence,” a term John never uses. John’s word for “new” conveys the idea of something that is new, but has its origin in the old. For example, the New Command came from the old one; the New Jerusalem follows the old Jerusalem; the new man is a transformation of the old man.⁵ And the New Heaven and the New Earth come out of the old. God does not annihilate the earth. Instead, He will transform the creation in a process of metamorphosis by which creation itself will experience freedom from the bondage of decay.⁶

¹ Rev. 21:1-2 ² Heb. 10:9 ³ (2 Peter 3:5ff) The Book of Isaiah also has the promise of a New Heaven and Earth. (65:17). ⁴ 2 Peter 3:10, 12 ⁵ Phil. 3:21 ⁶ Rom. 8:21

COMES DOWN

The New Jerusalem is “*coming down out of heaven from God.*”⁷ Abraham went out from the city of Ur, looking for a city whose chief architect and builder is God.⁸ Abraham’s journey of faith is ours. His going out is contrasted to Nimrod, who built his own city at Babel with a tower to reach Heaven. Heaven is, however, beyond the reach of sinful men, who fall short of God’s glory. God takes the initiative here, bringing the Holy City down to earth.

The Holy City possesses a beauty and fullness that only Heaven can produce. The city is teeming with the Redeemed, lovely as a bride adorned for her husband. Jesus has cleansed her, prepared her and now presents her without wrinkle or blemish to Himself.⁹ The city of God is people of faith that come down with Christ at His coming. The New Jerusalem, coming down, also conveys that Heaven and earth are united, revealing a new intimacy between God and His people, far beyond what Adam knew in Eden. Such closeness can only be developed through many toils and snares.

Imagine the joy when we all receive our new, glorious bodies. What was earthly, weak, aging and mortal is changed into what is heavenly, powerful, eternal and immortal. God provides the very best to those who love Him. So we do not fear the end of this world any more than our own death. We speak of our earnest desire to be with Christ.¹⁰ Too many Christians, however, seek their portion in this world and live no different than the earth’s inhabitants. They fail to ponder the fact that the best part, by far, is still to come.

We need the attitude of the ninety-year-old woman who was given only two months to live. She had her pastor come to discuss her funeral. She told him which songs she wanted sung, what Scriptures she would like read, and what outfit she would wear when buried. While the pastor stood to leave, she suddenly remembered something very important to her. “There’s one more thing,” she said excitedly. “I want to be buried with a fork in my right hand.” The pastor looked at the woman, not knowing quite what to say. “That surprises you, doesn’t it?” she said. “In all my years of attending church socials and potluck dinners, I remember, as the dishes of the main course were being cleared, someone would announce, “Keep your fork.” That meant something more was coming like velvety chocolate cake or deep-dish apple pie. I want people to see that fork in my hand and wonder, ‘What’s with the fork?’ Then I want you to tell them my story at the funeral. ‘I want my fork to be a lifelong reminder to everyone that the best is still to come.’”

⁷New Jerusalem does not refer to an earthly city in Israel but to a heavenly city. The Book of Hebrews highlights this city, also know as Mount Zion – the city of the living God. (Heb. 12:22-24). ⁸ Heb. 11:10 ⁹ Eph. 5:26-27 ¹⁰ Phil. 1:21-23



NEW JERUSALEM IS GOD WITH MAN

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.”¹¹

What is the best part of living in the New Jerusalem? Is it that everything is absolutely free like a very long, all expense paid World Sweepstakes Holiday? *“I will give to drink without cost.”* God’s manifest presence is the best part! Everything else is an added benefit. God’s age-old promise is fulfilled in the New Jerusalem. *“I will put my sanctuary amongst them forever. My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God and they will be my people.”¹²*

GOLDEN TREAD

God’s love is the golden thread, woven into the fabric of Scripture. All the Law and the Prophets hang on His love. The entire act of creation and the whole redemptive history is an outworking of this love story, which has been rightly called, ‘The Sacred Romance.’ This thread of God’s abiding love binds us to Him more closely than the closest bonds known on earth - than the bonds between parents and their children or a husband and a wife. Nothing can dissolve it. Nor can anything separate us from God’s love in Christ.¹³

Jason Tuskes, an Honor student, was very close to his mother, his wheelchair-bound father and his younger brother Christian. He was an excellent swimmer and loved scuba diving. He left home one morning to explore an underwater cave near his home in Florida. He planned to be back that evening to celebrate his mom’s birthday. But Jason became wedged in a deep, narrow passageway. When he knew he would not resurface, he shed his yellow air tank and unsheathed his diver’s knife. With his tank as a tablet and his knife as a pen, he spent his remaining seconds writing one last message. *“I love you mom, dad and Christian. I will see where there are no goodbyes.”* Then he drowned. God’s love to His own family is etched on a Roman cross. They are blood red and say, *“I love you and want to spend eternity with you.”*

NO GOODBYES

“And God himself will be with them” is reminiscent of a name given to Jesus. Emmanuel is *“God with us.”¹⁴* It is Jesus who makes it possible for a holy God to dwell with us. God is reconciled to us and we are at peace with Him. Jesus’

¹¹ Rev. 21:3 ¹² (Ezek. 37:26-27) Literally “they will be his peoples.” The plural, “peoples,” since they come from “every tribe, tongue, people and nation.” ¹³ Rom. 8:35ff ¹⁴ Matt. 1:23; Isa. 7:14

death satisfies God's demand for justice, removes Satan's claim, cleanses us from all unrighteousness and inspires us to truly love God in return.

God's great love for us is only fully experienced in the New Jerusalem. "In the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus." "As it is written: 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.'" ¹⁵ It is vital to know that until that day we can and we must keep ourselves in God's love. ¹⁶

Only a veil separates us from eternity. A veil is the thinnest and frailest of partitions. It is but a fine tissue, a delicate fabric of embroidery. It waves in the wind; the touch of a child may stir it and an accident may rend it. The veil that hides Heaven is our embodied existence - the veil of the flesh. So slight is it that the puncture of a thorn, the touch of an insect's sting, the breath of an infected atmosphere, may make it shake and fall. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, in the throb of a pulse, in the flash of a thought, our spirit could leave our bodies and pass into the light and amazement of eternity.



NEW JERUSALEM REPLACES THE OLD ORDER

"He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true. "He said to me: 'It is done.'" I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. " ¹⁷

The wiping away of every tear is a telling portrait of God's tender love. Like a mother who gently wipes away the tears from the eyes of her weeping child, so the Lord God stoops down to dry the tear-filled eyes of His children. Ever since mankind's fall into sin, countless tears have been shed so that this present world can indeed be called a vale of tears. But "the Sovereign Lord will wipe away tears from all the faces." ¹⁸

NEGATIONS

John uses negations to describe our eternal state. *"No more death, nor mourning or crying or pain."* In other words, the apostle tells us what is not there in order to help us understand how very different it is from anything we have experienced so far. ¹⁹ Try to imagine a city without griefs or graves, without sins or sorrows, without sicknesses or hospitals, without births or burials. Imagine no fears, guilt, or regrets - no negative emotions there.

¹⁵ Eph. 2:7; 1 Cor. 2:9; 1 John 3:1-2 ¹⁶ Jude 21 ¹⁷ Rev. 21:4-6 ¹⁸ Isa. 25:8 ¹⁹ 1 Cor. 2:9

How can John convey the wonder of what he saw. To illustrate his difficulty, imagine you wanted to tell an Eskimo about tropical Africa. The Eskimo knows only the snowy, cold of the North Pole. But you wish to tell him of the lush jungles. You could hardly begin by telling him about palm trees and elephants. He has no point of reference for these. It is better to start by telling him what is not there: no snow, no ice, no polar bear and no cold. And so the New Testament uses many negations to describe our eternal state. Peter says we have an inheritance that can “never perish, spoil or fade.”²⁰ How unlike all we know on earth: “where moth and rust do not destroy, where thieves do not break in and steal,”²¹ “neither marry nor are they given in marriage.”²²

NEW EVERYTHING

God says, “*I am making everything new.*”²³ Here is the glorious outcome of His redemptive plan - “the renewal of all things.”²⁴ God begins by renewing men through the work of Christ.²⁵ And He concludes with the renewal of Heaven and Earth.²⁶ God says, “*It is done,*” as if it were already a reality.²⁷ That is how true and trustworthy His words are. The words, “*It is done,*” were spoken when the seventh angel had poured out the seventh plague.²⁸ These plagues constituted God’s wrath in deconstructing this evil world. Now God utters the words, “*It has been done,*” to announce the complete reconstruction of creation. Both are as certain as if they had already happened.²⁹

In Revelation, God is revealed as controlling the conclusion of every situation. He sovereignly rules over His creation through His Son. Jesus is the Alpha and Omega; the first and the last letter of the Greek alphabet (our A to Z). He therefore sees the End and knows how to bring about all that He has purposed. He knows from eternity those who are His and has prepared a Kingdom for them from the foundation of the world. He freely gives to them the New Creation as their inheritance. Being God’s children and being heirs of all things is an unbreakable bond.³⁰ “*He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.*”³¹

FINAL CONTRAST

*“But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars - their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”*³²

²⁰ 1 Peter 1:4 ²¹ Matt. 6:20 ²² Matt. 22:23 ²³ OT prophecy. ²⁴ Acts 3:21 ²⁵ 2 Cor. 5:17 ²⁶ Rev. 4:2,9,10; 5:1,7,15: 19:4; 20:11 ²⁷ Literally, “they have become reality.” Derived not from the verb to do, but from the verb to become. ²⁸ Rev. 16:17 ²⁹ God speaks of the future with such certainty that the verbs are translated in the past tense (Isa. 14:15; Ezek. 28:18). ³⁰ “Now if we are children, then we are heirs.” (Gal. 3:29; 4:7; Eph. 3:6; Tit. 3:7). ³¹ Rev. 21:7 ³² Rev. 21: 8

The wicked are sentenced to the second death for specific reasons. John's short list spells out who is cast into the fire and why. The "cowardly" or spineless top the list. They fear danger and are afraid to confess Jesus' name. They stand in contrast to those who courageously believe and remain faithful unto death. The next trait for the lost is "unbelievers," which explains why they are cowards. "Detestable people" follow. Those polluted by the world.³³

These verses encourage the saints to be faithful and persevere a little longer that they might inherit all that the Father has prepared for them. He offers the water of life free of charge to all. You must simply thirst. What reassuring words these are since most of us have known many anxious needs during our short lives. But in Heaven, there will be no unmet needs, worrisome bills, or even unsatisfied desires. How different that is than this world.

Without cost makes me think of Covedale's Carnival when I was eight. While going into the school's dumpster, looking for a baseball we hit, Ralph and I found a whole box of unused tickets from that year's carnival. Although the tickets were green the next year, we kept our red ones. Sure enough the following year they were red again. Ride what you will over and over again, and eat what you want, popcorn, pops and pizza. We had all the tickets we needed. In fact, we shared with our friends like the last of the big spenders - Bill Gates for a day. The good thing about eating and drinking in the New Jerusalem is no guilt afterwards. It really is free and it is also fat free!



NEW JERUSALEM IS THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

*"One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God."*³⁴

An angel shows John the Bride, who was first spoken of in chapter nineteen. She is now seen in all her glory.³⁵ Recall, an angel had showed John the Great Prostitute, introduced in chapter seventeen and judged in eighteen. Revelation's cyclical approach is demonstrated again. The contrasts here are also striking and vivid. The Great Prostitute personified the wicked city of Babylon the Great. Her lover, the Beast, ends up hating and destroying her. The Bride, however, is the wife of the Lamb, who gave Himself to save her. She also symbolizes a city, but one that is holy – the New Jerusalem. Note the parallel wording that is used in both of their introductions.

³³ Likened to dogs, the wicked stay outside the Holy City - where in old Jerusalem a burning dump yard was located. ³⁴ Rev. 21:9-10 ³⁵ Rev. 19:7 and 21:2,9

Revelation 17:1,3

“And one of the seven angels who had the Bowls came and talked to me and said, “Come, I will show you the judgement of the great prostitute.” And he brought me to the desert in the Spirit.

There I saw a woman sitting on a Scarlet beast that was full of names of blasphemy.”

Revelation 21:9,10

“And one of the seven angels who held the Bowls full of the last plagues came and talked with me and said, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” And he brought me in the Spirit to a great and high mountain and he showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, that came down out of the heavens.”

Another contrast is how the Spirit took John to a desert to see the Great Whore; whereas, he takes him to a high mountain to show him the Holy City. The Harlot City appears in the wilderness, since her real nature is like a desolate wasteland, but the Bride City is seen from a mountain due to her sweeping beauty.³⁶ Standing on a high mountain, John is able to see and describe for us the entire majestic scope of the descending city.

LIKE JEWELS

*“It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.”*³⁷ The full beauty of Christ’s Church will not be evident until the Lord returns, although she is already adorned with gifts, graces, and fruit. Most becoming of all is her beauty of holiness. John’s image of bridal adornment with costly jewels is found in Isaiah. Throughout history, rare jewels were used to confirm relationships as well as enhance a bride’s appearance.³⁸ Like Abraham’s servant who “put the ring in Rebecca’s nose and the bracelets on her arms.”³⁹

The story line of the Lamb and His Bride follow a Jewish betrothal. A virgin woman is promised to a man, with the understanding that the couple have no sexual relations during the period between betrothal and wedding. The Church is betrothed to Christ, even though the wedding has not taken place. “I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.”⁴⁰

The brilliant light of God’s glory is compared to that of a precious stone, namely, a crystallized jasper stone. Jasper occurs four times in Revelation: first in the throne room scene and three times in the New Jerusalem.⁴¹ Jasper reproduces indescribable splendor that John fully utilizes. These descriptions convey the transcendent glory of the New Jerusalem, and are

³⁶ “In visions of God he took me...and set me on a very high mountain.” (Ezek. 40:2) ³⁷ Rev. 21:11

³⁸ Isa. 61:10 ³⁹ Gen. 24:47-52 ⁴⁰ 2 Cor. 11:2-3 ⁴¹ Rev. 4:3; 21:11; 18, 19

not a photographic rendition. John uses comparisons as indicated by the word “like” so that we can obtain a sense of the city’s glory. We read that her gold is like clear glass. Gold is a metal and not transparent, but combining gold and glass best expresses the beauty that John saw.

Each of John’s descriptions could be interpreted as various spiritual realities. For example, since faith is compared to gold earlier in Revelation and in the New Testament, its streets of pure gold may reveal the purified faith of its inhabitants.⁴² “And now these three remain, faith, hope and love.”⁴³ Doubtless, what God builds far surpasses man-made glitter. With that in mind, Paul admonishes us to build on the foundation of faith in Christ “using gold, silver, costly stones” rather than “wood, hay, or straw,” since all of our works on that Day will be exposed by pure light and tested with intense heat.⁴⁴

GATES AND WALLS

“It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north...The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb...The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper...and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls...The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.”⁴⁵

Isaiah’s prophecy of a restored Jerusalem is fulfilled in the Heavenly City. “O afflicted city...I will build you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with sapphires. I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones...I will make Your gates of sparkling jewels.”⁴⁶ Each gate in the New Jerusalem is made of a single pearl, which reminds us of Jesus’ parable of the Pearl of Great Price. The merchant sold all his possessions to buy that one pearl of great price. To enter and dwell in the Holy City is worth all we possess. For like a priceless pearl, it is free from any defects, for her inhabitants are made flawless by God’s love.

The city’s great, high walls convey shelter and communicate security. Twelve angels also safeguard the twelve entrances to the city, protecting the inhabitants from anything that could harm or defile them. The city is totally safe. The twelve gates also pave the way for free and easy movement within the city. Here is the first city with no traffic jams or crime. The city’s wall is built on twelve foundation stones, partially above ground, exhibiting the names of the twelve apostles. Also on the twelve gates are written the names of

⁴² Job 23:10; 1 Peter 1:7; Rev. 3:18 ⁴³ 1 Cor. 13:13 ⁴⁴ 1 Cor. 3:12ff ⁴⁵ Rev. 21:12-18 ⁴⁶ Isa. 54:11-

the twelve tribes of Israel. The number twelve occurs ten times in the last two chapters. Throughout Revelation, that number stands for God's people.⁴⁷

Revelation teaches that Jews and Gentiles are members of God's household. "Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone."⁴⁸ Apostles are at ground level and the tribes are at gate level. Believers from both the Old and New Testament era are given entrance and shelter in the city. We saw this in the twenty-four elders (twelve twice), which stood for New Testament Christians as well as Old Testament saints. They worship the one true God in unity.

Twelve is emphasized not only by the twelve apostolic foundations and twelve tribal gates, but also by John's list of twelve precious stones. These stones remind us of the breastplate that the Highpriest wore when he entered the Holy of Holies. Each particular stone on his breastplate represented one of the twelve tribes. Many of the stones in the Holy City were also part of the Highpriest's breastplate. The connection between them may be that all of God's people are a royal priesthood in the New Jerusalem.⁴⁹

MEASUREMENTS

*"The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls... The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement, which the angel was using."*⁵⁰

Earlier John measured God's temple, altar, and those who worshiped there.⁵¹ He measured what would happen on earth in order to complete the temple. Now an angel uses a golden measuring rod to measure its eternal dimensions.⁵² Its measurements are listed. The city is foursquare. Its length and breadth and height are all equal. It reminds us of the inner sanctuary in the Old Testament, which measured twenty cubits in length, breadth, and height.

For a metropolis, its dimensions are unlike any city known to man. The city is a perfect cube. A cube designates perfect space. It has twelve edges: four at the top, four at the bottom, and four at the sides. In the New Jerusalem, each edge is twelve thousand stadia, which when multiplied by twelve comes to 144,000. The thickness of the city's walls is also 144 cubits thick. This same number represents the followers of the Lamb.

¹² ⁴⁷ Twelve Tribes were sealed and the Woman had twelve stars. (Rev. 7:5-8; 12:1). ⁴⁸ Eph. 2:20
⁴⁹ Rev. 1:6 ⁵⁰ Rev. 21:15-17 ⁵¹ Rev. 11:1 ⁵² Heavenly items, in Revelation, are always represented by gold: lampstands, harps, bowls, crowns, altar and even streets in the city.

Although an angel measures the city, his measurements are in human terms. In our calculations, the size of the city is staggering. For twelve thousand stadia is more than fourteen hundred miles. The city totals nearly 2 million square miles. You don't need to worry about space. God has provided plenty of room for everyone who was ever conceived. I have read calculations on numbers of people and available space for each one, but I will refrain from speculating. It will surpass our grandest imaginations. "In my Father's house are *many* mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you...I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also."⁵³

John goes to great lengths to portray the New Jerusalem for us, because God wants us to know that it is an actual destination. I also feel that every detail has deep spiritual significance, which is what we need to value.



NEW JERUSALEM HAS NO NEED OF TEMPLE OR SUNSHINE

*"I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it."*⁵⁴

The ultimate temple is realized in the New Jerusalem. God dwells with His people. He is their temple and they have immediate and direct access to Him at all times. He has made good His promise to dwell with them forever. "The Lord is there." And He fills all things with His sacred presence. "When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all."⁵⁵

BEYOND IMAGINATION

What will it be like to dwell with God and one another in the New Jerusalem? Someone compared our feeble notions of what our eternal state will be like to unborn twins in their mother's womb, trying to picture what life would be like once born and grown-up. The more intuitive twin says to her sister, "I'm sure its not like here - we'll move around freely and feed ourselves!" "How can that be?" her twin replies. But going further, her sister predicts, "We'll even be able to carry babies like ourselves in our own body?" I can hear her twin's response to that. "Never!" But it is true.

"What is heaven like?" A question, my twelve-year-old, Nathan asked me. More specifically, he asked, "What'd you do there?" Before I answered, he went on to query. "What about time once you die? How is it measured?"

⁵³ John 14:2-3 ⁵⁴ Rev. 21:22-24 ⁵⁵ 1 Cor. 15:28

I admit that it would be a poor heaven, which such beings as us could fully conceive or anticipate. We might ask ourselves about Heaven, what the prophet asked Israel. “Can you measure the waters of the ocean in the palm of your hand, can you determine the span of the universe with a ruler? Or weigh the mountains in scales?”⁵⁶ No, we cannot fully grasp what life there will be like. But John gives us an inkling of it, because God wants us to look forward to it like children who await a big move and a new home.

To answer questions about life in the New Jerusalem, the negations continue. “*No temple, no sun or moon.*” The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple and the source of light. Like the Psalmist said to God, “in your light we see light.”⁵⁷ “God is light and in him is no darkness at all.”⁵⁸ Isaiah’s words are also alluded to here. “The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the LORD will be your everlasting light, and *your days of sorrow will end.*”⁵⁹

JOY UNSPEAKABLE

Research has proven how important sunlight is to our emotional well being. Sunlight activates a release of helpful endormorphines into our blood stream. On the other hand, days of overcast skies can be depressing. It is good to know that without sunlight or even sunlamps our “days of sorrow will end.”

No sun is a big one. It means “*that there should be time no longer*” as we know it.⁶⁰ Never rushing against the clock before the sun goes down. Hard to imagine? We are such creatures of time; and yet, in Heaven we will never worry about growing old or running out of time. To illustrate, someone said, “Suppose the whole world were a sea. When every thousand years expires a bird carries away one drop of it. It will come to pass that this sea, though very huge, shall be dried up in a thousand, million, billion years. Yet, the elect shall enjoy the Kingdom of Heaven not only for that long, but when the sea is dry; they shall enjoy it as long again. And when it is all done, they shall be as far from ending of this their joy as they were at the beginning.”

No sun proves that our eternal state is totally unnatural and unthinkable in physical terms. So what will it be like when we awake in the everlasting morning, and break the bonds of time and mortality? It will be far more satisfying than playing a favorite sport or doing a relaxing hobby. For there we will drink of the river of life, and behold all the wonders God can create.

⁵⁶ Isa. 40:12 ⁵⁷ Ps. 36:9 ⁵⁸ 1 John 1:5 ⁵⁹ Isa. 60:19-20

It will be like when the queen of Sheba came to Jerusalem to see Solomon's kingdom. She was so overwhelmed, she said, "The report I heard in my own country...I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told me."⁶¹

How different it is to see something than to merely hear about it. As the saying goes, "a picture is worth a thousand words." I think it will be like the amazement of the little girl who was blind from birth and only knew the beauties of creation from her mother's lips. Then a renowned surgeon successfully operated on her eyes. Three days later, as the last bandage dropped away, she flew into her mother's arms and then to the window and the open door. As the glories of earth rolled into her vision, she ran back to her mother exclaiming, "Oh, Mama, it is so beautiful?" "So very beautiful. You never told me it was so beautiful!"



NEW JERUSALEM NEVER SHUTS ITS GATES

*"On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life."*⁶²

The city's description is full of strong negation and figurative import. "On no day will its gates be shut." Isaiah's prophecy is reiterated. "Your gates will always stand open. They will never be shut, day or night. So that men may bring you the wealth of the nation."⁶³ In ancient times, city gates were shut at nightfall for the safety of her citizens. Everlasting openness signifies that destructive beings, human or angelic, can never enter the city. On the contrary, the open doors suggest that the residents are absolutely safe from all evil forces, since these have been consigned to the Lake of Fire.

NEVER AGAIN

Heaven is a place of complete victory. This present world is the land of sword and spear - the one to come of wreath and crown. Isaiah says, "O Jerusalem, the holy city. The uncircumcised (those outside of God's covenant) and defiled (those who have corrupted themselves) will not enter you again."⁶⁴ "Sorcerers, fornicators, murderers, idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices deceit" have no means of access.⁶⁵ The inhabitants of the world corrupted themselves by following their evil desires. The saints, however, denied themselves sinful pleasures and lived a life of godly service. Because they given their lives away, the saints will find their lives in Heaven.

⁶⁰ Rev. 10:6 ⁶¹ 1 Kings 10:4-7 ⁶² Rev. 21:25-27 ⁶³ Isa. 60:1 ⁶⁴ Isa. 52:1 ⁶⁵ Rev. 22:15; see 21:8

One lonely night a man had a dream of Heaven and hell. First he saw hell in which multitudes were seated around banqueting tables where every desirable food, beautifully prepared, awaited consumption. But those seated around the table had no means of feeding themselves. Instead of hands, there was a long fork and spoon at the end of their arms; too long to reach back to put food in their mouths. Frustration and anger was stamped on their faces. Some were hitting one another with their eating implements. In the second dream, he saw a similar room with banquet tables. The people seated around the table also had long forks and spoons at the end of their arms. But the scene was jovial and light as they fed one another continually and conversed at length.

The redeemed nations, as part of God's family, bring their best into the City, meaning her inhabitants originate from every tribe, language, people, and nation. They are those of whom the world was not worthy. God's cream of the crop. With the gates never shut, the city is a place of untiring activity. It is the land of the living and not of the dead; and yet, the city's activity is not that which men engage in to gain anything. People have already become what they are. It is relational activity. All freely share what they have become!

PIE IN THE SKY

Peter says, it is joy unspeakable and full of glory.⁶⁶ It far exceeds our happiest moments in this life - beyond our wildest dreams. I have decided that I will no longer disdain "pie in the sky" theology due to today's "steak on the plate" creed. I know that there are many practical benefits in this life from our faith in Christ, but too often the Church has appealed strictly to our current welfare, and made light of eternal rewards in Heaven. We appeal to our lower nature and have forgotten that we seek a city to come. Paul, who was motivated to sacrifice and delay his gratification for Heaven's sake, said, "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men."⁶⁷

Pastor Bill Leslie observes, "as churches grow wealthier and more successful, their preference in hymns changes from "This World is not my home" to "This is my Father's world." C. S. Lewis reminds us, that we dare not discount the value of future rewards to motivate heroic living. "Indeed," he wrote, "if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea."⁶⁸

⁶⁶ 1 Peter 1:8 ⁶⁷ 1 Cor. 15:19 ⁶⁸ "The Jesus I Never Knew," Philip Yancey, pg. 111.



NEW JERUSALEM ENJOYS GOD'S FACE

“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face... And they will reign for ever and ever.”⁶⁹

God's revelation begins in Genesis with Adam and Eve in Paradise, with the tree of life and a river to water the Garden.⁷⁰ Jesus' Revelation concludes with a picture of the Redeemed in Paradise with the tree of life and the river of life. As in Ezekiel's vision, the throne is the source of the river.⁷¹ It flows from the throne and gushes forth down Main Street.⁷²

SOURCE OF ETERNAL LIFE

The tree of life is said to produce *“twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month.”* Since the division of night and day will have ceased to function, and chronological time in terms of months is over, we should look for the symbolic significance of these images. For the river and tree represent the Holy Spirit and Christ - the source of life.⁷³ The Redeemed are united to Christ by the Holy Spirit and so constantly receive His life as does all of creation.

Twelve, which refers to God's own, is the number of crops the tree produces. This reveals its sufficiency to minister life to all of God's people. The leaves of the tree are not for healing diseases, but for the purpose of ongoing rejuvenation.⁷⁴ For we were told that there is no longer any pain, death or curse. The curse came because Adam ate of a tree, which brought sickness pain and death. Partaking of Christ, the tree of life, provides health and well-being for those from every nation.⁷⁵

GOD'S FACE

God and the Lamb now occupy one throne, which is also connected to His servants and a remarkable promise of them seeing His face. Throughout Scripture, we are told that no living person ever saw the face of God. Moses was permitted to see his back but not his face. *“No one has ever seen God.”⁷⁶* But the glorified saints will see His face.

⁶⁹ Rev. 22:1-5 ⁷⁰ Gen. 2:9 ⁷¹ Ezek. 47:5 ⁷² History is compared to a river that begins at God's throne and flows back to the throne. ⁷³ John 4:10-11; 7:38 ⁷⁴ The Greek word for healing (therapeian) means health giving. ⁷⁵ Ezek. 47:12; Zech. 14:11 ⁷⁶ Ex. 33:20, 23; John 1:18; 6: 46; 1 John 4:12

The old man and his grandson were sitting on a dock late one afternoon. It was their last time together though neither knew it. They chatted about everything. “What was my dad like as a boy and grandma before she passed on?” “What’s it like when you’re really old?” Questions only a little guy will so directly ask his grandpa. Finally, the boy looked up and asked, “Grandpa, does anybody ever see God?” “Son,” said the old man as he looked across the still waters of the lake, “it’s getting so now I hardly see anything else.”⁷⁷

When we see the sights of Heaven, we will be like Bartimaeus when he received his sight. All his life, he had heard about the sun, sky, trees and grass, but never saw them. He only felt the warmth of the sun and heard the rustle of the leaves on the tree and felt the grass beneath him. He could hear his mother’s voice but he never saw her form. It is as if we too were born blind, and have only occasionally heard and felt what John saw. But once Bartimaeus’ eyes were opened, he saw the blue sky above the palm tree groves of Jericho. He looked out over his other shoulder and saw the lush green hills of Moab. But more wonderful than all that, he saw a world full of people. And above all, when he looked up, he saw the face of Jesus, the person who had restored his sight! “*Seeing His face*” is surely the most awesome sight we can expect to see in the New Jerusalem.

RELATIONSHIPS

Ah, now we are coming to the reality of the New Jerusalem. It is a city full of people, living in community with God and one another. Once there, we will know the prophets, apostles, and saints of old as well as our own departed loved ones that trusted in Jesus. We shall know and love them better than we ever did when they walked and talked with us. For Heaven is a relational place where life is shared at the deepest possible level.

Consider how awesome it will be to see God, the great mystery behind all mysteries - the Self-existent One! He is the One who created not only the universe but also people in His image and likeness. He made them with a capacity to know and love. If that were not enough, He became one of us to reveal His love. “For we know in part and we prophesy in part...When I was a child...I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child...Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”⁷⁸

When I was boy, I thought of heaven as a great shining city with vast walls. But there was nobody that I really knew there. I had only heard of the angels

⁷⁷ Adopted from “*Daily Bread*,” 2001 edition, November 20. ⁷⁸ 1 Cor. 13:9-12

and saints of long ago. Then my dad died. Heaven was no longer a place where I knew no earthly being. Someone was there that I knew so well. Some of us see the faces of children, some young men, some tired fathers and mothers who were faithful to the end. May all our loved ones arrive home at last. Yes, Heaven is our home, our Father's house.

*“O then what raptured greetings, On Canaans' happy shore,
What knitting severed friendships up, Where partings are no more!”*

“Home” - oh, how sweet the sound of that word! “I am going home.” My most precious recollections of my earthly father's house are not those of playing in the yard, although I enjoyed countless hours of bouncing the ball off the wall in the backyard. Nor are they memories in the basement where I played numerous games with my brothers and sisters. Nor are my best memories those of my bedroom though I slept so soundly there. My most precious recollections are of the living room where, after having eaten our delicious Christmas meal, we ate still more rare delicacies like cashews and imported chocolates while we opened our Christmas gifts.

Life in the Holy City is like a relational banquet, an endless wedding feast. Our souls shall be satisfied forevermore. It is like spiritual buffets where you dine with those you love most. It is a family affair, where each one “will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.”⁷⁹ And we shall all dwell in the very presence of God, our Father, and Jesus, our Savior.⁸⁰

FOREVER AND EVER

“And they will reign forever and ever.” My prayer is that our study of Revelation will remove from each of us the fear of death and dread related to the end of the world. For the day, which many fear as the death-day of time, becomes the birthday of eternity. And the End is but the Beginning of an endless day when cosmic time has been turned into eternity.

Because Jesus rose again, there is a resurrection coming for us. Tony Campolo illustrates our coming resurrection. He tells of a preacher, in the inner city of Philadelphia, who preached a sermon Tony says he will never forget. For an hour and a half the pastor repeated these words over and over again. “It's Friday, but Sunday is coming.” I've never heard anything like it, Tony said. He kept saying it, but it was fresher and fuller each time. The congregation was spellbound by the power of it. ‘It's Friday. Jesus' mother, Mary, is crying her
⁷⁹ Matt. 8:11 ⁸⁰ Jesus said, “I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.” (Matt. 26:29).

heart out. That's her son up there on the cross. He's dying the agonising death of crucifixion as a criminal. But it's only Friday,' the preacher said. 'Sunday is coming. The apostles were really down and out. Evil men killed Jesus, their beloved leader. But it was only Friday. Sunday is a coming.' Each time he said, 'It's Friday,' the crowd began to respond in anticipation of 'Sunday is a coming.'⁸² God would have us anticipate our coming resurrection Sunday and eternal life in His Holy City.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What in your old life needs taking away?
2. Why does God save the best for last?
3. How does the golden thread of God's love made fully known make you feel?
4. How would you describe Heaven to a child who is age ten?
5. Why do you think John takes so much time describing the New Jerusalem?
6. Why would most people rather talk "steak on the plate" than "pie in the sky"?
7. What do you think you will see when you look into Jesus' eyes?

C.S. Lewis closes his book, "*The Last Battle*," when Peter, Edmund and Lucy meet the Great Lion Aslan, who is a symbol of Christ in the New Jerusalem. He tells them they died in a car accident.

Lewis wrote, "And as He spoke, He no longer looked to them like a Lion; but the things that began to

happen after were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories...But for them it is only the beginning of the real story."⁸³

⁸² R. J. Lavin "I Am the Resurrection and the Life." ⁸³ "*The Last Battle*," C.S. Lewis

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

CONCLUSION - OUR RESPONSE A SEVENFOLD RESPONSE IN REVELATION 22:6-21

Missionary Greg Fisher shares how West African Bible students can ask some of the most penetrating questions about minute details of Scripture. On one occasion he says, “the question took me by surprise. “Reverend,” the student asked, “First Thessalonians 4:16 says that Christ will descend from Heaven with a loud command. I would like to know what that command will be?” Fisher wanted to leave the question unanswered, saying that we must not go past what Scripture has revealed, but as he wrote later in his journal. “My mind wandered to an encounter I had earlier in the day with a refugee from the Liberian civil war. The man, a high school principal, told me how a death squad apprehended him. After several hours of terror, he narrowly escaped. The escape cost him dearly. Two of his children lost their lives. The stark cruelty unleashed on an unsuspecting population has touched me deeply.”

“I also saw flashbacks,” Fisher wrote, “of the beggars that I pass each morning. Every day I see how poverty destroys dignity, robs men of the best of what it means to be human and sometimes substitutes the worst of what it means to be an animal. The vacant eyes of people who have lost all hope haunt me. ‘Reverend, you have not given me an answer. What will he say?’ The question hadn’t gone away. ‘Enough!’ I said. He will shout, ‘Enough!’ when He Returns. A look of surprise opened on the faces of all the students. ‘Enough suffering. Enough injustice. Enough terror. Enough death. Enough indignity. Enough sickness and disease. Enough time!’”

As we conclude our study, let us take to heart John’s message, and live in the light of Christ’s Return.¹ Jesus’ life and mission, His death and resurrection, and His living Lordship are only grasped in that light. Evangelism, discipleship and every aspect of the Christian life springs from such a perspective. We must live like one who is engaged in a race looking to the finishing line. I grew up playing Chess, which like any game is an end-state matter. The goal in Chess is to bring the opponent’s king into checkmate. I learnt that only moves that contribute to that end are ‘good’ moves. How many pieces I capture, how quickly I make my moves, how much my play impresses the spectators - these and all other factors have significance only insofar as they contribute to checkmating the king. The End gives meaning to everything.

¹ For the Christian “the End” is the goal; and that goal determines the meaning of history’s first to last moment. Hence, Christ’s Return is to the Christian what the resurrection was for Jesus.

BACK TO FRONT

John affirms that the one end that gives meaning to history is Christ's Return. His visions in Revelation follow this principle. They have a beginning with a definite end in view and are arranged to emphasize a sense of completion. Many have observed the strong correlation between the first and the last chapters, which show movement from the start with the end in mind. Notice the following ten points of correlation in the first and last chapter.

1:1, 4, 9	(1) John names himself	22:8
1:1	(2) An Angel sent	22:6
1:1	(3) What will soon take place	22:6
1:1	(4) The servants	22:6
1:3	(5) Reader blessed	22:7
1:3	(6) The Time is near	22:10
1:4	(7) Grace to you	22:21
1:8	(8) The Alpha and Omega	22:13
1:10	(9) The Spirit	22:17
1:17	(10) John falls down to worship	22:8

These parallels are more than just thematic. There is also a parallel of action. Set within the context of a letter, it begins "*John to the seven churches,*" (1:4) and ends with "*the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with all*" (22:21). The action starts with John directly addressing his audience and describing his sojourn on Patmos where he has a vision (1:9-10). It ends with John also directly addressing the reader, saying this is what he heard and saw (22:8). It uses the classic technique of a storyteller. The actual visions are framed in a letter, which helps us experience it as a unity and end on a note of urgency.

MY PRAYER

May John's message of Christ's Return give meaning to your Christian life. May you live from a perspective of that final day. May your experiences from start to finish be a revelation of Jesus Christ. This final chapter is dedicated to that end, as John outlines several practical responses to his prophecy. His epilogue will help you to gauge whether you are responding to his message. It will help you to know if you are keeping the prophecy of the book and allowing it to make a difference in your life. What kind of difference should this message make? Guess how many differences I find in the last chapter of Revelation? How did you know that I would list seven? Each difference begins with a 'W.' Then I briefly define that response. A portion of Scripture from John's last chapter follows with related explanations and exhortations.



WAITING: A RESPONSE OF PATIENT ENDURANCE

“The angel said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place. “Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.””

THREE SAYINGS

As God had shown the prophets of old, God has shown John *“the things that must soon take place.”* He shows us that history is not some scattered, isolated collection of transactions between God and various individuals. God’s action is seen in a much broader, all-inclusive frame of reference. There is a meaningful sequence and conclusion. Christ’s Return brings the fulfillment of God’s purposes in creation and redemptive history. All history is summed up in three simple sayings: He is coming (Old Testament - Past); He has come (New Testament - Present); He will come again (Revelation - Future).

The dramatic cry, *“Look, He is coming”* is the burden of Revelation. This motor of expectancy drove every aspect of the early Church’s life. It was the motivation and content of Jesus’ preaching and atoning work. It was the basis of the apostolic call to repentance and holy living. It was the Church’s source of vitality and the explanation of her distinctive character. It was the dynamic that defined her mission in the world. To restore the Church, then, is to restore to her a vital sense of this expectancy. This is all-important.

The call to keep the prophecy of Revelation is a call to patient waiting.³ To the Corinthians, Paul writes, *“Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.”*⁴ The Thessalonians were *“to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead - Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.”*⁵ To Titus, Paul wrote, *“we wait for the blessed hope - the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”*⁶ To the Hebrews, *“He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”*⁷

In the 1940’s, Samuel Beckett wrote a play called, *“Waiting For Godot.”* It is a simple story, regarded now as a classic. Two men stand on an empty stage, hands in their pockets, staring at each other. All they do is stand and stare. There is no action, no dialogue; they just stand there waiting for Godot. But who is Godot? Is he a person? A thing? An event? Christian ethicist Lewis Smedes suggests, Godot “stands for the pipe dreams that a lot of people hang

² Rev 22:6-7 ³ In Revelation, the saints in Heaven were also told to wait until their number was completed.” (Rev. 6:11). ⁴ 1 Cor. 1:7-8 ⁵ 1 Thess. 1:10 ⁶ Tit. 2:13 ⁷ Heb. 9:28

onto all their life as an escape.” As the play ends those men are standing on the stage doing nothing, just waiting.

When the 50th Anniversary of that play was celebrated, someone asked Beckett, “Now will you tell us who Godot is?” He answered, “How should I know?” It would be empty and meaningless “*Waiting for Godot*.” People waiting for what they do not even know while their empty lives quickly pass. How totally different is Christian waiting. We are eagerly waiting for Christ to come again and take us home with Him, while we actively take His message of salvation to every nation.⁸

• Waiting means that I eagerly long for Christ’s Return

“The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed...Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies...But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.”⁹

Are you eagerly waiting for the Lord to return? Although Christians are glad to know that Christ will return, many would like Him to wait.

• Waiting means that I am dressed and ready to go out of the door

“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”¹⁰

Waiting does not mean that I quit my job. It means that I evaluate my life and ask myself, “Am I being faithful at doing what God has called me to do?” We cannot expect Christ to wait until we are ready for Him to come.

• Waiting means that to I do not judge others as to their motives

“Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.”¹¹

Do not allow resentment and a critical spirit into your heart. “Keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.”¹² Judgment belongs to God; He has set the day for judgment.

• Waiting means that I am patient in times of trouble

“Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near.

⁸ “Our Daily Bread,” July 14, 2001. ⁹ Rom. 8:19, 23-25 ¹⁰ Phil. 3:20-21 ¹¹ 1 Cor. 4:5 ¹² Jude 1:21

Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!"¹³ His coming encourages endurance in difficulties.¹⁴



WORSHIPPING: A RESPONSE OF HOLY DEVOTION

"I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"¹⁵

An anticipation of Christ's Return inspires our worship and service of God. And worship fuels faith which in turn promotes expectation. John's vision of Christ's Return began while he worshiped. It was while all of Heaven worshiped that the Lamb loosed the Seals of the Scroll. So it is too when a congregation worships that revelatory words are spoken to men.

A QUESTION OF WHO

There is a great conflict in this world concerning who each of us will worship. All of us end up worshipping somebody or something. After the Fall, mankind "worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator."¹⁶ In spite of severe judgments *"they did not stop worshipping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood - idols that cannot see or hear or walk."*¹⁷ In the final analysis, it boils down to either worshipping Christ or the Beast.

We can encourage men to worship by meeting together and reminding ourselves that Jesus is coming.¹⁸ That Day was the subject on which the apostles spoke, when they were themselves most deeply moved and when they wished to move others most deeply. Today, however, most pastors only preach about Christ's first advent, failing to articulate His Return; yet, that is not what we find in Scripture. Every meal anticipates the Marriage Feast of the Lamb. "As often as you eat" you are reminded "until He comes!"¹⁹

DAY APPROACHING

A surprise element is added to the message, *"Behold, I am coming as a thief."* This strengthens an ever-ready attitude needed to serve God. Attempts to set a date, however, are terribly misguided. For by seeking to know the day, we would bypass the very reason God does not want us to know it.²⁰

¹³ James 5:7-9 ¹⁴ 1 Peter 1:4,7,13; James 5:7,8 ¹⁵ Rev. 22: 8-9 ¹⁶ Rom. 1:25 ¹⁷ Rev. 9:20 ¹⁸ Heb. 10:24,25 ¹⁹ Rev. 16:15 ²⁰ If we knew the Day, there would be no reason for us to be ready at all times. Servant Left in Charge, Maidens and Talent Parables all affirm that the time is short and He will come unexpectedly. This is Jesus' two-part affirmation on His Return. (1 Peter 4:7; 2 Peter 3:8-10).

God wants us to live each day for Him, and not be like clock-watchers at work who pass their time waiting to knock off, or like Sunday worshippers who look at their watches for the service to end. He wants us to focus on the job at hand.

In the 1987 N.C.A.A. Regional Finals, LSU was leading Indiana by eight points with only a few minutes left in the game. But LSU began playing a different ball game. The TV announcer pointed out that their players were watching the clock more than playing the game. As a result, Indiana closed the gap, beat LSU by one point and went on to win the championship.

Being aware of “the signs of the times” means that I expend my energies in opportune service and not on useless speculations.²¹ Efforts to fit John’s visions into a specific timeframe leads to serious error. Disappointment and disillusionment are common to all who have done so up to the present time. “I was sure I knew when the End would come. But that date has come and gone; my information was false. I have now lost all my expectancy.”

NEVER SPECULATE

Disappointed expectations blight Christian worship. Jesus comes - yes, He comes soon, but soon in God’s timing.²² God’s perspective on time must become ours as surely as His ways must also become our ways and His thoughts our thoughts. Only then can we avoid our own hurtful ways. I am not interested in speculating as to when Jesus will come. God would rather have me emphasize what the expectancy of Christ’s Return has to say about the quality of my life and actions right now.

During the Zimbabwe crisis from 1999 to 2007, Christians learnt a lesson along these lines. Many church leaders proclaimed, “Change is coming!” Change coming is part of the prophetic, for men need hope for better days. But some Church leaders started setting dates. Change will come after the Parliamentary Elections, then by Christmas, or by the Presidential Election. It became a bad joke like date-setting for Christ’s Return.

Date-setting has fostered not only disappointment, but a sardonic attitude, which has discouraged believers from talking about Christ’s Return. And yet, the Church is obliged to speak of Christ’s Return until He comes, because when the Church fails to announce that Christ is coming, she has fallen away from the truth of the matter and discourages the very Christian worship she would promote.

²¹ Eph. 5:16



WALKING: A RESPONSE OF DETERMINED LIVING

“Then he told me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy.”²³

This is a puzzling statement: *“He that is unjust let him be unjust still.”* The first time that I read it I was stumped. Why would it say that? I understood the call for *“He that is righteous let him be righteous still.”* But those who are corrupt should surely repent. Upon reflection, however, I understood the grave significance of these words. It is because the moment that Jesus returns people will remain righteous or unrighteous, holy or vile. These closing words drive home the urgency of Revelation’s message.

FINAL STATE

The entire New Testament carries the expectation of Christ’s appearing, and the last chapter of the last book awakes us to the reality of that Day in startling terms. How Jesus finds you is how you will remain for eternity. If you are unclean you will remain unclean for eternity. If you are righteous you will be fixed in a state of righteousness for all eternity. Satan’s nature was fixed in Eden. There was no possibility of change. And so it will be for you and I when Jesus returns.

In his book *“Feminine Faces,”* Clovis Chappel tells us about ancient Pompeii. When it was being excavated, the body of a woman was found mummified by the volcanic ashes of Mount Vesuvius. Her position told a tragic story. Her feet pointed toward the city gate, but her outstretched arms and fingers were straining for something that lay behind her. The treasure for which she was grasping was a bag of pearls. Chappel writes, *“Though death was hard at her heels, and life was beckoning to her beyond the city gate, she could not shake off their spell. But it was not the eruption of Vesuvius that made her love pearls more than life. It only froze her in this attitude of greed.”²⁴*

WALKING THE TALK

“Walking the talk” means I daily follow Jesus. It means that I attend a corporate worship gathering with others. It means that I maintain a consistent devotional life in which I talk to God and listen to His words to me. These activities will help me to keep the message of Revelation. As I abide in this

²² Considering what God has done, we say it is soon. ²³ Rev. 22:10-11 ²⁴ Quote from Chappel

trusting relationship with Jesus, my character will settle like concrete, and I will have a firm foundation to grow up in Christ.

Many people think it would be difficult to die for Christ as a martyr. To make the ultimate sacrifice, to lay your life down, and go out in a blaze of glory. But God has something more practical in mind for most of us. He does not have us lay our life down all at once. Instead, it is as if God daily sends us to the bank to get \$200 in \$50 denominations. Then He tells us to give \$50 away here and a \$100 there.²⁵ By choosing for Jesus again and again, dying daily if you will, our character is conformed to His image little by little.

Christ's Return is consistently cited in Scripture as a motive for holy living.²⁶ John says, "He that has this hope, purifies himself even as He is pure."²⁷ *"Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood."*²⁸

WORKING: A RESPONSE THAT RESPECTS THE REWARD

*"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."*²⁹

PAY-DAY SOMEDAY

This fourth response to the core message is "Pay-day Someday." This goes beyond the previous calls. It beckons to us beyond waiting, worshiping and walking uprightly. It calls us to work. For at the end of the day, the Lord will pay wages according to how each person has performed his assigned task. Since no one knows when the whistle will sound for shut down, we should work while it is yet day.³⁰ "Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task."³¹

God gave you gifts to perform a certain work that He foreordained for you.³² Our "work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive *his reward*. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames."³³

²⁵ Matt. 6:20 ²⁶ 1 Peter 1:4,13,16; 2 Peter 3:11,13; 1 Tim. 6:11,14; Tit. 2:11-13 ²⁷ 1 John 3:3 ²⁸ Rev. 22:2-3 ²⁹ Rev. 22:12-13 ³⁰ John 9:4 ³¹ Mark 13:32-34 ³² Eph. 2:10; 4:12 ³³ 1 Cor. 3:11-15

That ought to motivate you and I to willingly serve God. David “served God in his generation and fell asleep.”³⁴ So did all the saints of old. Daniel was told by the angel. “As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance.”³⁵

John’s prophecy calls every generation to serve God. The story is told of Colonel Davenport, the Speaker of the Connecticut House of Representatives. One day in 1789, the sky of Hartford darkened ominously and some of the representatives, glancing out the windows, feared the End was at hand. Quelling a clamor for immediate adjournment, Davenport rose and said, “The Day of Judgment is either approaching or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for adjournment. If it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. Therefore, I wish that candles be brought.” Instead of fearing or cursing the dark, we are to be lights as we wait, worship, walk and work.



5 = WANTING: A RESPONSE OF DEEP DESIRE

“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.” The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.”³⁶

Here is a vital heartfelt response of desire. The Bride says, “Come!” This response gauges where we live. If we cannot sincerely say, “Come!” either we have a desire for other things competing with our desire for the Lord or there is some entanglement. It is important to ascertain what would keep us from saying, “Come!” Is it an earthly desire? Is it a loved one who has not come to Christ, or a child we wish to see become an adult? Although these are legitimate desires, let the Bride’s greatest desire be “Come!”

BRIDE TO BE

A lovely young lady was waiting at the airport for her fiancé’s plane to land. He had been overseas for three months on a great mission outreach. It was all she could do to maintain a conversation with her two friends while she waited. And of course those conversations kept coming back to you-know-who’s return. Once the plane landed conversation was no longer possible. She was at the entrance door, looking, waving and awaiting his embrace. The friends were heard to comment, “what a beautiful picture of the Bride of Christ as she desires the return of her Bridegroom.”

³⁴ Ps. 17:15 ³⁵ Dan. 12:13 ³⁶ Rev. 22:16-17

The genuine Bride of Christ is best known by her desire for the Bridegroom. In contrast, imagine a bride that does not desire her groom to come. That would be a pretty sad affair - not looking forward to seeing her groom, not excited about her wedding day. That is just what we see in the counterfeit woman, the Whore of Babylon, who rides upon the scarlet colored Beast. She is unwilling to wait for the Bridegroom, which makes her unworthy of Him. Her failure to wait is only too evident by her many boyfriends - the kings of the earth. On the other hand, as we wait expectantly, the element of desire will follow. For distance causes a true heart to grow fonder!

OBJECT OF DESIRE

Jesus would be more to us than an object of obligation. He wants to be wanted. For what is love without the element of desire? It is mere obligation. What is marriage without desire? John Eldridge's book "Desire" tells of counselling a couple that had no apparent issue in their marriage: no infidelity, no financial crisis or huge differences; only a loss of desire on Ted's part. During counselling, Diane made this offer to Ted. "If I could be more of what you wanted in a woman, what do you secretly wish I would offer you?" It's a question many men would die to be asked. Ted's response? "Clean socks!" That's all he could come up with. Life would be better; his marriage would be more fulfilling if Diane would keep his drawer filled with clean socks.

Desire lost is the missing ingredient to many a life. To lose marital desire is to say, "I don't really want you, but I'll live with you because I am obliged." Eldridge says, "Duty reduces a dance to a drill." It is like a husband who gives his bride flowers and she responds, "Oh, how beautiful!" But he replies, "Think nothing of it: it's my obligation." No one wants to be an object of obligation, but to be an object of desire is hard to beat. I would rather pastor the fiery young couple who drove down a country road, not saying a word. An earlier discussion had led to an argument and neither wanted to concede their position. As they passed a field with donkeys, the husband asked, "Are they relatives of yours?" "Yes," his wife replied. "I married into the family."

WATER OF LIFE FREELY

"Whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life." Most people are sceptical of free offers. There must be a catch, we say, because there are 'no free lunches.' I too look with suspicion at offers purportedly by Bill Gates to give me a free computer if I'll send a particular email to one hundred people. But the greatest possession, Christ and the Holy Spirit, really are free. No one can buy God's gifts. There is not enough money in all the world to pay

for the salvation of one soul. And when we realize we cannot pay our way, heartfelt gratitude is the only response.

Life in this world loses its appeal during times of pain and disappointment. During such times, “*Come, Lord Jesus!*” is quickly uttered. Also when our days are nearly over and death approaches, we take special comfort in John’s message. For he assures us that death is not the end of our loved ones or of us. Jesus will bring those who have died in faith with Him.³⁷ “He will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body.”³⁸ The blessings in the New Jerusalem are worth the loss of everything in this world.³⁹ This brings us to a most vital warning for churches today.



WARNING: A RESPONSE THAT SERIOUSLY SEEKS TRUTH

*“I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.”*⁴⁰

“A warning to the wise is sufficient,” my mom said. And John closes with a warning to not “*distort God’s word*” but to preach it in its entirety.⁴¹ Revelation’s message of Christ’s Return is a good indication as to whether we hold to the full counsel of God’s Word. Do we proclaim His Return and that men are lost without Christ and face eternal judgment at His Return? “Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ...Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.”⁴²

PERILS OF ADDING OR SUBTRACTING

“Do not add to God’s Word lest He reprove you and you be found a liar.”⁴³ The danger of adding to or of taking away from God’s Word is real. Last night, I watched a preacher on TV present his opinions as God’s very own Word.⁴⁴ This is especially hazardous when our own slant is added to further our own agenda, protect a pet doctrine or nurse a personal hurt.⁴⁵

Preachers also run the risk of leaving out what God says. No one can exhaust a topic, but we must not dismiss those parts that seem less palatable. God wants us mature. “No longer infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and

³⁷ 1 Thess. 4:17 ³⁸ Phil. 3:20,21 ³⁹ 1 John 3:2 ⁴⁰ Rev. 22: 18-19 ⁴¹ 2 Cor. 4:2; Matt. 24:14; Rom. 10:14; 1 Tim 4:1,2; 2 Peter 3:9; Jude 23 ⁴² 2 Cor. 5:9-11 ⁴³ Prov. 30:6 ⁴⁴ 1 Cor. 7:40 AMP ⁴⁵ “Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit.” (2 Cor. 2:17). ⁴⁶ Eph. 4:13-15

craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him.”⁴⁶

Those who discount, disregard or diminish Christ’s Return invite disasters. They are those whom Peter denounced. “Scoffers will come in the last day...and say, ‘where’s the hope of his coming? Since the fathers fell asleep everything continues as it was.’ Peter warns of “false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them - bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you.”⁴⁷

Evangelicals who would set a date for Christ’s Return are now few and far between, but other kinds of additions abound. Prophecy teachers offer their opinions of what must still happen as God’s sure word of prophecy. They teach a Pretribulation Rapture and add other events, which they outline in great detail. Such additions undermine the message that Jesus is coming soon.



WATCHING: A RESPONSE OF FOCUS ON CHRIST

“He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.”⁴⁸

My childhood days were filled with games, and one of my favorites was Hide and Seek. On cool autumn evenings, as the sun was setting, our neighborhood was a vast world all of its own, specially for a nine year old. As it grew dark the suspense mounted. Somebody was “It.” Everyone ran to hide. The game started when the person who was “It” said, “Here I come!” And what’s the rest? “Here I come - Ready or not.”

Christ is coming: “Ready or not!” And many believers are not ready. Their attitude is “My master is staying away a long time.” Watch out, Jesus said, “The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites.”⁴⁹ “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back - whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”⁵⁰ “So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you least expect him.”⁵¹

⁴⁷ 2 Peter 2:1-3; 3:3-8 ⁴⁸ Rev. 22:20-21 ⁴⁹ Matt. 24:48-51 ⁵⁰ Mark 13:35-37 ⁵¹ Matt. 24:42-45

Jesus' coming will totally shock most men. It will take them unaware like a thief breaking into their house at night. If we heed Jesus' call to watch, we will not be taken by surprise. Our seventh or full response is that of perpetual expectancy. This means that Christ's Return is possible any day and desired at all times. There should not be a time, when we least expect Him, because we are patiently waiting for Him. That means we will persevere in worshiping God; we will walk uprightly and work until He comes. Our desire for Him will increase too as we are careful not to add or take from John's message.

WATCHFUL AMEN

I hope our study of Revelation has helped you to develop watchful attitudes. That it has increased your longing for the Lord's coming. If not, take a moment and quiet your heart. Ask the Father to give you that desire.⁵¹ Wait on Him

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are you eagerly waiting for?
2. How ready are you for Christ's coming?
3. What would help you get ready?
4. Where do you lay down your life ?
5. Why is desire the wellspring of life?
6. What would you like to be doing when Christ comes?
7. How about asking God to create in you a greater desire for His Son's Return?

until your heart responds with "*even so, Come Lord Jesus!*"

"*The Unsealed Book*" was written "to Herald Christ's Return and Promote Closure to the Great Commission!" These two great themes are inter-related in the Book of Revelation. I believe that God is calling many of His

children to prepare the way of the Lord just as John the Baptist did. For family, friends and work associates, who have not yet come to Christ, we may be "it." May our lives, therefore reflect the attributes that John promotes here.

When I came to Christ, I read every book on Revelation that I could get my hands on. This fostered in me a tremendous expectation for Christ's Return. I remember walking down the street and looking up at the clouds, thinking how He might come at any time. My heart and days were filled with a joyful expectancy! My writing this book has renewed my longing for Christ's Return. I hope reading it has also renewed your longing.

Yes, it is "one less day until Jesus comes!" As a result of our study, I pray that you will receive a full measure of "*the grace of the Lord Jesus.*" And that this study causes your heart to respond more than ever with "*even so, come Lord Jesus...AMEN!*"

NOTES

INDEX ONE

EPOCH QUESTIONS

SEVEN CHURCH PERIODS IN REVELATION 1:4, 10, 20

While serving as Dean of a Bible School, I was often asked my position on a controversial subject. For example, “The Bible Code” attracted interest for a season, claiming that the Bible contains a mathematical code that foretells famous individuals and events. Although I am sure the Scriptures possess more than anyone has ever drawn from them (the exception being Jesus), I do not think such revelations require a computer or two thousand years of history. What is plainly written is more than enough for a life time of study without searching for secret messages. Someone said, “it is not the things in the Bible that I don’t understand that concern me, but the things that are clear - things like heaven and hell.”

Many students of Revelation claim there is a veiled prophecy in the seven churches, predicting the entire course of Church history from the first century to Christ’s Return. They claim that the *number, names, order and content* of these letters reveal seven epoch periods of Church history.¹ They point out that Jesus told John there is a “mystery” to the seven lampstands. The mystery, they allege, is that these churches would prove over time to correspond to the character of the Church during different periods throughout her history.² They argue that you could not transpose these churches such as Thyatira in the place of Smyrna or Ephesus for Laodicea without breaking the validity of this cryptic prophecy.

NUMBER, SEQUENCE, NAME AND CONTENT

The number of churches addressed, seven, speaks of a complete or full number. These seven represent the whole or total Church throughout her history.³ Those who hold to this view of a veiled prophecy also believe that these seven foretell the general condition of the Church in seven sequential epochs. They point out that other churches in Asia Minor like the churches at Colossae and Hierapolis could have been addressed, but that would have spoiled the prophecy that these seven reveal. Any other combination or order, they contend, would have failed to provide what is necessary for the prophecy to prove true.

Church history, they maintain, fits each of the churches’ names. The proof then is not merely their *number*, being seven, but the *order* in which they are given, the *names* they possess and the very *contents* of each letter. The subject matter addressed in each letter is said to match general conditions in the Christian Church during successive periods of Church history. The basic outline to follow will help you understand their hypothesis better so you can draw your own conclusion.

¹ Thomas Newton Dissertations on the Prophecies, Bible teacher, H. A. Ironside in Lectures on Revelation, and whole denominations hold to this view. ² Rev. 1:20 ³ Seven appears 54 times.



EPHESIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH (30 – 100 A.D.)

Addressed first, Ephesus means “desirable one.” It answers to the apostolic Church of the first century. Believers desire to experience the power of the early Church. They long to see the miracles and mighty works recorded in the Book of Acts. This period, however, did not last very long - less than a hundred years. Towards the end of the First Century the leaven of false apostles and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans was already at work in the Church. The Church’s loss of her first love was the beginning of apostasy. But to draw the church back, God allows persecution. That brings us to the next period.



SMYRNA PERSECUTED CHURCH (100 – 313 A.D.)

Smyrna means “bitter.”⁴ She represents the persecuted Church. Commentators interpret the ten days of tribulation as corresponding to the ten periods of imperial persecution, when the saints suffered crushing blows beneath the iron heel of pagan Rome. The Church was materially poor at this time; the poor of this world - rich in faith. Instead of magnificent buildings, they gathered together in caves, catacombs and other obscure places.

After a time of intense martyrdom, the Gospel took root, because “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” The Gospel is soon widely received, and evil men are restrained from violent attacks against her. A time of favor follows, which is as dangerous as persecution, because men begin to mix God’s Word with cultural norms. The church prospers and obtains property. Her paid clergy become more politicians than preachers of righteousness. Government supported churches emerge, bringing us to the Pergamum period.



PERGAMUM STATE CHURCH (313 – 590 A.D.)

Pergamum is a compound word “*pergos*,” “tower” and “*gamos*,” “marriage.” The Church is lifted to honor and wealth. Since Satan could not drive the Church out of the world by persecution, he drives the world into the Church at Pergamum. This union of Church and State mixes Christianity with paganism. This period began with Emperor Constantine in 313 A.D., when he repealed the edicts of his predecessor. The Christian religion advanced from one of the many religions in the empire to *the* religion in 324 A.D., and many were coerced into baptism.⁵ This marriage of Church and State saw a great influx of men who were Christian in name only and who brought their superstitions into the Church.

The desire for Christ’s Return was gone. Before this, the Church was looking for Jesus to put an end to the evil empires of this world. The devil shrewdly gave the Church the power of the Roman Empire and Christian bishops began saying,

⁴ Matt.2:11; Mark 15:23; John 19:39 ⁵ Constantine presided as head of the Church, and yet he still bore the title Pontifex Maximus – same title that the Pope bore.

“We have been looking for Christ’s reign but this is His kingdom now.” Roman Emperors bestowed many honors on the bishops, and they sat on thrones with the nobles of the empire. The Church departed from dependence on God and married the world.

With Rome’s wealth and protection, the Church became proud and powerless. Satan embraced the name of Christ in a diabolic strategy to usurp the true faith. Few knew the Bible and those who did struggled against the working of the mystery of iniquity. At Ephesus, it was “*one thing*” but now in Pergamum, it is “*many things*.” In this case, Antipas was not an individual but a class of men who opposed the power of the bishops and Popes of that day. Being a combination of two words, ‘Anti,’ *opposed* and ‘Papas,’ *father or pope*. Some suffered martyrdom in Constantinople and Rome. Pergamum led to the Thyatiran Church.



THYATIRA PAPAL CHURCH (590 – 1517 A.D.)

The name Thyatira means “continual sacrifice.” It is interpreted as a reference to the sacrifice of the Roman Mass. The Nicolaitan clergy secured for themselves a priestly office. They taught that they alone could offer the bread and wine, which they miraculously transubstantiated into the body and blood of Christ. By alleging to offer Christ afresh every time they served communion, they had a monopoly on Jesus’ sacrifice. Christ was now offered up for the sins of the living and the dead. This doctrine incorporated the cult of Jezebel and a Balaamite approach that skillfully mixed pagan superstitions with elements of Christianity.

The finished work of Christ was negated. Sacraments were added and the Gospel was redefined.⁶ Jesus does, however, cite Thyatira’s charitable works. Men and women in religious orders have served the needy and the sick. So Jesus says to Thyatira, “I know *thy works...thy works...The last to be more than the first.*”⁷ According to this view, a works gospel to earn salvation is promoted, and faith in Jesus’ work is overshadowed by man-made rituals.⁸

At Thyatira, the cult of Jezebel, described as the “depths of Satan,” introduced spiritual fornication by the worship of images.⁹ The original Jezebel was adept in the art of mixing and she united Israel’s religion with Phoenician Baal worship. So Romanism is said to be a mixture of Christianity, Judaism and Paganism. Yet, she claimed to speak for God, saying “Hear the mother Church!”

The Thyatiran period is said to extend from the 6th to 16th Century. During the Dark Ages, the sway of the Church of Rome and her doctrines continued unabated. In due course Mystery Babylon grew and became more powerful until the Reformation split Christendom down the middle. Christ “gave her space

⁶ Scripture teaches that Christ’s death is a one time, single, all sufficient offering for the sins of a guilty world. (Heb.10:1-23 esp. Vv.2-3,10-14,18). ⁷ Rev. 2:19 ⁸ Galatian Heresy added church laws to the Gospel. (Gal. 1:6-9; 2:15-5:26; Jn. 6:29) ⁹ The Two Babylons or The Papal Worship (Proven to be The Worship of Nimrod and His Wife) by Alexander Hislop supports this assertion in great detail.

to repent.” But she repented not. Some consider her children to be apostate Protestantism. To the one who overcomes at Thyatira, Christ promises the privilege of ruling in authority with Him over the nations. Ironically, this is what Rome has always sought - power over the nations.



SARDIS REFORMED CHURCH (1517 – 1790 A.D.)

Sardis is from a Hebrew word meaning “a remnant” or “those who have escaped.” According to this interpretation of prophetic Church epochs, the Sardis period represents the time of the Great Reformation. The Reformation protested against the rigid ecclesiastical hierarchy and cultic practices of Thyatira. Yet, the great State churches of the Reformation, who escaped from Rome, quickly fell into cold, lifeless formalism. They had “a *reputation* for being alive, but are dead.” They boasted of orthodoxy but recovered little of what was lost.

During this period, churches were composed of people that were still dead in sin. Vast throngs of people assembled who were devoid of personal faith in Christ. The Lord says, “Be watchful and strengthen the things, which remain, that are ready to die.” With the invention of the printing press, a new light began to dawn upon the world of Christendom and the desired strengthening came. The Scriptures were made available to the common people. Study of the Bible began, lost truths were gradually rediscovered and unbiblical practices were exposed. The remnant or “few” in Sardis made way for the Philadelphia period.



PHILADELPHIA MISSIONARY CHURCH (1790 – 1900 A.D.)

The name comes from the Greek word for “brotherly love.” Philadelphia stands for the age of revivals and the evangelical movements of the 19th Century. To churches that were faithful to Christ’s Word and kept His Name, Jesus opened a door of outreach. It is held that the Sardis churches that had strengthened “the things, which remain,” were able to enter through this door of fruitful service.

It was during this century that the great missionary movements were born. Here, the remnant of true believers in every church is in view. For not everything that is called Christian is Christian. Coexisting in the world and in local churches are the true and false, the professors and the real possessors. This is taught throughout the Bible. In all seven periods, God’s faithful remnant is found. They are found in Thyatira while they are missing in churches that have a reputation for being alive. Even in Laodicea there are those who remained faithful to the Lord.



LAODICEA LAST CHURCH (1900 - ? A.D.)

Laodicea means “the judgment or the voice of the people.” Democratization is major trademark of the Church in modern times. Everything from who serves as ‘pastor’ to what projects are undertaken are decided by a Church vote of

members. Like Laodecia, most churches today could not be accused of outright, bold apostasy. They are not even harboring a Jezebel in their midst, or embracing the doctrines of Balaam or the Nicolaitans. They are simply lukewarm; yet, they are unaware of their spiritual plight.

The Laodicean Church is the rich, poor Church. They are increased with goods, such as beautiful buildings and carpeted sanctuaries. They have state of the art lighting and sound systems. But they are poor within. Many churches in America would qualify as rich, poor churches. For those who interpret these seven churches as Church periods, Laodicea represent the state of the church before Christ comes, the latter end of Christendom, the final phase before the return of Christ

CONCLUSION

I think the attraction to this theory of a veiled prophecy of Church periods has more to do with its outline of church history than the actual contents of the letters. I find it difficult to accept because: **(1)** It makes part of Revelation a sealed book. (Rev. 22:10). **(2)** It detracts from the book's core prophecy of Christ's Return. (Rev. 1:1-3). **(3)** It demands 1900 years of hindsight (Rev. 22:7). **(4)** It provides a different interpretation than Jesus' interpretation of "the mystery of the seven churches." (Rev. 1:20) **(5)** It adds to John's prophecy. (Rev. 22:18). **(6)** It is subjective on the content of the letters. **(7)** These same kinds of churches are still around today and are found all over the world. It seems that the Church goes through similiar phases wherever she goes.

I take the seven churches to represent churches throughout history. They are types or kinds of believers and churches. The general prophecies in Revelation are similar in that they characterize the end of the age. They will be present in different parts of the world until Jesus comes, even as there will be wars, diseases, earthquakes, and false messiahs until Jesus comes.

INDEX TWO

A DREAM CHURCH

Revelation 2:1 to 3:22

If we take to heart Christ's instructions to the Seven Churches, we can become a Dream Church. A Church that is built on Jesus, His Word and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. A Church that lives in the light of His Return. One filled with faith and passion for God, abounding in energy and excitement for His purposes, having no use for fleshly hype or manipulation. Every meeting, whether in a sanctuary, office, home or coffee shop has an ongoing expectancy, a sense that God is on the move, empowering and releasing His people into His heartbeat for their individual lives and their corporate calling.

The Dream Church is a secure place. God's people are free to become all that God desires and destines for them. Such a Church overcomes the world, the flesh and the Devil, because of its prophetic dimension. The voice of God thunders through her worship and prayer, through her commitment to God and one another. She also carries the presence of Christ and His love for those who are lost. Members of the Dream Church have chosen to live holy lives and they readily share Jesus with all men.

The Dream Church reveals the nature of God's Lamb, for her leadership sets an uncommon example in these days of personal ambition by putting others first and seeking their highest good. The Church's authority is found in her humility, her faithfulness, her servant's heart and her courage in the face of difficulties. Her 'five-fold ministry gifts' feed God's flock with integrity.

Members of the Dream Church are a team where each one plays their part. They serve God as a unit with trust and honor for one another. Trust because their insecurities have been brought to the Cross, and honor because they value the diversity of each one's gift. They also recognize that God's children are at different stages of growth and experience various seasons in their lives.

The Dream Church is a multi-generational, multicultural family where young and old, black and white, and all shades in-between, laugh and cry, worship and work side by side, hand in hand, heart to heart. There are no class distinctions. No pecking orders. No super stars. She is a Church that understands and embraces an apostolic vision and mission. She is a sending Church, graciously releasing gifted ministries to other parts of the city, nation and other nations. She is committed to Christ's global cause. She aims to help, in every way possible, complete the task of world evangelization.

INDEX THREE

PRETRIBULATION RAPTURE ORIGINS

Revelation 4:1ff

A detailed expose` of Pretribulation Rapture origins would take a book.¹ Like flowing waters of a river, this endtime doctrine has covered a lot of ground. An outline of its origin would include many names and groups. Emmanuel Lacunza, a Jesuit priest, would be included since in 1812 he wrote “The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty.” In it, he presented a theory of a two-stage coming of Christ.

In 1830, a teenage girl, Margaret MacDonald in Port Glasgow, Scotland had an apocalyptic dream. Dr. Irvin of the Irvinites and Dr. Darby of the Plymouth Brethren interpreted the dream to teach a pretribulation rapture.² Darby influenced D.L. Moody, who through the Moody Bible Institute Sunday School material, supplied materials to the Assemblies of God.³ Early on Revered C. I. Scofield also put the rapture teaching in the notes of his famous Scofield Bible. Revered Finis Dake also promoted it in his annotated Bible. In non-English speaking countries, like China, where such study Bibles are rare, most Christians know nothing of a Pretribulation Rapture.

In the past forty years, books and tapes have done much to spread this doctrine. Most believers, however, have never taken time to study it for themselves. And naturally, everyone wants to believe that they will be spared Great Tribulation. Paul spoke of this tendency: “For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.”⁴

It is my hope that churches which include a Pretribulation Rapture in their Doctrinal Statement and teach it at their Bible Schools will go back to the Bible. A number of churches are already doing that very thing based on Paul’s injunction to correct what is amiss.⁵ Chapter six, Rapture Questions, is meant to help believers study questions related to the rapture by looking up all the relevant verses so they can determine for themselves what the Bible teaches.

¹Although the doctrine is widespread today among English speaking Christians, it is generally accepted that the doctrine did not appear until the 18th Century. ² Dave MacPherson, “The Incredible Cover-Up.” ³ When the AOG held their first general council in 1914 in Hot Springs, Arkansas, they were a small movement without their own publishing house. They secured Sunday School material from Moody Press that advocated a Pretribulation Rapture. In the early days, most Pentecostal groups lagged behind older established denominations in systematic theology, and for the most part their eschatology was adopted from other fundamental groups. ⁴ 2 Tim. 4:3 ⁵ “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction...” (2 Tim. 4:1-4).

NOTES

BIBLIOGRAPHY

COMMENTARIES AND REFERENCES

THE UNSEALED BOOK

- Aune, David E.** Revelation. Word Biblical Commentary, Vols. 52a-52c. Dallas, TX: Word, 1997-1998.
- Baker, Ernest.** The Return of the Lord. Seeley, Service & Co. Ltd. 1916.
- Baldinger, Albert. H.,** Preaching From Revelation, Timely Messages for Trouble Hearts, 1960 Zondervan Publ. Hs.
- Bancroft, Emery H.** Christian Theology. Ronald B. Mayers, ed, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981.
- Barnes, Albert,** Barnes Notes on Revelation, 1884 Blackie & Son.
- Beale, G. K.,** The Book of Revelation, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, 1999 Eerdmans Publ. Co.
Book of Revelation: Commentary on the Greek Text. Eerdmans, 1999.
- Brady, David,** The Contribution of British writers between 1560 and 1830 to the Interpretation of Revelation 13:16-18 (the Number of the Beast). A Study in the History of Exegesis Tubingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1983.
- Bloesch, Donald G.** The Struggle of Prayer. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980.
- Boring, Eugene M.,** Revelation Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching, 1989 John Knox Press
- Boshold, Frank S.,** ed. Blumhardt, A Conflict With Satan. T. E. Lowe, Ltd., 1970.
- Braaten, Carl and Jenson, Robert,** The Last Things, Biblical Theological Perspectives on Eschatology, 2002, Eerdmans Publ. Co.
- Bruce, F. F.** New Testament History. New York, NY: Doubleday, 1969.
- Burke, Todd and DeAnn.** Anointed for Burial. Logos International, 1977.
- Carson, D. A.** New Testament Commentary Survey. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996.
- Charles, R. H.,** The Revelation of St. John, 2 vols. International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: 1920.
- Chilton, David.** The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation. Fort Worth, TX: Dominion, 1987.
- Cobble, James F., Jr.** The Church and the Powers. Hendrickson Publ., 1988.
- Daniélou, Jean.** Angels and Their Mission: According to the Fathers of the Church. Westminsier, MD: Newman Press, 1957.
- Dawn, Marva,** Joy in Our Weakness, A Gift of Hope from the Book of Revelation, 1994 Concordia Publ. Hs.
- De Haan M R.** Daniel The Prophet. 35 Simple Studies. Zondervan Publ. Hs. 1947.
- Duffield, Guy P. and Van Cleave, N.M.** Foundations of Pentecostal Theology CA: L.I.F.E. Bible College, 1983.
- Ebaugh, David P.** The Key to the Book of Revelation. Chernobyl 1986
- Edinger, Edward F.,** Archetype of the Apocalypse, 1999 by Dianne Cordic
- Eerdman, Alexander,** ed. Eerdman's Handbook of the Bible, Eerdmans, 1973.
- Efird, James M.** Daniel and Revelation. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1978.
- Eller, Vernard.** The Most Revealing Book of the Bible: Making sense out of Revelation. Eerdmans, 1975.

- Emmerson, Richard K. and McGinn, Bernard**, Apocalypse in the Middle Ages.
- Exell, Rev. Joseph S.M.A., and Rev. Thomas H. Leale, A.K.C.** The Preacher's Complete Homiletic Commentary on Genesis: Baker Book Hs. 1986.
- Exell, Joseph S and Spence, H D M.** The Pulpit Commentary. Epistles of Peter, John & Jude. Revelation. Eerdmans Publ. Co. 1950
- Fausset, A. R.,** Revelation, A Commentary Critical, Experimental, and Practical on Old and NT, 1946. Eerdmans Publ. Co.
- Fusset, A.R.** Fausset's Bible Dictionary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publ. Hs. 1949.
- Feinberg Charles L.** Focus on Prophecy. Fleming H Revell Company.
- Fitzmyer, J. A.** review of J. A. T. Robinson, Redating the New Testament.
- Ford, J. Massyngberde.** Revelation. AB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975.
- Friesen, Steven J.,** Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John, Reading Revelation in the Ruins, 2001 Oxford Press
- Gaebelein Frank E.** The Expositor's Bible Commentary Volume 12 (Hebrews – Revelation). Zondervan Publishing House
- Galli Virginia.** Is Jesus REALLY Coming Back This Generation? 1987.
- Gasson, Raphael.** The Challenging Counterfeit. Plainfield, NJ: Logos Books, 1966.
- Gay, Robert.** Silencing the Enemy. Orlando, FL: Creation House, 1993.
- Gentry, Kenneth L.** "A Preterist View of Revelation." Four Views on the Book of Revelation, ed. C. Marvin Pate, Zondervan, 1998.
- Gentry, Kenneth L., Jr.** Before Jerusalem Fell. Institute Christian Economics, 1989.
- Giblin, Charles Homer,** The Book of Revelation, The Open Book of Prophecy, The Liturgical Press, 1981.
- Gonzalez, Catherine and Justo,** Revelation, Westminster John Knox Press 1997
- Gregg, Steve,** ed. Revelation: Four Views, Parallel Commentary. T. Nelson 1997.
- Graham, Billy.** Approaching Hoofbeats. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983.
- Green, Michael.** I Believe in Satan's Downfall. W. Eerdmans, 1981.
- Greene, Oliver B.** The Revelation – Verse by Verse Study. Gospel Hour, Inc. 1963.
- Gromacki, Robert C.** Worthy Is the Lamb. (Revelation) Baptist Press, 1986.
- Habershon, Ada R.** The Study of the Types Priests and Levites. Kregel Publ. 1981.
- Hadjiantoniou, G A.** The Postman of Patmos, Zondervan Publ. Hs. 1961.
- Halley, H.H.** Halley's Bible Handbook. Regency R. L., Zondervan, 1927.
- Hamstra, Sam, Jr.** "An Idealist View of Revelation." Four Views Book of Revelation, ed. C. Marvin Pate, Zondervan, 1998.
- Harrington, Wilfrid,** Revelation, Proclaiming a Vision of Hope, 1994 Resource
- Hastings, J.** The Great Texts of the Bible. Revelation, Scribner's and Sons, 1915.
- Hendriksen, William.** More Than Conquerors, Baker, 1944.
- Houghton, S.M.** Sketches From Church History. Banner of Truth Trust, 1980.
- Huegel, F.J.** The Cross Through the Scriptures. Zondervan, Publ. Hs. 1966.
- Humberd, R. I.,** The Book of Revelation, 1944 by R. I. Humberd.
- Ice, Thomas and Kenneth L. Gentry.** The Great Tribulation, Kregel, 1999.
- Ironside, H.A,** Litt.D. Lectures on the Revelation. Loizeaux Brothers, 1978
- Jacobus,** ed. New Standard Bible Dictionary, Funk and Wagnalls, 1925.
- Katrensky, K. G.** Footnotes to the Book of Revelation, 1998, Kenneth G. Katrensky
- Kelsy, Morton.** Encounter With God. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 1972.
- Kendall Rose.** Revelation: The Finished Work of Jesus Christ. Bible Pathways, 2000.
- Kepler, Thomas,** Book of Revelation, Commentary for Laymen, 1957 Oxford Press

- Kirban, Salem.** Revelation Visualized™ Salem Kirban Inc 1971.
- Knapp, Martin Wells,** Holiness Triumphant or Peals from Patmos, 1900 .
- Kraft, Charles F.** Genesis—Beginnings of the Biblical Drama, Methodist Ch. 1964.
- Ladd, George Eldon.** The Blessed Hope. Wm. B Eerdmans Publ. Co. 1986
- Larkin, Clarence,** The Book of Revelation, A Study of the Last Prophetic Book of Holy Scripture, Illustrated, 1919 by Clarence Larkin
- Larkin, Clarence.** Dispensational Truth - God's Plan and Purpose in the Ages. 1920.
- Larson, Bob.** Satanism: The Seduction of American Youth, T. Nelson Publ. 1989.
- Lawson, Stephen J.** When All Hell Breaks Loose, NavPress, 1993.
- Leaming, Charles M.** The Key to Prophetic Fulfillment. Publ. 1970
- Lee, Dale,** The Narrative Aside in the Book of Revelation, 2002, University Press of America
- Lewis, C.S.** The Screwtape Letters. New York: MacMillan, 1961.
- Lilje, Hanns,** translated by Olive Wyon, The Meaning of the Revelation of St. John, 1957 by Muhlenburg Press.
- Lorie, Peter,** Revelation, St. John the Divine's Prophecies for the Apocalypse and Beyond, 1994 Labyrinth Publ. (UK) Ltd.
- Ludy, Claude Edward,** The End of the Age, 1989 Claude Ludy.
- MacArthur, John,** ed. The MacArthur Study Bible. Word, 1997.
- MacDonald, Hope.** When Angels Appear, Zondervan Publ. Hs. 1982.
- MacMullen, Ramsay.** Christianizing the Roman Empire. Yale University Press, 1984.
- MacPherson Dave.** Rapture? 1987 New Puritan Library, Inc
- Marocco, James.** Closing the Forbidden Door, Bartimaeus Publishing, 1992.
Winning the Invisible War, Bartimaeus Publ. 1992.
- Marshall, Alfred.** N.I.V. Interlinear Greek-English NT, Zondervan Publ. Hs. 1976.
- Mathison, Keith.** Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope. P&R, 1999.
- Matthew Henry.** Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible. Acts – Revelation. MacDonald Publ. Co. 1706.
- McAll, Kenneth.** Healing the Family Tree. London, UK: Sheldon Press, 1982.
- McAlpine, Thomas H.** Facing the Powers: What Are the Options? MARC, 1991.
- McClung, B.W.** The History of the Devil. Printed by Warner in Patemoster, 1726.
- McKeever Jim.** Christians Will Go Through the Tribulation, Omega Publ. 1978.
- Merck, Bobbie Jean.** Spoiling Python's Schemes. Toccoa, GA: A Great Love, 1990.
- Metzer, Bruce M.,** Breaking the Code, Understanding Revelation, 1993 Abingdon
- Michaelsen, Johanna.** The Beautiful Side of Evil. Harvest House, 1982.
- Miller, Madeleine and J. Lane.** Harper's Bible Dictionary, Harper Brothers. 1952.
- Milligan, William,** The Book of Revelation, 1889 Jennings and Graham.
- Montague, George T.,** The Apocalypse, 1992 George T. Montague
- Morris, Leon,** Revelation, Tyndale NT Commentaries, Leon Morris 1987.
- Moule, C. F. D.** The Birth of Christianity, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982.
- Mounce, Robert H.** The Book of Revelation. New International Commentary on the NT, gen. ed. Gordon D. Fee. Eerdmans, 1998.
- Murphy, Ed.** The Handbook for Spiritual Warfare. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1992.
- Nee, Watchman.** "Come, Lord Jesus" Christian Fellowship Publ. Inc. 1976.
- New Layman's Parallel Bible.** Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publ. Hs. 1981.
- Newell, William,** The Book of The Revelation, 1935 William Newell.

- O’Royal.** The Apocalypse Unveiled. The Day of Judgment, The Resurrection, and The Millennium, Presented in a New Light. Vol. I and Volume II.
- Osborne, Grant R.** , Revelation, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Baker Academic 2002
- Pate, C. Marvin, and Calvin B. Haines, Jr.** Domsday Delusions.IVP, 1995.
- Pender, William C.**, Revelation, Interpretation Bible Series, 1999 William Pender
- Pinn, James R. C.**, Revelation Today, 1957 James Pinn
- Piper, Dean J.**, Is He Coming Soon? A Reader’s Guide to the Book of Revelation, 1999 by CSS Publishing Co., Inc.
- Powlison, Gordon.** Principalities and Powers. Fellowship Ministries, Inc., 1983.
- Price, Stanley.** The Giants of Noah’s Day, 1988.
- Prinzing, Ray.** Revelation – A Positive Book.
- Quispel, Gilles,** The Secret Book of Revelation, The Last Book of the Bible, 1979 McGraw-Hill Book Company (UK).
- Rice, John R.** Second Coming of Christ in Daniel. Sword of the Lord Publ. 1965
- Richardson, Donald W.** The Revelation of Jesus Christ: John Knox Press, 1964.
- Robertson, Archibald Thomas.** Word Pictures in the New Testament. Vol. VI The Revelation of John. Baker Book Hs. 1933
- Robertson, Norman K.** Understanding End Time Prophecy. Conquest Publ. 1989
- Robertson, Robin,** Beginners Guide to Revelation, A Jungian Interpretation, 1994.
- Robinson, J. A. T.** Redating the New Testament. Westminster, 1976.
- Robison, James.** Winning the Real War: Overcoming The Power of Darkness. Creation House 1991.
- Rumph, Jane.** Stories From the Front Lines, Chosen Books, 1996.
- Russell, Jeffrey Burton.** The Devil: Perceptions of Evil From Antiquity to Primitive Christianity. Cornell University, 1977.
- Russell, J. Stuart.** The Parousia. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, Reprinted 1999.
- Ryrie, Charles Caldwell.** Revelation. Everyman’s Bible Commentary. Moody 1968.
- Schaff, Phillip,** ed. Select Library of Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, The Christian Literature Co, 1891.
- Scroggie, Graham,** The Great Unveiling, Analytical study of Revelation, 1979 Zondervan Publishing House.
- Seiss, J. A.,** The Apocalypse, A Series of Special Lectures on the Revelation of Jesus Christ, 2 Vol. 1865 Joseph A. Seiss.
- Shaw, Gwen.** Redeeming the Land. Jasper, AK: Engeltal Press, n.d.
- Sherrer, Quin.** The Spiritual Warrior’s Prayer Guide. Servant Publ. 1992.
- Silvoso, Edgardo.** That None Should Perish. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1993.
- Sinclair, Scott Gambrill,** Revelation, A Book for the Rest of Us, 1992 BIBAL Press
- Sjoberg, Kjell.** Winning the Prayer War. England: New Wine Press, 1991.
- Smith, Uriah.** The Prophesies of Daniel and the Revelation.. Pacific Press Publishing Association, Mountain View, California, Revised, 1944.
- Smith, William, L.L.D.** Smith’s Dictionary of the Bible.Thomas Nelson Publ. 1979.
- Stedman, Ray.** Expository Studies in Genesis 2 and 3. Word Books, 1975.
- Stott J.** What Christ Thinks of the Church. Word Publ. 1990.
- Stott, R.W.** The Cross of Christ. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986.
- Sweet, John.** “Revelation, The Book of.” The Oxford Companion to the Bible.
- Talbert, Charles H.,** The Apocalypse, A Reading of the Revelation of John,

- Westminster John Knox Press, 1994 Charles H. Talbert
- Taushev, Archbishop Averky**, The Apocalypse in the Teachings of Ancient Christianity, An Orthodox Commentary, 1985.
- Thompson, Leonard, L.** Revelation, Abingdon NT Commentaries, 1998.
- Terry, Milton S.** Biblical Apocalypics. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, rep. 1988.
- Thomas, Robert.** Revelation 1-7, ed. Kenneth Barker. Chicago, IL: Moody, 1992.
- Thiessen, Henry Clarence.** Lectures in Systematic Theology. Eerdmans, 1949.
- Thomas, Robert L.** "A Classical Dispensationalist View of Revelation." Four Views, ed. C. Marvin Pate. Zondervan, 1998.
- Thompson** Chain Reference Bible, KJV. BB Kirkbride Bible Co., Inc., 1988.
- The New Unger's Bible Dictionary.** Chicago: Moody Press, 1988.
- Tuck, Robert.** The Preacher's Complete Homiletic Commentary on the General Epistles and the Revelation of St John the Divine. Baker Book Hs. 1986
- Vanderwaal, Cornelius.** Search the Scriptures: Revelation, Paideia, 1979.
- Vine, W.E.** Expository Dictionary of NT Words, Fleming H. Revell Co. 1940.
- Wilson Speed H.** Rapture! Prophecy or Heresy. Daring Publ. Inc. Life, 1989.
- Woodrow Ralph Edward.** Babylon Mystery Religion Ancient and Modern. Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association, Inc. 1990
- Wright, N. T.** Jesus and the Victory of God. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996.
- Wright, N. T.** The New Testament and the People of God. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992.
- Young, Robert.** Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible. Baker Book House 1897.

(Small Font used and Abbreviations used for New Testament, Old Testament, Volume, Publishing House, and other obvious words at times. Also the absence of the Place of Publishing and word 'Copyright' before the date of copyright in order to reduce the space necessary for the Bibliography).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

AND UTTERMOST MISSIONS

The author, Dr. Mark C. Roser and his wife, Pat, started Uttermost Missions, a nondenominational missions society in 1986. The Rosers have lived and worked in Africa, as missionaries for the past 20 years. Uttermost Missions is dedicated to equipping and sending missionaries into all the world.

The Rosers are deeply committed to evangelism, church planting and discipleship. With the growth of nondenominational churches, cooperation and networking within the Body of Christ, their vision is to empower missionaries who are without denominational resources and traditional qualifications. The Lordship of Jesus, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the knitting of hearts and the role of senders are the foundational principles of the mission society.

Areas in which Uttermost Missions is currently involved:

- **Conducting crusades and evangelistic outreaches**
- **Planting strong local churches**
- **Equipping leaders at both the regional and congregational level**
- **Supporting relief work to orphans and widows**
- **Developing work in entrepreneurship and self-help programs**
- **Publishing books, manuals and teaching materials.**
- **Hosting guest ministries and missionaries for conferences**
- **Building halls and providing equipment**
- **Encouraging participation in mission work by speaking at churches**

CONTACT DETAILS

A monthly newsletter is available free of charge.

For more information, please write 1232 West Kemper Road, #179, Cincinnati, OH 45240. For other materials available from Mark Roser, please write to the U.S.A. address.

You can also visit our web site: www.uttermost.org

Mark Roser visits the U.S.A., the U.K. and other nations to teach at seminars, minister at conferences and preach at local churches. If you would like Dr. Roser to minister at your conference, church, or Bible school, please email mcroser2001@yahoo.com or acts1-8@uttermost.org

THE CLEANSING OF THE HEAVENS

THE ACCUSER CAST DOWN

As a follow-up to The Unsealed Book, The Cleansing of the Heavens is a detailed study of Revelation chapter twelve.

THESE QUESTIONS ARE ANSWERED IN THE BOOK

- **Can Satan accuse us before God as he did Job?**
- **Has the Devil's position changed from the Old to the New Testament?**
- **When and why was Satan permanently removed from Heaven?**
- **What difference does this make in my relationship to God and the subject of spiritual warfare?**

The Cleansing of the Heavens is a detailed biblical study of Satan's career, from his days before God's throne to his removal from Heaven. Dr. C. Peter Wagner writes in the Foreward of The Cleansing of the Heavens:

"I began saying, 'Wait a minute! I am reading things that I have never read or heard before!' Questions such as what immediate influence the Cross of Christ might have had on the modus operandi of Satan in the invisible world can hardly be considered unimportant... I found myself becoming convinced that Roser's thesis was correct. Reading 'The Cleansing of the Heavens' will put us in a place where Satan will have less and less possibility of taking advantage of us, and therefore we will be better equipped to serve in the great spiritual army to which God is calling us in these exciting days."

**THE CLEANSING OF THE HEAVENS IS A GREAT SEQUEL
TO THE UNSEALED BOOK. A STUDY GUIDE IS ALSO AVAILABLE.**

To order The Cleansing of the Heavens or The Study Guide, call toll-free,
1-888-BELOVED or visit us at www.uttermost.org
or email acts1-8@uttermost.org

You can also write to Uttermost Missions 1232 W. Kemper Rd.
#179, Cincinnati, OH. 45240.

The cost of the book is \$10.99 plus \$2.00 shipping.
The Study Guide is additional \$3 plus \$1 for shipping.
Orders of 10 copies or more are priced at a 10% discount.

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

A TRUSTED TRUTH RESTORED

***“The comfort and wonder of an all powerful, all knowing,
ever present God, directing the affairs of this life,
is all but lost in our secular society...
What we need are new thoughts concerning
the infinite, majesty of God’s nature.
That is what this book is all about.”***

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE REGARDING GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY?

- **Do you believe that bad things just happen to people because they live in a sin-cursed world; that thorns are distributed indiscriminately as one would deal out a hand of cards, to the just and the unjust alike?**
- **Do you believe that there is not a single event in the entire universe that can occur outside of God’s sovereign control?**
- **Do you believe that God is sovereign over His creation while man is responsible for his actions? How do you reconcile these beliefs?**
- **Do you believe that if we do not ask God, His hands are tied and He is unable to help us? In what ways do you believe God limits Himself?**

**TRUST GOD MORE DEEPLY
AS TRUTH IS RESTORED IN YOUR LIFE
CONCERNING GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY**

To order “God’s Sovereignty” visit www.uttermost.org
or call toll free, 1-888-BELOVED, or write Uttermost Missions 1232 W.
Kemper Rd. #179, Cincinnati, OH 45240.

The cost is \$7 plus \$1.50 shipping.

BACK OF COVER

THE UNSEALED BOOK

- **Written in a style that every one can understand**
- **Covers all the major views of the Book of Revelation**
- **Contains tremendous stories to illustrate the text**
- **Answers crucial questions related to Revelation**
- **Provides a most satisfying outline and interpretation**
- **Convinces people of its approach with numerous proofs**
- **Serves as a great resource for small group Bible studies**

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING?

“The Unsealed Book answered all my questions on the Apocalypse!”

“It does not skip the hard verses but fully handles them.”

“I was amazed at how it exposed for me a lot man-made teachings!”

“It made me rethink what I had been taught at Bible School!”

“I led a successful Small Group Study on what others thought was a hard subject and we had really great discussions”

“I now understand the Book of Revelation and I no longer consider it the most difficult book in the Bible!”

“Best book I have ever read on the Book of Revelation!”

BAR Code