

# THE BOOK OF REVELATION

VOLUME ONE

A Bible Student's Commentary

By

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In concert with dedicated Bible students  
choosing to be a part of this work  
and to whom it is dedicated  
September, 2012

This study, as in all our work, is subject to revision as more is learned

## Foreword

This study and presentation is not designed to support theological presuppositions such as Dispensationalism, popular eschatological structures and theological emphases, any particular denominational emphasis or popular, Western, American, thought on the subject of the "End Times". One of the most curious approaches is the one that claims that the book is essentially written to people who won't be affected by its revelations because they won't be here having been "raptured" away effectively making the writing of the book unnecessary.<sup>1</sup>

Though many western churches teach all sorts of things and draw all sorts of conclusions and then attempt to "shoe horn" The Book of Revelation (as well as a lot of other Biblical passages) into their presuppositions, this study will not do so. We will explore some thoughts, but simply to show the divergence of thought on the book and its contents.

First, as with any book or passage in the Bible, when it presents something we might consider odd, the red flag ought to spring up with the question, "What kind of literature am I dealing with here?" In the case of this book, it is apocalyptic literature. Apocalyptic Literature has its own nature and character and rather than try to make it fit with a western-American thought form, the effort must be made to fit our thought form to the literature. Much like a parable, or any Biblical imagery, we need to see the message within the vehicle of the literature and text before us. Otherwise we may miss the message and intent of the book and find ourselves missing what God has to say to us. For example, in Ecclesiastes, chapter 12, one will miss the entire point of the chapter unless proper effort is made to understand the true interpretation of each image. In the parable of the mustard seed, the argument is often over the nature of mustard plants and the size of the seed and whether Jesus was aware of the sizes of seeds worldwide. The point of the parable is often missed over arguments about non-essentials in the vehicular style Jesus used. Genesis 1-5 is fraught with those who argue over the age of the earth and whether the account is to be taken literally. Yet in inquiry, I have found that not one person, who claims to be an expert in all the issues, has any idea of what the intent of those chapters is let alone the purpose for which they were written. They guess and mumble, but their focus is not on learning what God wants us to gain from the book, but only in supporting their personal point of view.

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<sup>1</sup> See the Appendix articles regarding those who oppose the concept of a "pretribulation rapture."

We will avoid these foolish arguments when we deal with Revelation although referring to them from time to time as we go along so that the questions raised by those who are caught up in some of these teachings may be answered.

**Second, and most important,** is that in studying this book, the focus is mainly on the history and events especially in the “end times.” People get all excited about what to expect and when to expect it and what to look for and so on. But the focus of the book is primarily spiritual. God wishes to get into the heart of His people so they will trust Him implicitly and without expectation. Here is why. People from the beginning have placed expectations upon God based in their own suppositions. Judas Iscariot is a prime example. He, as well as most of the Jews including the disciples had expectations based on what they had been taught about the Messiah. But Jesus didn’t fit the bill the way they thought He should. Nor when, nor how, nor what, nor why.

The problem with expectations is, that when they are not met, judgment and a loss of confidence sets in. “You didn’t meet my expectations” is a statement revealing one’s self-centered ideas about how God should do His thing. When He doesn’t “come through” the way we think He should, what is the normal response? Well, Judas sold Jesus out for thirty pieces of silver.

The problem is that in most of the teachings about Revelation, rather than instill a confidence in God regardless of the theology, expectation, plan, chart, program, schedule and everything else we throw into the mix, “expectations” regarding how, when, and where God will accomplish the end times are presented and the eyes of the believer are distracted from the Lord to these concepts.

After thousands of years of this sort of nonsense, one ought to realize that perhaps there is a more significant message to this book. Perhaps we ought to come to trust in God in spite of the circumstances and His “failure” to do it our way or the way of the “prophetic teachers” as fun as it might be. The disciples were forced to do this in due time, weren’t they. We ought to have learned something from this. As apocalyptic literature, Revelation is not easily pressed into a structure satisfactory to those who would wish it to be so. So attempts are made to force it to be so to the damage of its message.

## Introduction

### I. THE BASIC APPROACH TO THE BOOK.

The Book of Revelation is by any criterion the finest example of an apocalypse in existence. In Jewish-Christian (as well as Persians and Islamic) apocalyptic literature there is a distinctive and recognizable pattern. Basic to understanding any book is to understand its literary medium. Revelation is no exception. The very title "Revelation" is from the Greek "ἀποκάλυψις" (ap-ah-chah-loop-sus) and a translation thereof. The book is often called, "The Apocalypse". This title comes from the very first verse of the book, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants...". The word means to "uncover." And though the word is used many times in the New Testament in reference to different settings and experiences, in this context it speaks to the kind of presentation that is known as apocalyptic literature, based on the vision John experienced.

The flavor of this particular volume is Jewish to the core. It represents the culmination of the entirety of redemptive history from the beginning. The entire Bible, from Genesis onwards, funnels down to this book. At the forefront of this culmination is the person of Jesus. There is no apology about this by John who recognizes the dynamic act of God in His anointed Messiah Jesus. He sits at the right hand of God, is seen as the power of God and the full image of God, indeed one with God in the often presented plural singularity in Hebrew literature and theological thought. The solidarity of the Abrahamic lineage, the fullness of mankind in Adam (a plural word), the oneness of family as well as the oneness of marriage, the body of Christ (though having many members is one), are some of the ways a single plurality is spoken of in the Bible. The book cannot be understood without a grasp of Jewish thought, culture, religious practice, tradition, history and so on. And in Jesus the Messiah it all comes together. In Him it all finds its fulfillment and finally, after eons and eons, the promises of God come true. But not without the vicious display of man's true evil nature and that of his master, Satan the Devil.

Apocalyptic literature may be defined as the eschatological belief that the power of evil (Satan), who is the controlling force of a temporal and hopelessly evil age of human history in which the righteous are afflicted by his demonic and human agents, is soon to be overcome and his evil rule ended by the direct intervention of God, who is the power of good, and who thereupon will create an entirely new,

perfect and eternal age under His immediate control for the everlasting enjoyment of His righteous followers from among the living and resurrected dead.

Within this broad definition it must be noted that apocalyptic literature is always eschatological, always concerned with the way things will be as opposed to the way things are. It pits the death and end of the present age against the life in the age to come.<sup>2</sup>

From this we see two more things. First, there is an inherent "dualism" pitting God against Satan, good against evil, life against death, creation against destruction, angels against demons, this age against the age to come, and this creation against the creation to come.

Second, apocalyptic literature can rightly be called "tract for troubled times". That is, it is directed to and for the benefit of the "saints" (the people of God) who are suffering persecution, religious confusion or tempted to apostasy – usually attributed to Satan and his agents. The agents of Satan are normally men and women who are false teachers and persuade believers to positions and beliefs that are not actually truth.

But what is John revealing that is so important that it hasn't been considered crucial thus far? Essentially, the increasing brutality of the future history of the world and the place of the faithful in its midst. This brutality is unexpected in its scope and the evil of humanity and the spiritual forces driving it must be understood so that God's people won't despair and fear that God has abandoned them. Therefore, at the core of the writing is a predominant spiritual emphasis. To encourage the faith of the saints and to illustrate both the hazards of faith in God and His Messiah as well as the rewards of faithfulness is the paramount intent.

But the book is not just a view to the future, even from John's time. Sprinkled throughout are messages to the reader/listener in his own setting, messages that are vital to the faith and perseverance of the saints. The conclusion of the book makes it clear that in many ways the message and intent is timeless and applicable to the reader as invitations to come to the Lamb, the "living water," and to faith in the true God are regularly sprinkled therein. In addition, the warnings against being led astray from this faith by deceptive words or signs and wonders are frequent as

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<sup>2</sup> See the: "Jewish Eschatology" chart in the Appendix

well. All of this is designed to impact the reader of any age and solidify him in Christ and Christ alone.

The message of this type of literature is to encourage the saints to faithfulness and trust in God for He has the entire scheme of time worked out and those that are faithful to Christ, regardless of the evil they suffer, will be vindicated by God and share in an eternity of paradise with their brothers. This intention of the author was clearly understood by his readers, and the medium containing the details of his message throughout the narrative (or drama) were, for the most part, understood as well. These facts would not only to Revelation, but also to Daniel, portions of Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the gospels Matthew, Mark and Luke as well as several non-canonical books.

In this sense, Revelation is more than just pure Apocalyptic literature. Within it is found a prophetic element (note 1:3), an important message (sermon) for its readers, specific messages to specific churches, blessings, comfort and the like. But foremost, it is a book urging spiritual life and perseverance for God's people as the battles are principally spiritual within the historical setting whenever that may be. Many literary forms are found in the overall apocalyptic format, all of which lead to the fascinating nature of the book.

## II. AUTHOR

The author identifies himself as "John" four times in the book. (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8) Identifying which "John" this might refer to was not easily determined since the book has so many differences in the Greek in comparison to the Gospel written by John the disciple of Jesus, brother of James. Justin Martyr, shortly after the middle of the second century stated that Revelation was written by "John, one of the apostles of Christ." His statement came to be viewed as authoritative and is still held by many today. But there are also detractors to this as a legitimate skepticism remains. The internal evidence does not support Justin Martyr's claim.

Though the author identifies himself by name, at no time does he claim he is an apostle nor assert apostolic authority. Of course, neither is this done in any other writings attributed to John. He speaks objectively of the apostles in 18:20 and 21:14, but the in the context this seems appropriate.

The fact that the book appears at the end of the New Testament reveals some uncertainty of the authorship by early church fathers who attempted to determine

the authentic books from the pseudepigrapha. However, by 190 A.D. Revelation was accepted as an authentic apostolic book.

### III. DATE OF WRITING – OCCASION FOR THE WRITING.

The date of this writing is closely tied to the occasion for the writing. During the latter half of the first century and into the second, persecution of Christians was taking place, but not consistently. These seasons of persecution, some harsher and more widespread than others, seem to be the occasion that prompted the writing of the book. In addition, there were several heresies vying for the minds of the faithful. Chief among these was Gnosticism, and John became a vocal opponent of this movement. I John is dedicated to exposing the fallacies of this religious philosophy having infected so many churches. So the date cannot be stated for sure. It would make sense that it took place later in John's life and likely after the Apostle Paul had been executed since John appears to have been in Asia Minor at the time of the writing and the book is addressed to seven churches in that territory and there is no allusion to Paul's presence or writings. It is doubtful that 18:20 needs to include Paul. John speaks of the apostles as the twelve (21:14).

And there is no mention of Timothy, pastor at Ephesus for many years, as he may have already departed Ephesus or died sometime before John's arrival. We have evidence from Polycarp of John's presence in Ephesus near the closing of the first century and at the height of Domitian's rule from Rome (93-96) and Trajan's (98-114) both of whom demanded emperor worship upon penalty of death. Of course emperor worship was a heinous sin both to the Jew and the Christian and amounted to a denial of Christ and a violation of the first three commandments. Under this persecution, the book of Revelation makes sense from the contemporary view of the readers.

So we could place the book as early as mid 50's under the persecution under Nero, but more likely in the 90's. Many early church fathers, namely Irenaeus, Clement of Rome, Origen, Eusebius, Jerome and others all concur that the book was written near the close of the reign of Domitian.

The reason given in the book for the long period of suffering is to give time for repentance for those who would seek the Lord.

#### IV. PLACE OF WRITING

John describes the place and past tense of where the vision took place and why he was there in 1:9, "I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance *which are* in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus."

Patmos is a rocky, jagged, desolate Greek island off the West coast of Asia Minor some ten miles long and barely six miles wide at its widest point, having several harbors. It is nearly directly off the coast of Ephesus about 90 miles. It was used by the Romans as a place of banishment and was apparently a mining camp.

John, in 1:9, notes in the present tense that he is partaking of "the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance *which are* in Jesus. Then he switches to the past tense in noting he "was" on the island called Patmos. The writing of this book took place after he saw the visions and was released from Patmos.

After John was released from the labor camp he then wrote the book and the most likely place was Ephesus. Thus, he wrote it from memory.

Years before, John had moved to Ephesus sometime after 69 A.D. and resided there when the Romans invaded Jerusalem and destroyed the temple in response to the uprising of the Jewish Zealots against them. He apparently remained there for some time as we have an account in Polycarp of him and John going to the baths in Ephesus and commenting on the fact that Cerinthus, the famed Gnostic teacher, was there also. Eusebius states that John was arrested for his evangelism (stirring up the people and rejecting emperor worship) during the reign of Domitian and was released in 95 during the rule of Nerva.

His exile on Patmos was due to his own faithfulness to the Lord and his proclamation of the word of truth. He is a "fellow partaker in the tribulation" with his brothers in the Lord (1:9). But there are worse times to come. Further, one must discern why God doesn't cause a cessation of these times. Encouragement is given that the faithful will not suffer God's own pouring out of wrath upon the earth.

## V. FEATURES AND THEMES IN THE BOOK

### A. Special Features of Revelation

1. It is the only book in the Bible that contains a special promise to obedient readers (1:3). At the same time it pronounces a curse upon those who tamper with its contents (22:18-19)
2. A vitally important feature is that John, of all other apocalyptic writers, has superimposed upon the dramatic structure of his book another structure, that of a letter. Failure to discern this dual literary character of John's work has led to much misunderstanding on the part of interpreters. To disentangle the one form (drama) from the other (letter) is an unfortunately easy task. The marks of the letter form appear only in an opening salutation (1:4-6) and a closing benediction (22:21).

The whole book is a letter addressed in a Pauline like fashion to the seven churches of Asia Minor. As such, it is a unified entity from 1:1 to 22:21. The entire book was to be read to each church.

3. The book is particularly Jewish and we need to take into consideration first century Jewish thought form, literature, history, and culture so we can grasp more effectively how this book was to be understood by its early readers and grasp God's intent in having it produced in the first place. But it is Christian as well, albeit with the flavor of first century Judaism as represented by its author.
4. A special feature of Revelation is the predominance of the Lamb as sovereign. The Lamb, a metaphor for Christ the Messiah, is a controlling personality during the whole drama.
5. The structure of the book is critically important. We have seven "chapters" each containing seven dramas or "acts" prefaced with a prologue and ending with an epilogue. This is John's structure. The first five chapters are in actuality an introduction to the opening of the seven sealed scroll. The drama unfolds through a panoramic scroll presented as written on both sides. The scroll is sealed with seven seals, each portraying an act in the drama. The seventh seal contains seven scenes, and the seventh scene contains seven events. The number seven is mentioned 52 times in the

book. The number seven is a symbolic number of significance indicating completion, perfection, totality and rest. It corresponds to the Sabbath Day in the Genesis creation account.

6. There is a correspondence to Genesis in terms of a new creation as well as correspondence with the Egyptian captivity, the Plagues, the Passover and The Exodus. The book of Daniel, Matthew, chapter 24 and other literature also has correspondence to certain passages in the book.

7. Thought the book is filled with images, metaphors, symbols and so on, many of them are given interpretation so that the reader will not miss the significance of the imagery. For example, the Lamb is Christ, the seven lampstands are the seven churches, the stars in chapter one are "angels" (or "messengers") and so on. Other images need to be interpreted in light of the context of other Biblical references.

## B. Overriding themes

1. There is a constant reference of an evil and/or Satanic power (identity discussed later) which is seen as pitting its religious and economic forces and demands against the people of God (the church) and the Gospel of salvation by faith in Christ. The goal of this force is to crush the faith of the faithful and destroy their trust in God and, in so doing, gain the allegiance of the apostates. This force corresponds with the term "the great harlot (or whore)" in the book, principally chapters 17 and 19. Worship of the false "Messiah" was required in order to save one's life. It might be said that persecution and suffering does not strengthen character, but reveals it.

2. To combat these forces is the "everlasting gospel" imploring men and churches to remain faithful to Christ until God's redemptive plan is completed even though it may cost them dearly. Only as one has confidence in Christ in spite of persecution can one find real salvation and eternal life. Though His followers are slain and suffer persecution even to death for rejecting the whore's attempts to persuade them to apostasy, Jesus will vindicate the faith and perseverance of His own and all will reign supreme bringing this entire evil structure down to rubble, destroying the evil powers themselves and their followers.

3. The conclusion is the destruction of the earth both during the rule of man upon it and ultimately by God Himself who re-creates a new heavens and earth in which righteous dwells. This is a parallel to Genesis 1-9 except that paradise lost is regained for the faithful.
4. Though often thought of as fitting some historical or Biblical theme, many of the visions and images are representative of spiritual truth and spiritual warfare. This is the purpose of the book, to strengthen the spiritual focus, understanding and determination to persevere regardless of the historical, theological, doctrinal understanding, expectation or position of the reader.

### C. Characters in the drama

1. God. Mentioned a hundred times in the book. He is the eternal One , the Almighty. He sits in sovereignty over history and assures that His plan of redemption will be fulfilled to His own glory and that of the Lamb. He gives to the Lamb the seven sealed scroll (chapter 5).
2. The Lamb. Jesus Christ, the Sovereign of the faithful seen as glorious, powerful, and eternal, one with God who sustains the faith and confidence of His own. He is given the seven sealed scroll by God and is found worthy to open it and reveal it to John the revelator so it can be revealed to His followers.
3. John the revelator. It is to John God and the Lamb open the scroll so John can reveal its contents to the faithful.
4. The church(es). The only place the word "church" is mentioned is in the seven letters. But within the "church" are both faithful and unfaithful, much like within "Israel". In the remainder of the epistle these are differentiated even as in Israel. The faithful are termed: "bondservants", "saints" or "the called or chosen" or "those who overcome" and "written in the Lamb's Book of Life". The term "bond-servants" is used eight times and "saints" thirteen times. The unfaithful are seen as the "immoral", "unclean", "filthy" and, "not written in the Lamb's Book of Life."

The absence of the word "church" or "churches" from chapter four onwards does not indicate that the remainder of the book is without application to believers because they are now departed from the planet by some "rapture."

5. The angels. Agents of God and the Lamb in carrying out their wishes. Angels play a major role in the narrative. In some cases the term "angel" is better translated "messenger."
6. The Dragon. Satan, the Devil. Opposes both God and the Lamb and seeks to destroy the faith of the saints in them.
7. The Beasts. One of the Abyss, one of the Sea, and one of the Earth. Agents of the dragon.
8. The reader. It is thrust upon the reader to solidify his trust in God and the lamb regardless of the circumstances of life or the voices that might lead him astray. Spiritual, moral and life decisions, choices and commitments are set before him/her and these are critical to understanding the place of God and the believer in the midst of an evil world.

## VI. STUDYING THE BOOK

### Methods of Study

#### A. Deductive

There have been several ways to approach the material in the Book of Revelation. One is to identify the visions and their contents with historical events that seem to fit the pattern revealed. This is deductive in that one "deduces" what is meant by superimposing an outside schematic upon the narrative of drama. The material is understood from within the framework of one's own background and knowledge. What he has been taught, read, studied, or heard all has bearing upon what will be seen and understood in a book like Daniel or Revelation. The reader brings to the book a preconceived set of ideas; a theological persuasion, etc. The book is then accommodated to these ideas or theological perspectives rather than the student accommodating his mind to the intent of the book. Often the interpretation of such material rests upon one's understanding of other books or passages in the Bible which adds information to the matter.

Accompanying the deductive approach are several methods of interpretation of classical note. It is not surprising that a variety of methods of interpretation should have been tried with reference to

Revelation. Accordingly, Christian scholars have approached a study of this book with minds biased on the subjects with which it deals and the net result has been chaotic.

1. There is first, the contemporary view, also called the Preterist approach which sees the whole sweep of John's vision as limited to his own times and any prophecy as already fulfilled by the events of those times.
2. Secondly, is a view called the futuristic approach which holds that the book contains a forecast of universal history at the end of the age immediately preceding, during and following the "thousand years" of 20:1-10 which is literally interpreted. This is a popular approach.
3. Thirdly, is the "eclectic" view which lays stress on the spiritual elements of the book, and does not attempt to "dogmatize" the meaning of the details of the more mysterious visions in the book. They believe there are three classes of these passages; those very clear in their spiritual teaching; those more mysterious; and those too veiled to attempt an interpretation. The prophecies contain elements of the near and the far from the writers perspective.
4. Fourthly is the allegorical school of thought, a very ancient but widely adopted method which treats this book and all scripture as a picture of something else altogether relating to some spiritual truth such as the seven letters to the seven churches being seven ages of church history or seven people of historical importance or anything else that comes to mind such as the seven dwarfs of Snow White, I suppose.
5. Fifthly, is the so called "literary-analytical" approach which sees the book as the end product of editors or redactors who over time have worked over and assembled materials from several sources into one document. This "scissors and paste" approach does not see the book as a unity but a collage.
6. Sixthly, is the "dramatic interpretation" which states that John's book is highly dramatic in style, which is recognized on the face of it. The book is divided into seven "acts" as it were, each act having in

turn seven scenes depicting "what is" – the contemporary, from "what is to be", the eschatological.<sup>3</sup>

These basic methods are not mutually exclusive but often combined or overlapped with others to present the best possible viewpoint from a deductive point of view. Still, all these are approaches brought to the book, not necessarily derived from the book. Sadly, the book is often manipulated to fit this approach and accommodated to the point of view of the interpreter.

## B. Inductive

This approach to the book is by far more difficult. It demands that the reader, to the best of his ability, attempt to come to the book having put aside all preconceived notions, ideas, deductions, etc. The inductive method of Bible study implies that the literature speak for itself. Further, the reader tries to place himself within the experience, environment, historical circumstance and frame of mind of the writer and his audience.

This is not easy and requires much research before the book is even opened. Other considerations are the author's grammatical style, textual accuracy, writing style and so forth as he works to make his thoughts and intents of his text clear and direct without the clutter of a superimposed system.

"Why is this book written?" is an important question. "What is the intent God has in having it written?" "If I were living when this was written, how would I understand its message?" "In what way should I approach and understand apocalyptic literature?" Questions like this are helpful in determining the interpretation of the literature. In this way, one hopes to glean God's thoughts in the process.

One starts with the material given and builds from there. This is the inductive method. The deductive process starts with a construction or pattern and brings it to the book. The book then is manipulated to fit the construct. The former is more difficult but also more rewarding, and I believe more accurate. Let the book speak for itself and the "chips will fall" where God intends. Placing the "chips" in a certain way and then illustrating how the book fits the pattern is profitless in my opinion as all that does is

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<sup>3</sup> See the chart on "Jewish Eschatology" in the appendix.

affirm my own idea. In our study we will approach the book as inductively as possible given our own cultural, linguistic, and religious lenses through which we see.

Regardless of the method utilized, it is critical to get the spiritual message of the book and have it effect the reader. To fail to do so is to add and subtract from the book and come under the warning of 22:18-19.

### C. The Greek Text

The Greek text of Revelation is more uncertain in some respects than that of other books of the New Testament. That is to say, assigning authorship of it to the writer of the Gospel finds awkwardness in the use of the Greek in comparing the two documents. The Greek of John's Gospel is smoother and consistently at an even level throughout the book. In Revelation, though there are similarities with the Gospel Greek, it is found to be rougher, with many irregularities. The use of an amanuensis could explain the differences, one being used for either book, but unlikely for both.

As with all the other New Testament writers, John uses the Septuagint (LXX) when quoting Old Testament passages. There is often a difference in the Hebrew verse he quotes and it is worth noting. (Rev. 2:27 for example)

### D. Interpreting the material

As one begins to read the book he is faced with understanding and applying the material as the author intended. The overall message is relatively simple if the book is taken at face value. It can be stated in a sentence or two as, "Times will become more difficult for God's faithful ones in Christ, even to the point of persecution and extermination if one is determined to remain faithful to the Savior. But neither fret nor fear, for your faith will be vindicated and the Savior will one day reign victorious, with the power of evil destroyed, and with you at His side."

There would be, of course, those who would disagree with this summary based on theological views that are not actually presented in the book. So the student will have to determine for himself the actual message of the book, or if he prefers to manipulate the book to support a preconceived theological position.

However, the more I read and study the book, the more I sense that, though most try to see a historical timeline in the narrative, there is actually more emphasis on the spiritual nature of the letters, visions, images and narrative and how the reader should be impacted within any given historical setting. The goal is the same. To encourage faithfulness to God regardless of the circumstances we find ourselves in because, even though that could include great persecution, suffering and even death, the outcome is vindication and glory for those who persevere to the end.

**Perhaps the two most important keys** to interpreting the book lies in the prominent use "**prolepsis**" and what I will call "**recapitulation.**" In Revelation we have many examples of this. Let's define them.

The placing of an event yet to occur in the past tense is a literary form called a "**prolepsis.**" Jesus used this in John 12:31 as he envisioned the defeat of Satan based on an event (His crucifixion and resurrection) about to become reality, "Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out." We have the same style of proleptic announcements in Revelation 12:10 and 19:6-7 where the reign and rule of Christ are announced as having occurred yet have not. These are made to help the reader look to the future victory of Christ and the fulfillment of His promises to His faithful in the midst of difficult and discouraging times. A view of the future so to speak.

The best way for us to understand a prolepsis is to think of our last will and testament wherein we may state something to the effect, "I (we) bequeath our estate to the following beneficiaries..." It is signed, notarized and placed in safe keeping until such day that it is actuated. Yet we put the language in the present tense even though it refers to a future event yet to occur. At that future event, the language is temporally correct. The "New Covenant" also called "The New Testament."

"**Recapitulation**" means that a vision, image or symbolic act is presented, set on the "back burner" as it were, and later on (often much later on) recapitulated to and enhanced and filled out. This can happen several times with the same narrative. Sometimes even the image is changed or enhanced. Jesus did this Himself in, for example, the Olivet Discourse. He would make a statement, draw His narrative to a conclusion and then take it up

from the beginning again adding new information. He would do this several times.

Both of them are seen, for example, in 14:8 where we have the statement made by an angel, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great...." But the actual fall of Babylon the Great does not occur until chapter 18. The statement by the angel in 14:8 is a "prolepsis" and the re-introduction of the theme and comments on it are the "**recapitulation.**" Another example is found in 6:15-17 where the kings of the earth mourn the coming "presence 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 is able to stand?" But this moment is abandoned and John does not return to it ("recapitulate") until chapter 19.

You have **prolepsis** in 11:17-18, but the actual event does not occur until chapter 20. These are critical matters and by these few of many examples, help us understand two important things. 1. John is not inconsistent in his narrative and we can see that due to these concepts, we need not assume that the book is a cut and paste document as some propose, and 2. We need not bind ourselves to a strict chronological framework in which we must try and fit it all together.

Finally, once again, the message of the book is timeless and contemporary to every age. Though the book seems to emphasize the time of the end and the great concluding battle between the forces of evil and those of God, there is evil and deception in every age and it is clear from the book that every person ought to take seriously his stand in the sight of God and make the appropriate choices now regarding his eternal destiny.

**OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF "SEVENS"**  
**AND STRUCTURE OF THE SEVEN SEALED SCROLL**

I. Introduction to the vision. Prologue, Greetings and Doxology and vision of Jesus among the seven lampstands. 1:1-20

II. The seven letters to the seven churches 2:1-3:22

1. Ephesus 2:1-7
2. Smyrna 2:8-11
3. Pergamum 2:12-17
4. Thyatira 2:18-29
5. Sardis 3:1-6
6. Philadelphia 3:7-13
7. Laodicea 3:14-22

III. Interlude: The heavenly scenes, A. God in the heavenly temple. B. The Lamb and the Scroll. 4:1-5:10 Anticipation: Praises to the Lamb for power and dominion forever 5:11-14

IV. The seven sealed scroll 6:1ff.

1. White horseman – False Christs. (Possible worldwide proclamation of gospel, but less likely) 6:1-2
2. Red horseman – War 6:3-4
3. Black Horseman – Famine 6:5-6
4. Pale horseman – death 6:7-8
5. Martyrs – persecution and slaying of God's faithful. 6:9-11
6. Heavenly signs and great earthquake. 6:12-17

Anticipation: Recognition of God and Christ appearing in judgment. 6:16-17

V. Interlude: A. Sealing of the 144,000. B. Great multitude of slain faithful. 7:1-14 C.

Anticipation: The future blessings under the rule of God and the Lamb. 7:15-17 D. Breaking of the seventh seal and silence in heaven. 8:1 E. Angelic casting of fiery bowl to earth 8:2-8:5

7. Seven angelic trumpet plagues 8:6-16:21
  1. Fiery hail mixed with blood destroying 1/3 of the earth, trees and grass. 8:7
  2. Great burning mountain thrown into the sea destroying 1/3 of the oceans, sea life and shipping. 8:8-9
  3. Great star (Wormwood) falls on 1/3 fresh water turning it bitter and many die from drinking it. 8:10-11
  4. Heavenly bodies struck, 1/3 of sun, moon and stars are darkened.

Announcement of three woes to follow. 8:12-13

5. The first "woe." "Locust" plague released from "bottomless pit" and ravage people with pain who have not the mark of God on their foreheads. 9:1-12
6. The second "woe." Great army from east (200,000,000) kills 1/3 of all who do not have the mark of God on their foreheads. 9:13-21

VI. Interlude: A. The angel and the little scroll. B. The two witnesses. C. The Beast from the Abyss. 10:1-11:14

7. Loud voices and **a major interlude** before the final "woe" (seven bowls of God's wrath) A. Announcement in anticipation of the rule of God and Christ. B. Sign of the woman. C. Sign of the dragon. D. War in heaven. E. The Beast from the sea. F. The Beast from the earth G. The Lamb and the 144,000 on Mount Zion. H. Three angelic announcements in mid-heaven. I. The reaping. J. Song of the victors. K. Seven angels prepare the final outpouring of God's wrath. 11:15-15:8

The seven bowls of God's wrath poured out. 16:1-17:13

1. Malignant sores 16:1-2
2. The sea turned to blood, all sea life dies. 16:3
3. All fresh water turned to blood. 16:4-7
4. The Sun scorches men with fire 16:8-9
5. Torment on the throne and kingdom of the Beast and those therein. 16:10-11
6. The Euphrates dried up and preparation for Armageddon. 16:12-14

Anticipation: Christ's announcement of His soon appearing. 16:15

7. Massive earthquake and judgment on Babylon. 16:17-17:13

VII. A. Victory shouts and songs. B. Marriage Supper of The Lamb. C. Return and victory parade of Christ. D. Judgment of the Beast and False prophet. E. Millennial reign, Satan imprisoned. F. Satan released and then thrown into the Lake of fire forever. G. Great White throne judgment. H. The new heaven and new earth. I. The New Jerusalem. J. The river and tree of life [Paradise (Eden) restored]. K. Promise by Christ to come quickly. L. Conclusion of the book. 17:14-22:21

# THE BOOK OF REVELATION

## Chapter One

Outline:

Verses 1-3 Introduction

Verses 4-6 John's Salutation

Verses 7-8 Apocalyptic Announcement

Verses 9-20 Prelude and Vision of the Glorified Christ

1:1-3

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

The first three verses are the salutation to the readers, specifically the seven churches and the introduction of John the seer and the fact that what they are about to read is a "revelation" from Jesus Christ.

1: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ". This is first the subjective genitive in my opinion, the Revelation "belonging to or from Jesus Christ" rather than "about Jesus Christ", because God gave it to Him to show others. The purpose is to show the things that must soon take place to His bond-servants. John himself also called a bond-servant.<sup>4</sup> The giving to Jesus of things of importance by God is well founded in John's gospel. In John 5:19-47 for example, Jesus spends time explaining the things God has delegated to Him. On the other hand, there is much revealed about the glorified Christ as well significant to the message given to John.

In turn, Jesus sent and communicated it to John by means of an "angel" or "messenger."<sup>5</sup> How He goes about doing this is told later on. The word "angel" is the word for "messenger" and is a transliteration of the Greek word "aggelohs."

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<sup>4</sup> The term "bond-servant" is used of the faithful eight times in the book; 1:1; 2:20; 7:3; 11:18; 19:2; 19:5; 22:3; and 22:6. "Bond-servant" is used twice; of John in 1:1 and of Moses in 15:3. "Saints" is 13 times to describe the faithful.

Sometimes it means a heavenly messenger and sometimes an earthly as in: Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:24; and Philippians 2:25. The translation is based on the context. Here, it appears to refer to a heavenly sent messenger. This angel is the "master of ceremonies" so to speak, and transports John here and there so he can experience what God wants to show him. The Greek word for "angel" is found 176 times in the New Testament and translated "angel" 171 of these times in

the NASB. It is used 67 times in the Book of Revelation. The "angels" addressed in the messages to the seven churches could well be earthly messengers, but are most often seen as heavenly. This does not actually make a lot of sense since the message to these "angels" is usually negative in terms of the condition of the church over which they seem to have some responsibility. We will return to this during that discussion.

The unity of the book is seen in 22:8 as John may well be referring to the same angel as mentioned here in verse 1. As for God revealing mysteries, Revelation is not unique in declaring this. Daniel, which Revelation reflects quite often, tells us in 2:27-30,

27: Daniel answered before the king and said, "As for the mystery about which the king has inquired, neither wise men, conjurers, magicians *nor* diviners are able to declare *it* to the king. 28: "However, there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will take place in the latter days. This was your dream and the visions in your mind *while* on your bed. 29: "As for you, O king, *while* on your bed your thoughts turned to what would take place in the future; and He who reveals mysteries has made known to you what will take place. 30: "But as for me, this mystery has not been revealed to me for any wisdom residing in me more than *in any other* living man, but for the purpose of making the interpretation known to the king, and that you may understand the thoughts of your mind."

"Must soon take place." This phrase has led to many ways to understand the book.<sup>6</sup> This phrase places it in the arena of prophecy and in so doing leads us to some important aspects of prophecy in general. 1. Prophecy is most often (but not

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<sup>5</sup> Messenger angels do not have wings as depicted in artistic renderings. The wings in art pieces are to identify the being as an angel, not represent angels as having wings. Messenger angels often appear as normal people in the scripture as Hebrews 13:2 suggests.

<sup>6</sup> See section VI for a discussion of these methods.

exclusively) found within a threatening situation to God's people where God, through the prophet, offers various consequences based on the response of God's people to the situation at hand.<sup>7</sup> 2. The consequences for then people are often based on the response of the leader of the people, be he a king, prophet, or foreign power. 3. The fulfillment of the prophecy may take place multiple times over the period of the history of God's people. For example, promises and prophecies made to Abraham about his numerous descendants, the land they would possess, the kings that would come from him and the rule of God in their midst came to pass, changed, came to pass again and so on until they will be finally fulfilled at Christ's return. Messianic prophecies apply to God's anointed king and ultimately are fulfilled in Christ as are so many prophecies directed to Abraham's descendants. The patterns of God's involvement in redemptive history are repeated and can be seen in the past, the present and the future in Biblical perspective. 4. Following on this, we find that the Biblical narrative is seldom concerned about chronology, specific historical order, or accommodating itself to the way we write and think about history, whether it be past or present. It is more often concerned about spiritual matters and themes, persuading its readers about a needed area of attention, telling a story in a variety of forms so it can be remembered and so on. This is easily demonstrated when one tries to correspond the chronology of Jesus' life in the synoptic gospels with that of John, for example.

The point is that the phrase, "soon must take place" does not limit the fulfillment to one period of history alone, as we already know, living 2000 years after the book was written. God is the God "who is, who was and who is to come."<sup>8</sup> We can see in the book multiple fulfillments of certain events depicted therein. Daniel 2:28 (quoted above) speaks of the "latter days" when the things he speaks of are to take place. Yet the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream begins with Nebuchadnezzar himself. Peter, in his speech at Pentecost quoted the prophet Joel and proclaimed that the "last days" Joel spoke of were coming to pass.<sup>9</sup> We differentiate the "last days" from the "end time" or "end of the age."<sup>10</sup>

So we often discover dual or even multiple fulfillments - or even what we could call cycles of fulfillment, in that certain events are both near at hand, have been fulfilled before, and will be fulfilled again. Another example of this is found in the person of Elijah the prophet whom Jesus said his coming again was fulfilled in the

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<sup>7</sup> For example, see Ezekiel 18:29-32; Amos 5:4-6 etc.

<sup>8</sup> 1:8; 4:8 etc.

<sup>9</sup> Acts 2:15-17ff.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 24:3ff. etc. Also see Jewish eschatological chart in the appendix.

person of John the Baptist<sup>11</sup> but we see another possible allusion to Elijah yet to come in Revelation 11:3-12. In Matthew 24, Jesus speaks about certain signs which we know now have been fulfilled many times over such as wars, famines, earthquakes and so on.

2: Literally, "...who witnessed the word of God, the witness of Jesus Christ and all that he saw." The word "witness" is the Greek "μαρτυρέω" (mar-too-reh-oh) from which we get our term "martyr". This is more than what we consider a "witness" to something. It carries with it the idea of an oath taken on one's life or that one's life is involved in or backs up the event.

"...the word of God" is more than spoken communication here. It is a creating, living, dynamic power. It is personified in Jesus Christ Himself as John states in the first chapter of his gospel. God speaks and it is accomplished. In chapter 19:15, the only weapon the conquering Christ employs is a "sharp sword" from His mouth – His word. Paul also calls the "word of God" the "sword of the Spirit" in Ephesians 6:17.<sup>12</sup>

3: "Blessed"-there are seven times a blessing is poured out in the book, 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:5; 20:6; and 22:7. The first blessing is on those who read and those who hear the words of the prophecy. This may well refer to the reading aloud of the document to each of the seven assembled churches where both those who read it and those who hear it read are given the blessing. The word "blessed" means "happy" or "fortunate". This is not to say that individuals are excluded from this blessing, but that the document was intended for the assembly of the church.

However, they are "to heed" the things written therein. This is reminiscent of Jesus words in Luke 11:28, "blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it."

1:4-5a

4: John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come<sup>13</sup>, and from the seven Spirits

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<sup>11</sup> Matthew 11:14; then note Matthew 17:11-12 and

<sup>12</sup> See also: Revelation 1:16; Revelation 2:16; Isaiah 49:2; Hebrews 4:12

<sup>13</sup> Also Rev. 1:8; 4:8; 11:17

who are before His throne, 5(a): and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

4-5a. The salutation. "John". He names himself four times in the narrative, three in chapter one and once in 22:8. There is no title appended such as "The apostle" or anything else at any time. This suggests he was well acquainted with the churches and they knew whom had the vision and wrote the book. Why these seven churches? There were many more within the territory of Asia Minor. Their "lampstands" in the vision shows that they were churches of prominence and influence. They were central and important to the Lord's work in Asia Minor, the spreading of the Word. As capital and trade cities, more people flowed through these cities than any other in the province. Their effectiveness was being threatened by problems within the church itself. It was to these the Lord felt most needed the message.

In addition, the number seven is the framework for the entire corpus of material. It is used no less than fifty five times in the book. In itself it carries themes and messages. It is the number of completion, fulfillment, and rest as it reflects the creation and Sabbath day account in Genesis, chapter 1. It reflects the power and sovereignty of God and that he will complete what He has begun. It is often an inclusive number in that when seven of something is mentioned, all of that something is included as well.

For example, the seven spirits before God are indicative or symbolic of the complete Spirit of God, all that the Spirit encompasses and, as we shall see, symbolic of the fact that God sees and knows all things. This is somewhat cryptic as the Jews read this and know that nothing is hidden from God.<sup>14</sup>

The seven churches are presented to us, perhaps a symbol of the whole church for all time. The problems of each church and their strengths are part of the entire history of the church, and I reject the seven churches as representative of an artificially constructed "seven church ages."

So we have, as so often we find in scripture, a plural singularity (or single

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<sup>14</sup> "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." Hebrews 4:12-13

plurality) where a single entity is also seen as a plurality. So seven entities can represent in the plurality, a complete oneness, or corporate entity as well. Seven also pictures timelessness, agelessness, and eternity. It is the number of the end, conclusion or fulfillment of things. Bottom line, it is the way God does things and fulfills things he sets in motion. It is not done until "seven" is done so to speak.

"Asia" is what was known as "Asia Minor" in ancient times, western Turkey today.

"Grace to you and peace" is a typical apostolic salutation. It reflects the provisions of the New Covenant for those in Christ.

"...from Him who is and who was and who is to come..." This phrase is very Jewish and reflects Exodus 3:14, "God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, I AM has sent me to you."

"I AM" is God's name. It is represented by the tetragrammaton, "YHVH" - (יהוה).

The actual Hebrew word here is, אלהים and is the causative of the infinitive "to be" that is, in the best way we can express this, "The One who brings about existence", or, "The Creator" as it were. Yet this term is not bound by time. Thus the expression John recorded, essentially the eternal or everlasting One who has created and held all things together and will do so forever. Thus, the phrase is also expressed describing both God and the Lamb as "the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end." This is not to say that they have a beginning or an end, but that they are in full sovereignty over the beginning and end of all things.

"... and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne...", represents the fullness of His Spirit. Again a single plurality. They also represent God's ability to see all that goes on in the earth simultaneously. This concept is also reflected in several Biblical passages. Notably Zechariah 4:1-6 (-14), which seems to be the basis of much of the vision in the remainder of this chapter. Also Isaiah 4:4 and 11:2 speaks of various aspects of God's Spirit.<sup>15</sup> 11:2 is Messianic and worthy of review.<sup>16</sup> "Before His throne" is the position of dispatch and service as God directs.

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<sup>15</sup> Isaiah 4:4, "When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and purged the bloodshed of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning..." Isaiah 11:2, "The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD."

<sup>16</sup> Also note: 3:1b; 4:5; 5:6.

5a. "...and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. John is conveying a greeting to the seven churches from Himself, God the Father, The Son of God and The Holy Spirit of God.

"The faithful witness" – "Faithful" is "believing, trustworthy, and persevering."

"Witness" is again "μαρτυρέω" (mar-too-reh-oh) - (see verse 2 above). "Belief" or "faith" in the Bible is not head knowledge, but a living reality prompting conduct in accordance with that reality. Faith is a part of the individual, not an ancillary aspect of one's makeup. It is his makeup. It is who he is, his identity and the force that animates his every thought and move. So obedience and works are a natural outflow of who a person is and who a person is identified with his faith (or relationship) with God. So Jesus acted consistently and perfectly with who He was. And that brought Him to death, the ultimate demonstration of His faithfulness. They are one and the same.

"...the firstborn of the dead"- Jesus was not the first to be raised from the dead in either testament. In Colossians 1:18, Paul uses the same term, "He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything." And in I Corinthians 15:20 the Apostle says, "But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming..."

So the term "firstborn" has to relate to the first of a generation of those who will rise fully in right standing before God due to their faith and faithfulness, whether past saints, present or those to come. This reflects Jesus words in John 5:28-29, "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.

Plus, Jesus is now the "firstborn son" of a multitude of descendants promised to Abraham who will also be raised to life in the last day based on his faith by which God counted him righteous.<sup>17</sup> This gives Him the authority of the Father. In Psalm 89:27, God says of David, "I also shall make him My firstborn, The highest of the

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<sup>17</sup> Genesis 15:6

kings of the earth." This Psalm becomes Messianic as well in verse 36, "His descendants shall endure forever; And his throne as the sun before Me."

The legacy of the "firstborn son" is well documented throughout the Bible. What is a blessing is that we who are His by faith are a legacy to Him and he is a legacy to us.

"...and the ruler of the kings of the earth." This phrase is not intended to indicate that the kings of the earth are in any way submissive to the Lord. In John's time, Rome was often wreaking havoc on the church and many of its emperors demanding to be recognized as Lord and God. But, like it or not, the kings of the earth cannot thwart the sovereign will and power of the Lord when it comes to His own kingdom and His plan for redemption of mankind. Even the might of Satan and his demons are powerless in this regard.

Plus, we read in Romans 14:9-12, 9: "For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. 10: But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. 11: For it is written, "AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD." 12: So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God." And in Philippians 2:9-11, 9: For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10: so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11: and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

In the long term, even all the efforts of the kings of the earth to thwart God's purposes will fail, and even be used by God to further His own kingdom. (Note verse 6)

5a ends the salutation.

5b-6

5b: "To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood—6: and He has made us *to be* a kingdom, priests to His God and Father--to Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

5b. Begins a doxology ["word of glory" (to God)]. The text here is preferred over the KJV due to the multitude of early manuscripts attesting to this rendering found well after the KJV was published. Glory and "dominion forever and ever" is due to God because He "loves us" (present tense) and "released us" from our sins by His blood. In other words, we are no longer in bondage to the sentence upon us for our sin, nor to the power of sin itself because the work of redemption is finished and complete. It is again worthy to note that Jesus blood was the means of releasing mankind from their sins, not a system of works.

6: Those belonging to Christ are a "kingdom." This reflects Exodus 19:6, "...and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."<sup>18</sup> This is more of a prophecy than an attribute of Israel. Under the Law, only the Levites were permitted to hold the priesthood, but the remainder of the people were prohibited from doing so. However, Isaiah 61:6 proclaims a future where "Israel" will be called the "priests of God." Those who belong to God through faith are, by virtue of that relationship, the people of His kingdom and constitute His kingdom. There is a flavor in the New Testament that this "kingdom" will participate in judging and ruling over the earth with Christ.<sup>19</sup> As His kingdom, they are "priests" in that they have no need for a mediator.

"Amen" – the transliterated Hebrew word meaning "faith" or "belief". It also carries with it the idea of something being trustworthy and permanent thus worthy of placing one's faith into it.

1:7

7: BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen"

7: This verse sets the overall theme of the book. It is good news and bad news. Good news to those who "loved His appearing" and look for the "blessed hope" of His appearing.<sup>20</sup> It is bad news to those who rejected Him, killed Him or disregarded Him. The rest of the book describes all these characters and events in its pages.

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<sup>18</sup> See also: I Peter 2:5; 9; Rev. 5:10, 20:6

<sup>19</sup> Daniel 7:18; 27; Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:28-30; I Corinthians 6:3; II Timothy 2:12; 4:1.

<sup>20</sup> II Timothy 4:8; Titus 2:13.

"...with the clouds...". A quote directly from Jesus Himself who quoted Daniel 7:13.<sup>21</sup> "Clouds" are mentioned in the Bible 51 times and nearly every time they are used as a symbol of God's power, presence or soon appearing. This corresponds with the promise made to Noah that in the cloud God places a rainbow to remind mankind of His covenant never to destroy the earth by flood again. Looking to the clouds finds a reminder of all of God's promises and warnings.<sup>22</sup>

There are seven references to the appearance of the "Son of Man" with the clouds.<sup>23</sup> In each instance it indicates His appearance to establish His judgment on the earth, His powerful rule and eternal kingdom and/or simultaneously gather His elect from the earth. In cases where the "great tribulation" is mentioned, this event follows it. There is no mention of Christ's return anywhere in scripture prior to this event.

"...every eye..." We would have to speculate as to how this could occur, especially when added to the witnesses are, "those who pierced Him." There is no doubt, however, that all mankind, both the faithful but more so those who dismissed His Lordship will realize the inescapable truth. The consequences of their decisions about Christ are about to be revealed. A great wail of mourning will rise from the lips of those who dismissed, rejected or crucified Him. "So it is to be" is the simple Greek word, "yes", followed by "amen". And so we have a synopsis of the book in one verse. But the message to His own has not yet been revealed.

1:8

8: "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

8: John says this about God in verse four and then records God saying it about Himself in this verse. The repetition is for emphasis. It is to underscore the sovereignty of God over time and eternity, history and destiny. The two phrases are synonymous. (See comment on verse 4). "Alpha" and "Omega" are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet and are also synonymous with the phrase "first and last." God is sovereign over not only the beginning and the end, but all things in between. This is clarified in the following phrase, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." He is the eternal, ever living One over all time

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<sup>21</sup> Matthew 24:30; 26:64; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Luke 21:27; I Thessalonians 4:17; Acts 1:11.

<sup>22</sup> Significant are several verses such as Mark 9:7; Luke 21:27; Acts 1:9-11; I Thessalonians 4:7.

<sup>23</sup> Daniel 7:13-14; Matthew 24:30; Matthew 26:64; Mark 14:62; Acts 1:9-11; I Thessalonians 4:17; Revelation 1:7 and Revelation 14:14-20 shows the Son of man initiating the wrath of God upon the earth.

and all history. A study of the Alpha and Omega statements in Revelation finds both Christ and God making them.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, Christ is identified with God.

"Almighty" – "all powerful." This is picked up from the Hebrew, "El Shaddai" used 48 times in the Old Testament as a title for God. The term is used by John 9 times in Revelation and only one other place in the New Testament, by Paul quoting the Old Testament in II Corinthians 6:18. The title "El Shaddai" reflects the phenomenal power of God. It carries with it a massively destructive concept in terms of God's strength, might and power. It is also connected with the mountains, the place from which God often speaks. (Notice also 11:17 where "Almighty" is coupled with "great power")

Hebrews 12:25 notes,

25: "See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned *them* on earth, much less *will* we *escape* who turn away from Him who *warns* from heaven. 26: And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "YET ONCE MORE I WILL SHAKE NOT ONLY THE EARTH, BUT ALSO THE HEAVEN." 27: This *expression*, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. 28: Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; 29: for our God is a consuming fire."

The verse quote is probably Isaiah 13:13 and this brings us back to the focus of John's revelation later on.

The phrases: "Alpha and Omega", "the first and last", "the beginning and the end" are also spoken by Jesus in 1:17-18; 2:8; 22:13, identifying Him with the Father in nature, sovereignty and authority.<sup>25</sup> This terminology is from Isaiah 41:4; 43:10-13; 44:6; 48:12-13.

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<sup>24</sup> See 21:6, 22:13.

<sup>25</sup> 22:13, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." This expression is attributed to God in 21: 6, but to Jesus in 22:13. Those who deny the deity of Christ have to struggle with many such passages in the Bible that underscore Jesus as truly God. What they fail to understand is the concept of the plural singularity explained in the introduction.

## THE FIRST MAJOR VISION (1:9-3:22)

1:9- 11, The glorified and exalted Christ and His seven letters to seven churches in the province of Asia Minor.

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

9: John now introduces the circumstances of his vision experience. Again,<sup>26</sup> he notes he is (present tense) a fellow partaker of the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance in Jesus (*which are* is supplied by the translators), but uses the past tense about his time on Patmos.

"Fellow partaker" – συγκαινωνός (soog-koi-noh-nohs) – "participant with", a compound word "with" and "fellowship". John is one with them in the persecution they all endure together. The vision is to address the Lord's plan in all this.

"Tribulation" – is θλίψις (thlip-sis) meaning "anguish", "distress", "trouble", "affliction". There is a distinction between this common element in the persecuted church throughout the ages and what Jesus calls "The Great Tribulation" in Matthew 24:21. The body of Christ in the world finds persecution and ridicule not only a common occurrence but one that Jesus Himself stated would occur. In John 16:33 He said, "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." This statement actually sums up the point of the entire Book of Revelation.

"Kingdom" - See comment on verse 6. John is also in fellowship with them in the kingdom of God.

"Perseverance" – is ὑπομονή (hupo-moh-nay) "to remain under". This idea is steadfastness, or endurance while under a load.

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<sup>26</sup> See comment in the introduction, IV. Place of Writing.

These three themes are predominant in the book. John is encouraging his readers that he too suffers with them, they are not alone and God has neither forgotten them nor abandoned them. This is a frequent theme in the apostolic writings, and is notable in Hebrews, I and II Peter and Jude, for example. John and his readers were well acquainted. He had been in the Asia Minor territory for nearly 20 years it seems. We know he spent considerable time in Ephesus and was well acquainted with the churches in the region. This was typical of apostolic ministry – to travel about from congregation to congregation encouraging them to remain steadfast in their faith.

There were many challenges to the faith. Opposition from the Jews who often tried to involve Roman authorities against the church for some trumped up reason; false teachers with the church itself attempting to manipulate the truth to their own ends; a pagan community ridiculing believers and persuading them to abandon their devotion to Christ and succumb to worldly temptations; economic woes; questions and doubts arising without apostolic support and strength; and at times an outright persecution against the church from Rome that demanded recognition of the emperor as God; attacks of spiritual forces; and the list goes on.

Now John had been absent from them for some time and things were deteriorating. So the vision is given to John to bring the churches attention back to the Lord and give hope and encouragement amidst an environment contrary to the faith. It also encourages the same steadfastness John expresses as a vital element of one's walk with Christ. Circumstances will not only remain difficult, but in due time get far worse. But God will reign victorious in the end and their perseverance in Christ will see them sharing the victory as well.

We often ask the question, "Where is God in all this?" We had better realize the essence of what this book reveals because it does not paint a pretty picture of the future from John's first century perspective.

Patmos – see introduction, IV. Place of Writing

10: "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day..." – again past tense. It is important that this opening is understood properly. It is not an easy interpretation.

First, "in the Spirit". This is not some time when John was "walking" in the Spirit as described by Paul in Romans 8:9, Ephesians 6:18, or Philippians 3:3. Rather he was in a state of spiritual worship and meditation, "infused" or "engulfed" with the atmosphere of the Holy Spirit as he did so. This atmosphere was transformed into an ecstatic experience. Second, He was engaged in this worship time, apparently by himself, on the same day as other believers came together to worship, the first day of the week. However, this is the only place this term is used in the New Testament of "Sunday."

There are two possibilities. One is that due to the late writing of this work, the term came into use long after the other apostles had completed their work not using the term themselves. We have that type of occurrence with the term "Christian" which came into use several decades after the church was begun. Until then it was called "The Way". Not much later, the term was used frequently to designate the first day of the week when Christians came together to worship.<sup>27</sup> The other is that John is setting the scene for the "Day of the Lord", which is a significant term in both testaments, pointing to the direct return of Christ in wrathful judgment upon the planet. John actually is involved with both in his experience. But here the context leans toward the first day of the week.

As John was in his devotion/worship/prayer<sup>28</sup> he heard behind him a loud voice as of a trumpet. The word "Trumpet" does not tell us what type of instrument John likens the voice to. It could be a "shofar" – a ram's horn or a metal horn. John's use of the term, however, is to describe the volume and sound of such a voice. The sound is to command attention and action. This is reminiscent of the trumpet sound in Exodus 19:16,

"So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who *were* in the camp trembled."

That sound was not of a voice, but an ear-splitting blast of a horn, perhaps much like a fog horn or a modern ships horn. It was so loud it frightened the people.

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<sup>27</sup> Ignatius (101 A.D.), Irenaus (115) used the term and it became common from then on.

<sup>28</sup> This is thought to have occurred in what is today "John's cave", a grotto beneath a monastery on Patmos.

John was not blasted like that because, 1. It was a voice, and 2. It sounded like a trumpet. 3. It was behind him and intended to get his attention. 4. But it was sharp and penetrating.

The voice may have been that of an angel, not necessarily that of the Lord, in spite of the "red letter" print. Here's why. In 4:1 we read,

"After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like *the sound* of a trumpet speaking with me, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things."

So there were two (or more) voices John heard. In verse 11 of chapter one we have the voice of the angel John speaks of in chapter 1, verse 1, the, "Master of ceremonies" angel we could say. Also in 1:15, we have Jesus with a different voice, "like the sound of many waters."

11: This verse actually occurs after verse 20. Remember, verse 4 makes it clear that this book is written to the seven churches. Here this is repeated. John's immediate focus is directed to these churches. He was to write it in a "book". However, this is misleading. The book or "codex" was not invented for about another 50 years. John would have used sheets of papyrus, sewn together and rolled on a spindle. These sheets were not much different in size from a contemporary piece of printing stock.

The seven churches in these seven cities are all in Asia Minor, and circle the region. Though miles from each other,<sup>29</sup> John (and likely some companions) would have traveled to them regularly much as Paul did in for the churches in Cilicia. They were centers for Christian assembly and congregants likely met in homes, rented facilities such as gymnasiums, meeting halls or the like. The excavated or partially excavated ruins of each city are visible today, though much is unexcavated due to building near or on the sites, lack of funding or political reasons (all are in Muslim Western Turkey today) travelers can still gain the flavor of each ancient setting. Photos are abundant on line.

1:12-15

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<sup>29</sup> About 25 to 50 miles apart or more, depending on the route one takes.

12: Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands;<sup>30</sup> 13: and in the middle of the lampstands *I saw* one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. 14: His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. 15: His feet *were* like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice *was* like the sound of many waters.

12-13a: The vision now begins. John turns to see the source of the voice and instead his eyes are fixed on a panorama before him that wasn't there when he began his worship. He first sees seven lampstands made of gold. Each lampstand may have been seen as hosting seven lamps like the seven branched Menorah in the Old Testament.<sup>31</sup> Each branch was a stand for each bowl. The lamp itself was an oblong pottery or terra-cotta bowl with a spout. In the bowl was poured olive oil and a wick, made of twisted flax, extended from within the oil over the spout. When lit in the evening it would burn most of the night. In Matthew 25:1-10, Jesus tells a parable in which he talks about "trimming" the wicks of the lamps.

The lampstands could have been singular. But the lampstands John saw were probably the same as Zechariah saw. Chapter 4:1-2 of his book reads,

1: "Then the angel who was speaking with me returned and roused me, as a man who is awakened from his sleep. 2. He said to me, 'What do you see?' And I said, 'I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold with its bowl on the top of it, and its seven lamps on it with seven spouts belonging to each of the lamps which are on the top of it; [3: also two olive trees by it, one on the right side of the bowl and the other on its left side].'"<sup>32</sup>

The bowl "on the top" was a apparently a supply bowl from which lines, spouts or troughs ran oil into the lamps as needed. There is considerable debate about what this looked like. But one reasonable explanation is that the lampstand was circular with a center stand upon which sat a bowl with seven spouts. Each spout supplied a bowl. There have been bowls and lamps found like this with seven spouts.

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<sup>30</sup> Exodus 25:31-40; Numbers 8:1-4; Zechariah 4:1-2

<sup>31</sup> However, the word "menorah" did not originally mean a stand built to host seven lamps. It was first used to host one, then more later on. There have been four and five branched lampstands discovered.

<sup>32</sup> The "two olive trees" are mentioned in Revelation 11:14.

13a: "... and in the middle of the lampstands... The above image would fit nicely with the scene John saw if indeed each stand was a singular stand hosting one lamp and the lampstands were in some sort of a circle. In the center would be Jesus. But this is conjecture. They could well be seven branched Menorahs in a row or other configuration as discussed below.

So John saw seven lampstands with Jesus in the middle. What was the configuration of the lampstands John saw? A circle with Jesus in the midst? If it was, this "circle" could have been the actual pattern of the placement of the churches in the Asia Minor province. It is possible they could have been in some other configuration as the Greek offers other possibilities. The word "middle" could mean that Jesus is seen in their "midst", "between them" or even "in front of them". A semi-circle reaching from the sides of Jesus going around behind Him seems to work best. In verse 17 John falls at his feet, and Jesus reaches out and places His hand on John's head. This suggests Jesus standing in front of the lampstands, and with a semi circle, He would still be in their midst.

The height of each lampstand is a guess. In the tabernacle and temple, the gold Menorah seems to be about three feet in height, plus its base, making 4-5 feet in height. I read an article quoting an uncited Jewish tradition that the temple Menorah was 3.5 feet high and 5 feet wide. This is probably a fair estimate. The engraving of the Menorah on the arch of Titus in Rome could match this estimate. It stood alone in the Holy Place on the south side of the Holy Place and was not on a table. The height of the lampstands John saw could be estimated at around the same height.

Olive oil is frequently used as a symbol for the Holy Spirit and this is suggested by Zechariah 4:5-6.<sup>33</sup> By the Holy Spirit (or "seven spirits" -see verse 4) the churches are empowered and by the Spirit of God is each church being spoken to (chapters 2 and 3). So the image of Jesus in the midst of seven golden candlesticks can be visualized in various ways. Consistent with the rest of the vision, it seems like each lampstand had seven branches and each branch supported a lamp. Each lampstand then, had seven lighted lamps. This would represent the Holy Spirit in each church. Each bowl, as in the temple would be turned so the entire room was illuminated by a fan of lighted lamps.

The house hold lampstand could be about 3-4 feet high and one such single stand

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<sup>33</sup> This does not refer to the two Olive trees. They are explained in 4:11-12

excavated was a metal tripod with a plate on top for the lamp. It was about 31/2 feet tall.

Now we come to the presentation of the glorified figure of Jesus. He is described by John and it is by this description we can identify the image of Christ and its symbolism.

A. "The Son of Man". 13: b "... I saw one like a son of man... Jesus' most common title for Himself was "Son of Man". He uses it 84 times in the Gospels and it is never used by anyone else in the New Testament.

In Daniel 7:13-14 the Son of Man is pictured as a heavenly figure whom, in the end times, is entrusted by God with authority, glory and sovereign power. It is Jesus way of trying to get His disciples to see the link between "Messiah" and "Son of Man". Again, He is shaking their preconceived notions. Jesus' suffering is in accordance with the predictions in Isaiah 52:13-53:12. A typical statement by Jesus causing consternation among the Jewish leadership can be seen in Mark 8:31-32a for example,

"And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And He was stating the matter plainly."<sup>34</sup>

The Elders are lay members of the Sanhedrin, the high court of the Jews.

B. His robe. 13b: "...clothed in a robe reaching to His feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash....".

The color of the robe is not mentioned but it could be either blue or white. On the one hand, it seems to be the robe of the high priest because of the "sash" that is mentioned. In this case, the robe would be blue. It reaches to His feet, slightly longer than the High Priests robe. No bells are mentioned. Normally the sash across the chest would be a twisted blue, purple, and scarlet linen. Here it is gold.<sup>35</sup>

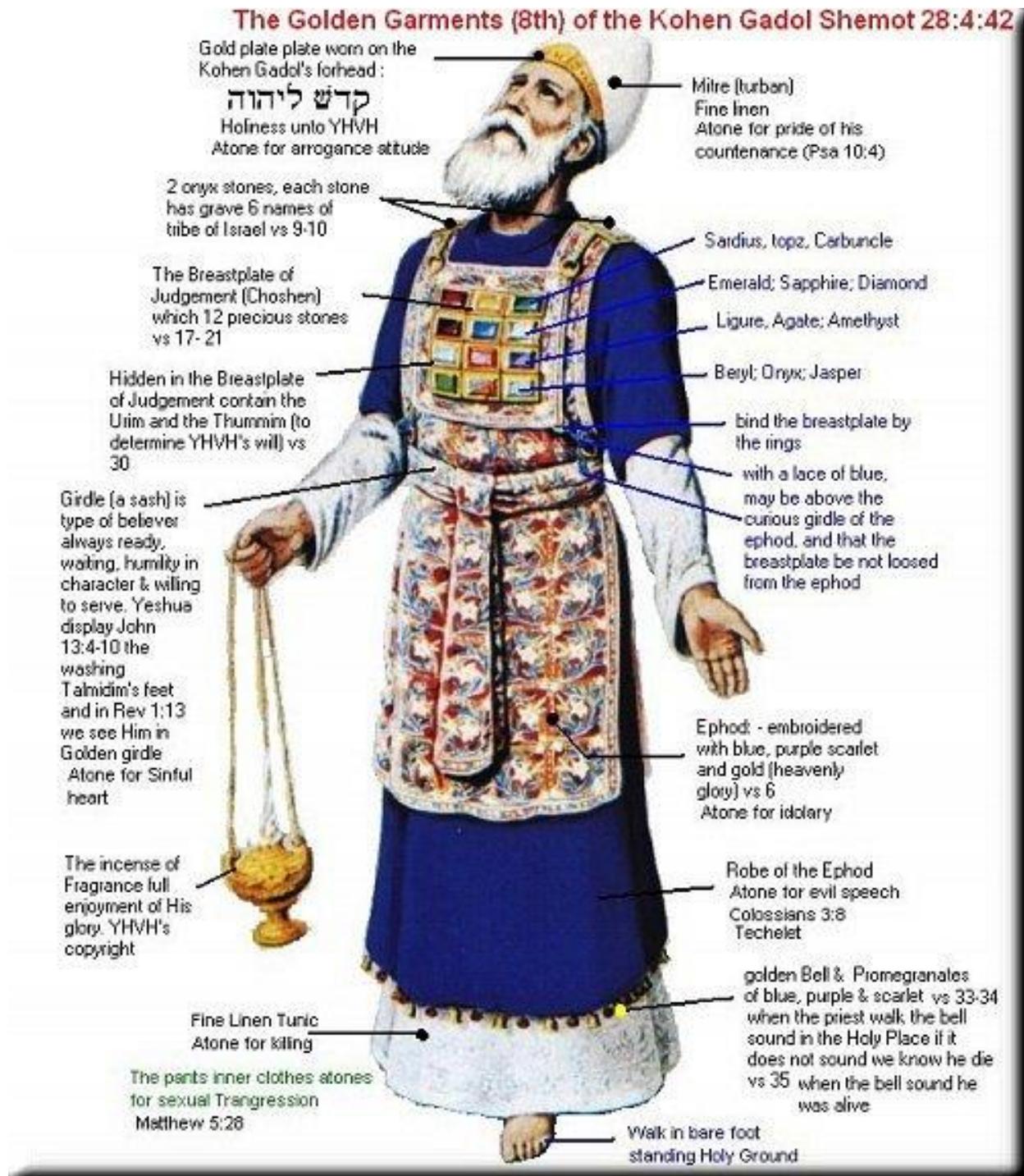
The High Priest would enter the tabernacle (or temple) barefoot in accordance with Exodus 3:5, "Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." It appears that

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<sup>34</sup> For a thorough discussion on this term, see the Excursus in the Appendix on this subject.

<sup>35</sup> See Exodus 28 for a full description of the garments of the High Priest.

the feet of Jesus are bare (verse 15). Each of the garments the high priest wore spoke to the atonement of specific sins of the people. But in this vision, apparently not all the garments are displayed, perhaps to symbolize that the full atonement had been accomplished.



The second possibility was that the robe is white. This is based on Daniel 7:9 as we will discuss with the next verse.

C. His head and hair. 14a: "His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow;..." A white head and hair. No turban. This is how Daniel 7:9 describes the "Ancient of Days". "I kept looking until thrones were set up, And the Ancient of Days took *His* seat; His vesture *was* like white snow And the hair of His head like pure wool..."

So John's description identifies Jesus with this image. Here, the robe is white. The image John sees identifies the glorified Jesus with The "Ancient of Days".<sup>36</sup> Of course, in Daniel's time, this would refer to the Almighty God. This phrase is only found in Daniel. In Daniel 7:13-14, we read,

13: "I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. 14: "And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed."

So Daniel identifies Jesus with both the Ancient of Days and the one (Son of Man) who comes to Him and is granted this "dominion, glory and kingdom." This "dominion" is reflected in Revelation 3:21, I Corinthians 15:27; Ephesians 1:20-22; Philippians 2:9-11; and I Peter 3:22.

D. His eyes and feet. 14b-15a. "And His eyes were like a flame of fire, His feet *were* like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace,..."

In Daniel 7:9b-10, we read, "His (*the Ancient of Days*) throne was ablaze with flames. Its wheels *were* a burning fire. A river of fire was flowing And coming out from before Him;..." This passage is quoted to note the presence of fire that so often accompanies a vision of God. "Fire" is a common image of God's presence and power in the Bible. It was the most destructive force in these times except for earthquakes which terrified people. In Exodus 19:16-19 we have lightning, thunder, thick clouds on a mountain, the sound of a loud trumpet, fire and an

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<sup>36</sup> In 19:13, the robe Jesus wears is blood red.

earthquake all a fanfare for God's presence. The people were so frightened they trembled in fear.

16: "So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who *were* in the camp trembled. 17: And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. 18: Now Mount Sinai *was* all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. 19: When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder."

The vision John beheld frightened him also. Many of these ancient elements are captured in the glorified Christ he sees before Him. Plus he knows he is in a holy place. In John's introduction, his intent is to bring his readers to the place where they recognize that they are being presented with a document from God Almighty.<sup>37</sup> This is as serious as it gets. And now they begin to see the vision with him. The desired effect should be obvious.

The phrase in verses 14 and 15, "His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet *were* like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace." In 2:18 this is repeated to the church at Thyatira and again the "eyes as of fire" in 19:12. This description is first seen in Daniel 10:4-6,

Daniel 10:4-6, 4: "On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, while I was by the bank of the great river, that is, the Tigris, 5: I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, there was a certain man dressed in linen, whose waist was girded with *a belt of pure gold of Uphaz*. 6: His body also *was* like beryl, his face had the appearance of lightning, his eyes were like flaming torches, his arms and feet like the gleam of polished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a tumult."

"The eyes like a flame of fire" is symbolic of the Lord's all seeing power apparently also having judgment in view whether negative or positive. He sees all the earth and this image appears to have a dual intent. For example, In II

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<sup>37</sup> See comment on verse 8 regarding the title "Almighty" and the quote from Hebrews 12.

Chronicles 16:9 we read, "For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His." Fire is also used frequently in the scriptures as a purifying agent burning away the dross in the smelting process.

The oft quoted Psalm 34:15-16, 15: The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous And His ears are *open* to their cry. 16: The face of the LORD is against evildoers, To cut off the memory of them from the earth. And, Proverbs 15:3, "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Watching the evil and the good."

Most interesting is Zechariah 4:10, "For who has despised the day of small things? But these seven will be glad when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel--*these are* the eyes of the LORD which range to and fro throughout the earth." "These seven" reflect the "Spirit of God". The same image is seen in Revelation 5:6, "And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth."

"...feet like burnished bronze..." Also from Daniel 10:6, meaning "highly polished" or "gleaming". The intent is for the reader to identify this figure with the one in Daniel 10. The feet are bare feet. No sandals. this is again reminiscent of the high priest who enters the temple barefooted.

E. His voice. 15c. "...and His voice *was* like the sound of many waters." Again, from Daniel 10:6, " and the sound of his words like the sound of a tumult." In Ezekiel 1:24 we read, "I also heard the sound of their wings like the sound of abundant waters as they went, like the voice of the Almighty, a sound of tumult like the sound of an army camp..."

In Ezekiel's vision, fire, thunder, lightening, clouds, burnished bronze, a voice like a tumult are all part of the vision he saw as well. The voice in the prophets Daniel and Ezekiel belong to the Almighty God.

So in the image of Jesus John sees, we find the attributes of God Himself.

1:16-20

16: In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its

strength. 17: When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18: and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. 19: "Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things. 20: "As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

16a: "He held..." The Greek word "had". "The right hand." The "right hand" always indicates the hand (or place) of delegated power and authority, and in this case it is invulnerable power.<sup>38</sup> And in that hand is ultimate security.

For example, in Mark 14:62 we read, "Again the high priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, 'Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed *One*?' And Jesus said, 'I am; and you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING WITH THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.'

Hebrews 1:3, "And, And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

Hebrews 1:13, "But to which of the angels has He ever said, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET"?

I Peter 3:22, "... who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him."

16b: "Seven stars." "In" His right hand are seven stars or the messengers of the seven churches. The "stars" are likely points of bright light as one would see in the night sky. Although we do not know exactly what these "stars" actually looked like, nor how they were held, this portrays, 1: That the seven messengers are totally secure regardless of the problems and persecution plaguing them. 2. It is

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<sup>38</sup> Also the hand or blessing. Note Genesis 48:13-20. Psalm 138:7 speaks of God's "right hand" of deliverance.

the Savior from whom these messengers derive their authority and strength. 3. These messengers are to be lights to the world. Especially their churches. 4. The number seven is likely not inclusive of these messengers and churches alone, but symbolic of the messengers and churches overall and throughout time. The remainder of the book, transcending the time of these particular churches, supports this probability

16c: "Sharp two edged sword." Did John actually see a sword proceeding from Jesus mouth? Perhaps, but in any case, this sword is always a symbol of the Word of God, God's truthful Word, and the key weapon of God and His messengers. This is seen in several places in the Bible. In Isaiah 49:1-3 we read,

1: Listen to Me, O islands, And pay attention, you peoples from afar. The LORD called Me from the womb; From the body of My mother He named Me. 2: He has made My mouth like a sharp sword, In the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me; And He has also made Me a select arrow, He has hidden Me in His quiver. 3: He said to Me, "You are My Servant, Israel, In Whom I will show My glory."<sup>39</sup>

The "Sharp two edged Sword" image is repeated in Revelation 2: 12, 2:16, 19:15, 19:21; as well as in Ephesians 6:17; and Hebrews 4:12-13 which says,

"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."

Of particular interest is Revelation 19:15-16, in which we see that the only weapon Jesus uses is this "sword".

15: From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. 16: And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."

The simple truth of this is that when Jesus speaks, it is done. In John's Gospel,

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<sup>39</sup> Verses 4-6 following are revealing and also filled with literary images and symbolism.

Jesus IS the word of God. Carrying through the symbolism, He is the two edged sword. God spoke Him and all creation is completed. (John 1:1-10) Hebrews 1:1-2 states, "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world."

16d: "...and His face was like the sun shining in its strength." This incredible brightness is reminiscent of the transfiguration in Matthew 17:2 which says, "And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light."

We have this image in both testaments. In the prophecy of Isaiah 60:19-20, we read,

19: "No longer will you have the sun for light by day, Nor for brightness will the moon give you light; But you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, And your God for your glory. 20: Your sun will no longer set, Nor will your moon wane; For you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, And the days of your mourning will be over."

Following with this we have in 21:23, "And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp *is* the Lamb."

17a: "When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying,..." John's response is falling "like a dead man" ...without strength or ability to do anything else. Images similar to Daniel. In Daniel 8:17-19 we read,

17: So he came near to where I was standing, and when he came I was frightened and fell on my face; but he said to me, "Son of man, understand that the vision pertains to the time of the end." 18: Now while he was talking with me, I sank into a deep sleep with my face to the ground; but he touched me and made me stand upright. 19: He said, "Behold, I am going to let you know what will occur at the final period of the indignation, for *it* pertains to the appointed time of the end."

And in 10:9-10,

9: "But I heard the sound of his words; and as soon as I heard the sound of his words, I fell into a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground. 10: Then behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees."

Also Ezekiel 1: 27-28,

27: "Then I noticed from the appearance of His loins and upward something like glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, and from the appearance of His loins and downward I saw something like fire; and *there was* a radiance around Him. 28: As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so *was* the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such *was* the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw *it*, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking."

This "falling on one's face like a dead man" is involuntary. The mind and body lose all their own power under the startling and frightening encounter with the glory of the Lord and one collapses.

The placing of the Lord's right hand on John is the transfer of blessing, appointment, power and authority. The "why" of this is explained in verse 19.

17b-18,

17b: "...Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last,..."

"Do not be afraid..." reveals that John has indeed collapsed of fright. These words are common to divine personages who encounter people and cause them great fear or terror.<sup>40</sup>

"First and the Last" – See discussion on 1:8. "I am the First and Last" - εἰμι ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος. This is comparable to being the "Alpha and Omega" (1:8). The idea is not that there are other gods, but that the idea of any other god is excluded. "I Am" prefacing this notes who is speaking to John and assures him that it is the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses who is speaking with him.

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<sup>40</sup> Isaiah 35:4 (and the entire chapter is notable); See also: Matthew 14:27; 17:7; 28:5; 28:10; Mark 6:50; Luke 1:13; 1:30; 2:10; John 6:20; Acts 18:8; 27:24.

Even though the image before John is clearly of Jesus, the identification with the Almighty God is evident.

18: "...and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades."

"The living One" identifies both God and the Lord Jesus Christ. God is thus described in Joshua 3:10; Psalm 42:2 (My soul thirsts for God, for the living God); and Psalm 84:2. This sets God above idols and images worshipped by the pagans. Paul made a remark relating to this in his speech at Athens recorded in Acts 17:22-32. In Jeremiah 10:10 in the midst of the condemnation of idols and their makers we read, "But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth quakes, And the nations cannot endure His indignation."

"I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore." A definite reference to the crucifixion and resurrection of our Savior. The resurrection is, of course, the most important fact setting the foundation for the truth of our faith.<sup>41</sup> His eternal life assures us He has the power and authority to grant it to others. This is the point of, "and I have the keys of death and of Hades." This means that Jesus has both the power and authority (the symbolic meaning of "keys") over death and "Hades". "Hades", the Greek term for "underworld or place of the dead" simply means the "grave" and the seemingly finality of that place and of death. this is equivalent to the Hebrew concept of "Sheol."<sup>42</sup>

The King James and other versions translate "Hades" as "Hell" and this is incorrect in our vernacular. However, even into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the term "hell" was used to describe a burial place in the earth, especially by the British. Decades ago, I personally heard a woman talk about how her grandfather planted potatoes in hell (the earth).

With His power, Jesus can unlock and defeat the "final enemy" (as Paul puts it I Corinthians 15:26)) and free souls from the grip of death and the grave and give them eternal life.

19: "Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and

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<sup>41</sup> See this author's work entitled, "The Resurrection" found on line at: [www.bibleclassroom.org](http://www.bibleclassroom.org), topical studies.

<sup>42</sup> For example see: Genesis 37:35; 42:38; Numbers 16:33; Ezekiel 32:27; Hosea 13:14 (quoted by Paul in I Corinthians 15: 54-55); Habakkuk 2:5; etc. the term is used 67 times in the Old Testament.

the things which will take place after these things. "The touching of the "right hand" of the Lord upon John authorizes or commissions him to record the events of the vision. He noted this commission in 1:11. These events include all of the things up to this moment, all that is taking place, and all that he will see as the vision unfolds.

Included in "the things which you have seen" is the presentation of the phenomenal power of the Lord coupled with His personal presence and care all of which bring an address to the seven churches in Asia Minor, and by attrition, the church as a whole. "The things which are" include the present state of the seven churches and the message given to them. "The things which will take place after these things" are the dictates of the consequences that will occur depending on the response of each church. In any case, the churches and the church will face persecution and how they handle it and understand God's role in the midst of it is a key factor. This is a typical prophetic pattern. Then a broad portrait of the future until the end of days is presented.

20: Interprets the seven stars and lampstands already discussed. The lampstands are strictly for the purpose of shining light to the surrounding area through the medium of the lighted lamps that sat on the top of the stand. Using this analogy Jesus said to His disciples,

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does *anyone* light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."  
Matthew 5:14-16

In Matthew 4:14-16 after Jesus temptation and move to Galilee, Matthew writes,

14: *This was* to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: 15: "THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI, BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND THE JORDAN, GALILEE OF THE GENTILES—16: "THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A GREAT LIGHT, AND THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF DEATH, UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED."

See comment on 1:4-5a about why these seven churches.

# **THE BOOK OF REVELATION**

## **Chapter Two**

### Introduction:

Before John reveals the vision to his readers he is instructed to compose letters to each of seven churches. Each church will see what is said to all. The "angel" as each church is likely better understood as "earthly messenger" as a heavenly angel has no responsibility to guide, teach or administer any church at all. The message to the "angel" would hardly fit a heavenly messenger at all. But specifically who is meant by the term "messenger" or "angel" is not revealed.

There is little question that John was very familiar with these churches and the cities they inhabit. Also, the phrase, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" suggests that the message is intended for a wider audience than the local congregation by itself.

In deference to those who postulate that each church represents a period or age of church history, there is no evidence for that. Today's church, and the church in any historical period, exemplifies many of the seven church's strengths and weaknesses in some way. In fact in any year, from congregation to congregation and even within the same congregation similar things are going on. The messages to all the churches are timeless. The theme of the entire book is seen in each letter in some degree, namely, amidst challenges the believer is to remain faithful to Christ and in so doing will reap the eternal reward. Faithfulness and perseverance go hand in hand and faith is actually demonstrated by perseverance.

Each letter follows a general seven point pattern or outline of its message.

- A. Address – To whom it is to be sent
- B. Description of Sender – Jesus Christ
- C. Commendations for the church
- D. Criticism for the church –( Except Smyrna and Philadelphia)
- E. A Warning
- F. An Exhortation
- G. A Promise

Each letter contains a theme of the entire book. Each is a microcosm of what the entire vision will reveal.

MAP OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF REVELATION



**2:1-7 THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS**

## Introduction:

The city of Ephesus was the second largest city in the Roman Empire once hosting 250,000 – 400,000 residents at the height of its fame, the first century and during the apostolic era. It was founded over a thousand years before Christ by the earliest Greeks.

It was supplied with water from the Cayster River and a manmade harbor connecting the river to the Aegean hosted trading ships from throughout the empire. Though the harbor continued to fill with silt from the river, it was constantly dredged in order to fulfill its increasingly important role as a military capital, political capital and trade center.

The Greek goddess Artemis, and Kybele of the Anatolians came together as Artemis of the Ephesians and was the patron goddess of the city. The largest temple in Asia Minor was built in her honor in and is mentioned in Acts, chapter 19. It was first constructed over a thousand years before Christ. Ruined by a flood in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., it was rebuilt with the help, of Croesus around 550 B.C. About 560 BC, Ephesus had been conquered by the Lydians under king Croesus of Sardis. His signature has been found on the base of one of the columns of the temple (now on display in the British Museum). The temple became one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Its size would more than fill a modern football stadium, edge to edge or more and be as tall.

Under Roman rule, Ephesus came to its height of prosperity. Augustus made it the capital of Asia Minor in the place of Pergamum. Here, major meetings of provincial leaders would take place. The city became equipped for its role for the center of political power in Asia Minor.

The city had one of the most advanced aqueduct systems in the ancient world, with multiple aqueducts of various sizes to supply different areas of the city, including private homes, public baths, public fountains and a multiple set of water mills, one of which has been identified as a sawmill for marble.

Ephesus prospered as a trade center where ships from all over the world supplied goods here which were transferred and sold to buyers empire wide. It had its own guild of trades with shops in three major agouras in the city where visitors could purchase locally manufactured goods and supplies. It had a manufacturing center for many of these trades and was a center for visitors, tourists and vacationers from

all over the world. It supplied visitors with nearly anything they could desire from foods, textiles, jewelry, leather and fabric goods, marble, and more, and even supplied any who were engaged in either intellectual or erotic pursuits. Its library held some 12,000 scrolls and around the corner was a public brothel. The temple, however, stood on the plateau above the city and at night it was lit up and could be seen for miles out to sea as a beacon to ships and sailors.

Tradition tells us that Jesus' mother Mary moved to Ephesus when John moved there. There is a both a church and a home named after her there in Ephesus and a church of St. John there as well.

### **THE TEXT OF THE LETTER 2:1-7**

1: "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: 2: 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them *to be* false; 3: and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. 4: 'But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. 5: 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place--unless you repent. 6: 'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7: 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.'

### **COMMENTARY**

#### **A. Address**

1a: The first letter is to the chief city of Asia Minor. This was the most important church in the group. Ephesus as a city held prominence for both the Greeks and Romans for over a thousand years and fell into decline in the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. However, Christianity did impact the city and finally became the overriding faith until Muslim invasions in the 7<sup>th</sup> century hastening the decline of the city.

The Christian faith had taken a strong foothold and was growing in the mid first century. The church there was founded by an exemplary Christian couple, Aquila

and Priscilla. They likely founded the church at Rome as well as the church at Corinth along with Paul. In Ephesus their strong faith and sound teaching won many of the city's Jews to Christ and after some time gentiles as well. Later, in John's day it was a pagan city of splendor and a hotbed of religion and philosophy, and Emperor worship had been instituted. But Christianity was gaining ground.

## B. Description of Sender.

1b: "The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands..." is interesting in that, unlike 1:16 the word "hold" here (kra-tay-oh) indicates a very strong grip suggesting that Christ holds His church so firmly that there is no power capable of removing them from His hand. In John 10:27-30 Jesus says,

27: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28: and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. 29: My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand. 30: I and the Father are one."

Those who are his are secure in the full power of the Almighty. The right hand is the hand of power and authority.

1c: "...the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands..." He conducts His Lordship in the midst of the churches. They are His light to the world. And they are accountable to Him who brought them out of darkness and made them light.

## C. Commendation.

2-3: "I know...(something good about you)" Jesus makes this statement in beginning His comments to each of the churches. In each case it reflects something Jesus commends them for and suggests He has a partnership or fellowship with them in these things. Notice He does not commend them for their love, either for each other or for the lost as He does in verse 19 in the letter to Thyatira.

In Ephesus, like in so many Mediterranean cities, false teachers and new philosophies ran rampant. By invading the church, some attempted to turn the

believers toward their own teachings and thus take authority over the church. Specifically, these were: 1. the teaching of the Gnostics and, 2: The influence of the Judaisers. This is not to exclude all the temples, priests, priestesses to gods and prominent men whose worship was popular in Ephesus.

In this light, the church had worked to refute all the influences that would turn believers away from Christ and the truth. They have turned away "evil men" in the church claiming to be apostles and are not. They have persevered in this and rejected false teachings. They had remained steadfast. For this they are to be commended. "To persevere" is to bear up even under a difficult load and their faith is demonstrated by their perseverance, a frequent apostolic theme.

#### D. Criticism.

4: But they have left their "first love". Fallen away from "the deeds" they did at first. This suggests that they were doing something early in their growth in Ephesus that they were no longer doing. What could that be? Some say it was love for Christ Himself. But I would suggest it was love for those outside of Christ, outside of the church. In other words, the loss of the evangelical spirit of sharing the Word with the unsaved.

Since the word "agape" is used for "love", this indicates a self sacrificing love for others. By this time an actual church structure may have been built and the congregation may well have become comfortable within its confines. Rather than reaching out to those who had need of help or of the truth, perhaps they simply had come to harbor themselves in the enclosure. On the one hand, as persecution increased, one can understand the desire to resist being so vocal. On the other, as Christ's body in the world with the great commission to reach the lost, the Lord would not be happy with this situation.

Thirty years prior, Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians in which he stresses Christ's Lordship overall and why, and that in light of His Lordship they should welcome the Gentiles into their midst as equals and all should be engaged in good works toward others but at the same time their personal lives must exemplify holiness. Here are some passages expressing that message that could reveal their "first love" to some degree and the struggle even then they were having.

1:15-23,

15: "For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which *exists* among you and your love for all the saints, 16: do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention *of you* in my prayers; 17: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him." We have no such commendation in the first letter in Revelation.

18: "*I pray that* the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19: and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. *These are* in accordance with the working of the strength of His might 20: which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, 21: far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22: And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, 23: which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."

In a city where gods and goddesses as well as Roman Emperors were worshipped, this statement is foundational so believers would be on guard against being swept up into the popular religious culture from which many of them had come. This had caused both suspicion and friction between those in Christ who came out of Judaism and those who came out of paganism. Paul seeks to heal the internal strife and then have them all look to others who need the Lord.

2:10-13,

10: For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. 11: Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," *which is* performed in the flesh by human hands—12: *remember* that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13: But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

A special note to the Gentiles to 1. Remind them that they ought to do likewise with other pagan neighbors, and 2: prepare the way for a note to Jewish believers to recognize these Gentile believers as equals in Christ. In addition Paul stresses,

3:1-6,

1: For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—2: if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; 3: that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. 4: By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 6: *to be specific*, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,

He begins by speaking to the Gentile believers and ends by speaking about the Gentile believers (to Jewish believers). Then to all...

4:1-3,

1: Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2: with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3: being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

4:11-32,

11: And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, 12: for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13: until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 14: As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15: but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, 16: from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. 17: So this I say, and affirm

together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles (unbelievers) also walk, in the futility of their mind, 18: being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; 19: and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. 20: But you did not learn Christ in this way, 21: if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, 22: that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23: and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24: and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of* God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

25: Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE *of you* WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another. 26: BE ANGRY, AND *yet* DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27: and do not give the devil an opportunity. 28: He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have *something* to share with one who has need. 29: Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such *a word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear. 30: Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31: Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32: Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

And then, an emphasis on godliness:

5:1-7,

1: Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; 2: and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. 3: But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; 4: and *there must be no* filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. 5: For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the

kingdom of Christ and God. 6: Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.  
7: Therefore do not be partakers with them;

[DVD]

E. Warning.

5: Repent or else. "...coming to you and remove..." Their prominence and privilege of being a light to their world. If a lamp no longer functions as it should it is discarded and replaced.

6: Nicolaitans. Here and at 2:15 (Pergamum). Unlikely the Nicolas of Acts 6;5. Belief in the heretical teachings of Nicolas whose "deeds" (or works) are hated by the church and the Lord. Whom Nicolas was we have no information. But whatever was taught resulted in works that were contrary to the truth and character of the Lord and those who belong to Him. (See: comment on 2:15)

F. An exhortation.

7a: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Jesus used this expression in Matthew 11:15.<sup>43</sup> This is a note such as we would say over something important, "You had better listen to what he says" or "Pay attention." Note it is the Spirit who is speaking to the churches. He is not the "angel" or "messenger" of the church but the authority behind what is said verifying its truth.

G. A Promise.

7b. "To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God." The word "overcome" also means "to conquer" or "prevail". Overcome, conquer or prevail over what? It is not specified. But Adam Clarke says it as good as any, "To him who continues steadfast in the faith, and uncorrupt in his life; who faithfully confesses Jesus, and neither imbibes the doctrines nor is led away by the error of the wicked; will I give to eat of the tree of life."<sup>44</sup>

George Ladd<sup>45</sup> says something stronger; "Although the Revelation forecasts the

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<sup>43</sup> Also: Matthew 13:9; 13:43; Mark 4:23 etc.

<sup>44</sup> E-Sword on line, Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible, Revelation chapter two verse comments.

terrible domination of evil in the person of the antichrist in the last days, it is in reality a prophecy of the victories to be won by Christ and His church. The idea of conquering suggests warfare. The Christian life is an unrelenting warfare against the powers of evil. The victory is not a physical or worldly one; it is a victory analogous to the victory won by Christ Himself, even though it involved His death on the Cross. 'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.' (3:21) A later vision, after the appearance of the beast and his fierce persecution of the church, sees the martyrs standing before the throne of God with harps in their hands singing a chant of praise to God; they are described as, 'those who had conquered the beast.' (15:2) In other words, their very martyrdom was their victory, for they had turned every satanic effort to turn their loyalty and devotion away from Christ and had remained true. The conqueror, then, is the victim of persecution whose death is not loss but is in reality his victory."

"Tree of Life in the Paradise of God" is an obvious reference to Genesis 3 in Eden. References to the "Tree of Life" or "Paradise" are numerous. None come to mind more than Jesus' words to the believing thief, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise." Luke 23:43

This indicates a restoration to conditions before what is traditionally termed the "fall of man"<sup>46</sup> for those who are in Christ. This is a consistent promise both in Revelation and the scriptures in general. It means that those who overcome will live eternally in a place described as "The Garden of God."

Some years after the John's book was published, Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, wrote a lengthy letter to the church at Ephesus in which he praises them for their unity, blameless Christian conduct and living in harmony and love under the guidance of their bishop, Onesimus. The church flourished there for over three hundred years.

## **2:8-11 THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA**

Introduction:

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<sup>45</sup> George Eldon Ladd, A Commentary on the Revelation of John, Eerdmans Publishing, Sixth printing 1981, page 40-41.

<sup>46</sup> The term the "fall" of man does not occur in scripture, but we use it as a common idea and reference.

Smyrna is some 38 miles north of Ephesus. It is now known as "Izmir". In pre-Christian times, it was founded by Greeks a thousand years before Christ but totally destroyed by an invasion of the Lydians some 600 years before Christ. One of Alexander the Great's generals, Lysimachus, rebuilt the city in 290 B.C. and it began to flourish and prosper. Perhaps this is alluded to by Jesus comment in 2:8, "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life..."

Being a seaport city, on the slopes of Mt. Pagus near the Hermus River, it grew into a principle city of Asia Minor and supported Rome's ascendancy to a world power. Even as early as 195 B.C., Smyrna erected a temple to the goddess of Rome (dea Roma). It also built a temple to the first Roman Emperor, Augustus, and in 26 A.D. several cities competed for the privilege of building a temple to the Emperor Tiberius and Smyrna was awarded the honor. She could then claim to be the "first city of Asia." Temples abounded and one to Asclepius<sup>47</sup> was especially prominent.<sup>48</sup> With support from Rome and its strategic location, the city became one of the most prosperous in the province.

The founding of the church likely resulted from the spreading evangelical efforts of Paul and his companions over several years in Ephesus. There is documentary evidence of this as well as a visit by the apostle John and his disciples in the latter half of the first century. Indeed, Acts 19:10 tells us that Paul's teaching in Ephesus, "...took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." And in 19:26, one of Paul's opponents in Ephesus, Demetrius the silversmith, complained, "You see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods *at all*."

One of John's disciples was a young man named Polycarp who, a number of years later after John's death, became Bishop over the church at Smyrna.

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<sup>47</sup> Latin: "Aesculapius."

<sup>48</sup> Asclepius was the god of medicine and healing in ancient Greek religion. Asclepius represents the healing aspect of the medical arts; his daughters are Hygieia ("Hygiene", the goddess/personification of health, cleanliness, and sanitation), Iaso (the goddess of recuperation from illness), Aceso (the goddess of the healing process), Aglæa/Ægle (the goddess of beauty, splendor, glory, magnificence, and adornment), and Panacea (the goddess of universal remedy). He was one of Apollo's sons, sharing with Apollo the epithet *Paeon* ("the Healer"). The rod of Asclepius, a snake-entwined staff, remains a symbol of medicine today.

Smyrna also hosted a large Jewish community who had influence with the civil authorities and were aggressive hostile to the emerging Christian church. We know of the collaboration from the persecution of the church and the death of Polycarp c.155 A.D. The Jews were principally involved in his execution and not so much the Roman authorities. It seems that the Jews of Smyrna were more antagonistic than were the Romans to the spread of Christianity, for it is said that even on Saturday, their sacred day, they brought wood for the fire in which Polycarp was burned. His grave is still shown in a cemetery there. His death was recorded for posterity and we have a record of it today.<sup>49</sup>

Like many other cities of Asia Minor, Smyrna suffered frequently from earthquakes, especially during the years 178-80 A.D., but it always escaped entire destruction. During the Middle Ages the city was the scene of many struggles, the most fierce of which was directed by Timur, the Mongol conqueror, against the Christians in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century. Tradition relates that there he built a tower, using as stones the heads of a thousand captives which he put to death, yet Smyrna was the last of the Christian cities to hold out against the Muslims, and in 1424 it finally fell into the hands of the Turks.

### **THE TEXT OF THE LETTER, 2:8-17**

8: "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this: 9: 'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10: 'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11: 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.' 12: "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this: 13: 'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. 14: 'But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit *acts of immorality*. 15: 'So you also have

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<sup>49</sup> See: "Documents of the Christian Church", H. Bettenson, London University Press, 1963, pgs. 12-16, 98.

some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16: 'Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth. 17: 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give *some* of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.'"

## COMMENTARY

A. Address:

8a: "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write":

B: Description of Sender-Jesus Christ.

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

See discussion on 1:8 and 1:17b regarding the description "The first and the Last." The phrase "who was dead and has come to life" might be an allusion to the city's destruction in 600B.C. and its "resurrection" some 300 years later to the first city of Asia.

C. Commendations.

9: "I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich),.."<sup>50</sup>

Though the city itself enjoyed economic prosperity, it was not so for those who had turned to Christ by faith. First, the Jews who had done so had been cut off and disenfranchised by their family and community. Often their property was confiscated.<sup>51</sup> Finding a way to make a living without denying Christ and either turning to emperor worship or back to Judaism was very difficult, if not impossible. For the Gentiles, their faith in Christ was seen as a rejection of the goddess of Rome and other such idolatry. Plus, there was civil opposition to the church by both Roman and Jewish citizens. The Jews were especially up in arms over this "cult" of Christians and often brought distorted accusations to Roman officials to gain their support in crushing out the movement. More on this in a moment.

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<sup>50</sup> Note the sharp contrast with the church of Laodicea (3:17) which professed to be rich but was in fact" poor."

<sup>51</sup> See: Hebrews 10:34 for an example of this.

"But you are rich" is intended to be figurative and focused on the spiritual riches one has in Christ and His kingdom of which he is an heir.

",...and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan."

"...blasphemy " can be seen in two ways. 1. Claiming a relationship with God through their fleshly lineage and, 2. Slander or calumny<sup>52</sup> against those who are Christ's by faith.

The former would find further comment to this by Paul,

"For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God." Romans 2:28-29

This is reflective of Jesus' words in John 4:23-24, "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

The concept that real Jews and the true Israel of God are those of faith and not of fleshly lineage is frequent in the scriptures. However it is rejected by some of particular theological persuasion as it interferes with their prophetic views. However, other verses supporting this view are:

"Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; for we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh....,"  
Philippians 3:2-3

"But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel; nor are they all children because they are

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<sup>52</sup> Slander; false accusation of a crime or offense, knowingly or maliciously made or reported, to the injury of another; false representation of facts reproachful to another, made by design, and with knowledge of its falsehood; sometimes followed by on

Abraham's descendants, but: 'THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED.' That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.

Romans 9:6-8

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise. Galatians 3:26-29

"For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy *be* upon them, and upon the Israel of God." Galatians 6:15-16

"But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *God's* OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY." I Peter 2:9-10

John is making a distinction between the literal/physical Jew who has rejected his Messiah, and those who have come to have faith in Jesus as the true Messiah and are in God's eyes, the real "Jew." Then, the picture must include Gentiles as well and thus we have the true "Israel" and the true "Church" of Christ. In other words, not in name only, but in true faith. The Church in general is a field of both wheat and of tares.

For the latter view, we have ample examples in the New Testament of the Jews telling Roman officials distorted tales about Christ and those who have come to believe in Him. For example,

Luke 23:2, "And they began to accuse Him, saying, 'We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King.'

But Jesus had said, Luke 20:24-25, "Show Me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?" They said, 'Caesar's.' And He said to them, 'Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.'"

But the Jews persisted:

John 19:12, "As a result of this Pilate made efforts to release Him, but the Jews cried out saying, 'If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out *to be* a king opposes Caesar.'"

John 19:15 "So they cried out, 'Away with *Him*, away with *Him*, crucify Him!' Pilate said to them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but Caesar.'"

Acts 17:7, "...and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus."

"Synagogue of Satan" - The word "synagogue (of Satan)" is only used twice in Revelation, here and in 3:9. "Synagogue" means basically "to gather with" or an assembly. The Jewish synagogues here in Smyrna and in Philadelphia are called this. The designation does not necessarily apply to all Jews but the leaders of the synagogue and those who follow them are collaborating with the Roman officials to oppose and dismantle the church(es) where those who have turned to Christ are gathered.<sup>53</sup> Further, they perpetrate lies about both the church and its Lord. In this sense they are not led by God but by Satan.<sup>54</sup> It is also possible, as we saw in John 19, that the synagogue had pledged its allegiance to Caesar.

D. Criticism for the church – none.

E. A warning – none

F. An Exhortation

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<sup>53</sup> This is borne out by verse 10.

<sup>54</sup> Further, the Jews were accused by Jesus and the apostles of persecuting, stoning and killing the prophets who brought God's word to them both of His displeasure and of His Messianic promise.

10a: "Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days." The agents of the devil are the Jews who, in collaboration with Roman officials, imprison believers based on false charges. These charges most likely accuse the Christians of being "Anti-Caesar seeking his overthrow by the support of another opposing king. This is the typical tact.

Imprisonment was not to be permanent but was often a confinement to coerce dissidents into compliance with local custom or law.<sup>55</sup> This is borne out by the following verse where Jesus speaks of testing, not death or long term confinement.

"...tested" is not a term on punishment but an opportunity to see that Christ has built phenomenal riches within the individual and only under such "testing" are they revealed and brought forth. Both in the Hebrew and the Greek, the words used for "testing" are normally associated with the mining and smelting industry where the precious substances from the ore are brought to the surface through the smelting (or testing) process. This is noted by Job 23:10, "But He knows the way I take; *When* He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

"...tribulation for 10 days." Note especially the first chapter of Daniel that demonstrates the purpose to which God uses testing and persecution in the lives of His own. The number ten itself is used when there is a special assignment in relation to dedication to God's service in two ways. First, it has a common designation indicating a person involved in an aspect of God's work. For example, in Genesis 24:10, the servant of Abraham set out to find a wife for Isaac and was told he was doing God's will. So he chose to take ten camels. You have similar actions in Joshua 22:14; Judges 4:6; 6:27; Ruth 4:2 and so on.

Second, the number ten is also used in a sacred sense including apocalyptic literature. Example of this are: Exodus 26:1; Numbers 7, 28-29; II Kings 20:9-11 and in the New Testament: Matthew 25:1ff; Luke 19:17; and so on. There are 200 references in the Bible using the number "ten" in some way

The Jews saw the number ten as that which is dedicated to God and even the ten fingers and toes represent a person's conduct (walk) and work as of necessity and designed belonging to God's service. That is presumably why the tithe (10%) of a person's harvest was to be given to God's service.

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<sup>55</sup> See: Word Biblical Commentary, Thomas Nelson, 1997, Volume 52A, David Aune, pg. 166.

## G. A Promise.

10b: In suffering and persecution for the name of Christ, one sees this as the ultimate honor in service to God. One's faithfulness, even in the midst of suffering, has a promise attached, "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." The passage that always encourages me is from Daniel 3:16-18,

"Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. If it be *so*, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But *even if He does not*, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

And Paul wrote that famous promise in Romans 8:28,

"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose."

"...crown of life..." Not a literal crown but this symbol indicates the final and high recognition of one's achievement. The word for crown is "stephanos" and means the laurel wreath given to athletes who are victorious in their events. A victor's wreath. Paul writes in I Corinthians 9:25,

"Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable." The word wreath is "stephanos" as here in 2:10. In James 1:12 a similar teaching with this passage occurs,

"Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown (*stephanos*) of life which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him." (Italics mine)

2:11 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

11a. See: Comment on 2:7. Note the plural, "churches".

11b. " He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death." The "second death" is the eternal death. The first is the natural, bodily death. The phrase "second death" occurs in Revelation 20:6; 14; and 21:18. This "second death"

occurs when one is cast into the lake burning with fire and brimstone. Jesus said in Matthew 10:28, "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

"Hell" here is "Gehenna" which, in the Hebrew tongue, is the "Valley of Hinnom". This valley is on the south edge of the City of David in Jerusalem and used in ancient times as the "City Dump" as it were. Refuse, dead animals, filth and so on were taken here and burned. The fire seldom went out. In John 15:6, Jesus says, "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned."

In ancient times and even during the times of the kings of Judah, human sacrifices took place in this valley. Shrines to gods like Moleck were established and burnt sacrifices, even of children, took place.<sup>56</sup>

However, the faithful will not be subject to this "second death."

## **2:12-17 THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT PERGAMUM**

### **Introduction:**

Troas, about a hundred miles north and west of Pergamum, was the crossroads of the major trade routes. From there one could, by land, travel south or east. By sea, north and west. If one went south by land, the first major city one would come to would be Pergamum. Situated on a major trade route in a mountainous region several miles from the harbor on the Aegean Sea, Pergamum became an important stop over and trade city in Asia Minor. It is modern Bergama, Turkey today, and the modern city sits in the lowlands just below the ancient acropolis situated on a mountain top and in the midst of the ancient city itself. It was and is a big city of several square miles.

Pergamum had been named the capital city of the Roman province of Asia because in the half century before the birth of Christ temples were erected to honor the Roman goddess, (Roma) and then one to honor its first Emperor Augustus (Octavian). Observance of this worship became a test of loyalty to Rome. In Ephesus there was honor to Domitian. But when he died, the fervor ended. But

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<sup>56</sup> See: II Kings 23:10; II Chronicles 28:3, 33:6; Jeremiah 7:31-32.

allegiance to Rome itself, the "eternal city", was a constant theme and expectation. So the "cult" of Rome was central to Pergamum and refusal to take part in the official cult could be considered treasonable. Under Augustus, the status as "capital city" had been transferred to Ephesus.

Here also, the provincial Governor had the seldom given authority of capital punishment, "the power of the sword." Normally, this authority was yielded only to a Roman Procurator, rather than to a local official. This may be one reason the letter begins, "The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:"

### **TEXT OF THE LETTER, 2:12-17**

12: "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this: 13: 'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. 14: 'But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit *acts of* immorality. 15: 'So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16: 'Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth. 17: 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give *some* of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.'

### **COMMENTARY**

#### **A. Address:**

12a. "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write:" See introduction to Pergamum above.

#### **B: Description of Sender – Jesus Christ**

12b. "The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:" This is the second time this has been mentioned (1:16 – See comment on 1:16c). This also may

correspond with the "power of the sword" wielded by the governor of the province. In this case, Christ's word (sword) is tinged with judgment as we shall see.

### C. Commendations for the church

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

13a. They "dwell" where Satan's throne is. This is probably a reference to the city's stature as the capital city and its rule over the province hosting provincial offices, and thus its influence in the province. "Satan" means "adversary" or "accuser" and he is known as the deceiver and the evil one. Here, every sort of deception and lie about where the true blessings reside and proceed from is displayed in temples on the acropolis and around the city where the gods and goddesses, not to mention prominent human figures and emperors, are given honor and worship for the things only God Himself can provide or do.

Even things in the scriptures are distorted and given to pagan idols as their symbols. For example, the symbol of healing (a staff entwined with a snake) that Moses held up before the people to look at to be healed of snake bites (Numbers 21) and is used today as a symbol of healing was adopted by the Greeks and Romans and healing attributed to their god Aesclepius (Latin: Aesculapius). This is a lie and a deception but Pergamum was the center of worship to this god as much as Ephesus was the center of worship for Artemis. The Asclepion was a center of the healing arts and a college of physicians.<sup>57</sup>

Also, on the thousand foot high acropolis, there was a huge altar dedicated to Zeus and several temples dedicated to gods and goddesses given credit and worship for creation, provision of crops, and the sort. Pergamum was also the center for the imperial cult, and denial of Rome as the source of all blessings and protection was most threatening to faithful Christians and Jews.

13b. "... and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells."

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<sup>57</sup> Not far from Troas where the physician and writer of Luke-Acts may well have lived, it is quite Possible he attended the college of physicians at Pergamum for his training as a physician.

The reference is to the past faithfulness of the church which, it seems, has deteriorated. The persecution was so great, some of the faithful were put to death. At the time of John's exile, the emperor would have likely been Domitian (81-96). At the end of his reign, Christians were heavily persecuted and church leaders were forced to offer sacrifice to a statue of the emperor or be punished by exile or even execution. With the propensity of major Roman cities to build large statues and altars of the current emperor, it is quite likely that one existed in Pergamum and this is a major cause of the designation of "Satan's throne" and of the murder of Antipas.

Even so, no one was found denying Christ and honoring Caesar or Rome in His place. "Antipas" is honored with a personal commendation by our Lord. His name means "reflection of a (or "the") father". He is called "My witness, My faithful one." No doubt a leader, if not the leader of the church in Pergamum, Antipas suffered death when others did not. This was a great blow to the church. There apparently was no one comparable to take his place. From that time the church began to weaken. There is nothing in any other record to tell us who this Antipas was.

13c. "Where Satan dwells." The repetition is no accident. The Lord wishes to impress upon the church that regardless of the attractions of the city, everything there radiates from Satan's control, including the emperor cult. In other words, do not let yourself get caught up in it.

#### D. Criticism for the church

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

The reference is to the accounts given in Numbers 22-31. As Israel approached Moab after the Exodus, Balak, king of Moab was startled by their numbers and strength and feared for himself and his kingdom. So he called on Balaam of Peor, a prophet to come and curse Israel and offered riches and honor if he would do so. But Balaam was prevented by the Lord from cursing the Israelites as Balak, king of Moab requested (Numbers 22-24). But still he revealed his greed later by advising Balak to send loose Moabite and Midianite women into the Israelite camp to seduce the men and turn them to their local gods. Many men in Israel succumbed

to this temptation, and ate foods sacrificed to idols as well. (Numbers 25:1-3, 31:16).

Apparently, in Pergamum, some had adopted the idea that all these sins were somehow okay – perhaps treading on the grace of God. A group began advocating these doctrines and it had affected the moral and spiritual fiber of the church. This has happened many times throughout church history where immorality becomes acceptable in the church. In Pergamum and other Roman cities, much of the pagan worship involved sexual immorality. Plus, in contrast and direct disobedience to the Jerusalem Elders, both fornication and eating foods sacrificed to idols was being practiced, though forbidden in a letter Paul took with him and read to the congregations he visited. (Acts 15:22-30). The eating of food offered to idols would likely be in the temple feasts. Paul commented on this when he said in

I Corinthians 10:19-21,

"What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? *No*, but *I say* that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.

15: "So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans." In Ephesus the teaching of these doctrines was rejected. Here in Pergamum some hold to the teachings. (See: comment on 2:6)

At this late date, it is possible that the doctrines of what came to be known as the "Gnostics" may be referred to here as the teachings of the Nicolaitans. A complex Jewish mysticism, Gnosticism had gained a strong foothold in many churches as these teachers, Jews by nationality, had adopted a Greek idea based in the teachings of Plato, mixed in Jewish and Christian themes and produced an attractive philosophical religion. Since one branch also embraced immorality, this could be a likely candidate for the teachings discussed. Though we have the names of some early Gnostic teachers, the name of Nicolas is not known.<sup>58</sup> There is some support for this view, however. Irenaeus (c. 125 A.D.) claims that the Gospel of

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<sup>58</sup> There are a multitude of resources to which one can turn to learn more about Gnosticism including the internet. A fine book I can recommend is, "Church History in Plain Language" by Bruce Shelley, Thomas Nelson, 1982-1995.

John was written as a response to the erroneous teachings of Cerinthus and the Nicolaitans. Other church fathers such as Clement of Alexandria and Augustine connect the Nicolaitans with Gnosticism.

But it is to be noted also that John, in his first epistle, attacks the Gnostic influence in the churches to whom he is writing. This is an important fact when one reads and interprets the book. Major errors have been made because this fact and misunderstanding John's style in confronting Gnosticism has been ignored.

#### E. A Warning

16: "Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth." This is a statement of judgment on those who would teach a distortion of the truth or present a total lie as the truth. We must realize that when the Lord speaks, the greatest power in the universe is unleashed. In fact, by his word the universe was created. If He speaks, it will be accomplished and there is no power in heaven or on earth that can stop it. By His word it was created and by His word it will be destroyed. Those who are not His will be destroyed along with it.

#### F. An Exhortation

17a: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." This statement is found at the conclusion of each of the seven letters. The "hearer" is expected to respond without question. See commentary on 2:7a.

#### G. A Promise

17b: "To him who overcomes, to him I will give *some* of the hidden manna..." "Overcomes" – see comment on 7b. "Hidden Manna." There are several references from which this could be drawn.

I. "Manna" is first mentioned in Exodus 16. There, Israel grumbled against Moses for the lack of food. Moses brought the complaint to God who promised to bring Quail in the evening and to rain bread from the sky in the morning. This rain turned out to be small crystal looking white flakes like frost on the ground. It is described as like Coriander seed with a taste like wheat wafers with honey. They called it "Manna". Israel was supplied this Manna for forty years until they ate the

first crops of Canaan. So this sustaining frost like seed from heaven disappeared. But a golden jar full of it was placed into the Ark of the Covenant.

"Then Moses said, "This is what the LORD has commanded, 'Let an omerful of it be kept throughout your generations, that they may see the bread that I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt. Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar and put an omer full of manna in it, and place it before the LORD to be kept throughout your generations." Exodus 16:32-33

It was believed that Jeremiah hid the ark, before the destruction of Jerusalem, where it would not be discovered till Israel was restored (II Maccabees, 2:1-8).

1. One finds in the records that the prophet Jeremiah ordered those who were being deported to take some of the fire, as has been mentioned, 2: and that the prophet, after giving them the law, instructed those who were being deported not to forget the commandments of the Lord, or to be led astray in their thoughts on seeing the gold and silver statues and their adornment. 3: And with other similar words he exhorted them that the law should not depart from their hearts. 4: It was also in the same document that the prophet, having received an oracle, ordered that the tent and the ark should follow with him, and that he went out to the mountain where Moses had gone up and had seen the inheritance of God. 5: Jeremiah came and found a cave-dwelling, and he brought there the tent and the ark and the altar of incense; then he sealed up the entrance. 6: Some of those who followed him came up intending to mark the way, but could not find it. 7: When Jeremiah learned of it, he rebuked them and declared: "The place shall remain unknown until God gathers his people together again and shows his mercy. 8: Then the Lord will disclose these things, and the glory of the Lord and the cloud will appear, as they were shown in the case of Moses, and as Solomon asked that the place should be specially consecrated."

II. Jesus made specific reference to this Manna but noted a new analogy in John 6:28-51,

28: Therefore they said to Him, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?" 29: Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." 30: So they said to Him, "What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform? 31: "Our fathers ate the manna in the

wilderness; as it is written, 'HE GAVE THEM BREAD OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT.'" 32: Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. 33: "For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world." 34: Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread."  
35: Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.

49: "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50: "This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 51: "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh."

So the hidden "Manna" could be simply the life that Christ Himself supplies, a heaven supplied eternal life which He gives to all who are His.

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand." John 10:27-28

This could be represented by the jar of "manna" secluded away in the Ark of God. The "hidden" part of this probably refers to the fact that no one can find it except those to whom it will be given. I

17c. "...and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.'

An unusual image without direct precedent in scripture. The word for "stone" indicates a small polished gem quality stone. It could be in the form of an amulet or pendant. The color white is universally thought of as one being found "innocent" and "righteous". The "new name" written on the stone is left deliberately secret. But we have a similar note in Revelation 3:12 which says,

"He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name."

There is a sense of permanence in this image. A human name passes into history and may be forgotten. A divinely given name never fades away. It is like a stone. Note Zechariah 3:8-10 where a Messianic age is portrayed,

8: 'Now listen, Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who are sitting in front of you--indeed they are men who are a symbol, for behold, I am going to bring in My servant the Branch.'<sup>59</sup> 9: 'For behold, the stone that I have set before Joshua; on one stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave an inscription on it,' declares the LORD of hosts, 'and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. 10: 'In that day,' declares the LORD of hosts, 'every one of you will invite his neighbor to *sit* under *his* vine and under *his* fig tree.'"

In 2:17, the phrase, "... no one knows but he who receives it" could refer to the intimacy associated with the word "know" in Hebrew thought. Thus, the idea could be that there would be no intimate relationship with Christ except for those who receive from His hand the affirmation that they are deemed righteous by their faith. This would be represented by the stone.

## **2:18-29 THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT THYATIRA**

Introduction:

The name of the city is of an unknown origin. It is an inland city, about 35 miles from the Aegean Sea and between Pergamum and Sardis. Today it is the modern Turkish city of Ahisar. The ruins of the ancient only fill a square block in the modern city as the rest of ancient Thyatira was built over. Thyatira was the smallest and least significant city of the seven and owed its prosperity not to political or religious bases, but to trade.

Interestingly, the smallest and least significant city of the seven (in the eyes of the province) has the longest letter of the seven. It is contained in twelve verses while the next longest (to Smyrna) has ten verses.

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<sup>59</sup> Regarding this "Branch" see also: Zech. 6:12; Isa.4:2, Isa.11:1, Isa.53:2; Jer. 23:5, Jer.33:15; Eze.17:22-24, Eze.34:29.

There were a few token temples, but the main focus was on Apollo, the god of light and the sun, truth and prophecy, healing, plague, music, poetry, and more. Apollo is the son of Zeus and Leto, and has a twin sister, the chaste huntress Artemis. As the patron of Delphi (*Pythian Apollo*), Apollo was an oracular god—the prophetic deity of the Delphic Oracle. Medicine and healing are associated with Apollo, whether through the god himself or mediated through his son Asclepius, yet Apollo was also seen as a god who could bring ill-health and deadly plague.

The city bustled with manufacturing and was a center of many trade guilds. Jews in city leadership were not in great abundance and there was little resistance if any to the new Jewish sect called "the Way". But the guilds were well known and in Acts 16:11ff. Paul and his companions came across a woman named Lydia from Thyatira who was a seller of purple fabrics and a "worshipper of God."

Thyatira is mentioned specifically because of its fame in the dying of purple fabrics. Lydia was a single woman and a merchant who had accumulated some wealth it seems from her trade in purple fabrics. The dye to produce this color was extremely expensive as it seems to be from the excretion of a some snail or oyster. Of these fabrics, linen was the most popular dyed fabric.

First, Lydia is identified with her trade. In Thyatira, there were many trade guilds one of which would have been dyers of textiles. Thyatira was known for its purple dye and its fabrics sought after worldwide. In Luke 16:19, Jesus begins His parable of the rich man and Lazarus, "Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day."

Other trade guilds operating in Thyatira were: Clothiers, bakers, potters, tanners, linen workers, wool merchants, shoemakers, metal workers, and slave traders. Membership in a guild was mandatory for anyone desiring to work in that trade.

The guilds often had common feasts and indulgence in pagan worship (food offered to idols) and immorality would have been unacceptable a Christian participation. But a far more sinister problem faced the churches.

Incidentally, Lydia is called a "worshipper of God" denoting that she was a Gentile proselyte of the Jewish faith. In Philippi, there is no mention of a Synagogue indicating a small Jewish population. It took a requisite ten men to form a synagogue. So Paul went on the Sabbath to the riverside looking for a place of prayer where Jews might be assembled. He found such a place where women were

assembled and spoke to them. Lydia believed the message and she and her household were baptized.

### **TEXT OF THE LETTER, 2:18-29**

18: "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this: 19: 'I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first. 20: 'But I have *this* against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit *acts of* immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. 21: 'I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. 22: 'Behold, I will throw her on a bed *of sickness*, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. 23: 'And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds. 24: 'But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them--I place no other burden on you. 25: 'Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come. 26: 'He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, **TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; 27: AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES**, as I also have received *authority* from My Father; 28: and I will give him the morning star. 29: 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

### **COMMENTARY**

A. Address:

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

B. . Description of Sender – Jesus Christ

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

The phrase, "The Son of God" is only found this one time in Revelation. However, God is called Christ's Father in 1:6; 2:27; 3:5; 3:21; and 14:1. And, in 21:7 God is called the Father of believers, "He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son."

The rest of the verse reflects 1:14 where John describes his vision of the glorified Christ (see comment there). This verse demonstrates the continuous flow from chapter one intended by the text.

### C. Commendations for the church

19a: "I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first."

"Deeds" is the Greek for "work". This work seems to be defined by the following details.

"Love" is "ἀγάπη" (agape) and only used here and in 2:4 in the letter to Ephesus.

"Faith" is "πίστις" (pis-tis) and used only here and in 2:19; 13:10; and 14:12. It indicates not just "intellectual" belief, but action of belief. So "faithfulness" goes hand in hand with faith. James makes this point about works being the evidence of true faith.

"Service" is "διακονία" (dia-ko-nia) and only used here this one time in Revelation. It means "ministry" in meeting the needs of others.

"Perseverance" is "ὑπομονή" (hupo-men-eh) is used seven times in Revelation; here, 2:2; 2:3; 3:10; 13:10; and 14:12. It means to "remain under", that is "to bear up under" for as long as it takes and is a major theme of this book.

When one looks at the list, it pretty much captures the entire corpus of what should be the life of the Christian.

19b: This is quite a contrast to Ephesus who had begun to fade in its zeal while Thyatira was increasing. There is a parallelism here as "love" links with "service" and "faith" with "perseverance". The same with "deeds of late" and "than at first" noting that they have become greater.

This also is applicable as a model of the life of a Christian.

### D. Criticism for the church

20: "But I have *this* against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit *acts of immorality* and eat things sacrificed to idols."

Even though the church was doing well, they tolerated a woman the Lord calls "Jezebel". This was not her name, but they would know who she was from this designation. Biblical Jezebel was the wife of king Ahab of Israel and the story of her evil personality and deeds is found from I Kings 16 through II Kings chapter 9. She was engulfed in paganism of her home country of Phoenicia and her father Ethbaal was a priest of Ashteroth (Astarte) and of Baal (note his name). She was also enchanted with the paganism and religion of Egypt. Under her influence, much of the religious symbolism and practices permeated Israel.<sup>60</sup>

In the church of Thyatira, this woman called herself a "prophetess." The "prophetess" was an honored position for a woman. Aaron and Moses' sister Miriam is called a "prophetess" in Exodus 15:20; and Deborah the judge is called a prophetess in Judges 4:4. Other prophetesses mentioned in the Old Testament are Huldah (II Kings 22:14; II Chronicles 34:22); Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14) and an unnamed prophetess in Isaiah 8:3. In the New Testament Anna as well as the daughters of Phillip are called prophetesses. These women would speak the word of the Lord to inquirers and their authority to do so was respected. The "gift" of prophecy is mentioned by Paul many times in his writings and is a "manifestation of the Spirit" (I Corinthians 12:7-10).

But this woman in Thyatira claimed to be among these but was an imposter. Still, the term places her in the tradition of the Jews, and it is quite probable she was Jewish. She taught "deep spiritual truths" but these were the "deep teaching of Satan" as verse 24 suggests and she seemed proud of this. Her counsel led genuine inquirers into immorality<sup>61</sup> and the causing of a stumbling block to the spread of the gospel in that they were encouraged to eat food offered to idols, perhaps even eating at the feasts in the temple of the idols which would cause a great offense to the Jews seeking truth. This of course was prohibited by the specific prohibitions in the letter written by the Jerusalem apostles but also in the writings of Paul regarding placing stumbling blocks in the path of the weaker brothers. This is much like those who committed the sin of Balaam mentioned in the letter to Pergamum.

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<sup>60</sup> A signet ring excavated in Samaria thought to be Jezebel's is engraved with Egyptian religious symbols.

<sup>61</sup> The Greek is "por-ne-ia" meaning fornication. the word for "adultery" in verse 22 is "moi-kew-oh" and is intended to reflect a joining into false teaching and practice in this context.

The reference to Jezebel was because Jezebel led<sup>62</sup> her new husband Ahab in the way of her Sidonian (Phoenician) people who worshipped the female goddess Ashtaroth (Astarte) and the male god Baal. To help accomplish this Jezebel murdered a hundred prophets of the Lord. Thus Israel was led astray by this setting up and worshipping of idols (I Kings 16:31-33). The sacrifices on the altars of Baal were burned animals and eaten after the sacrifice. The worship of these gods was the greatest spiritual challenge to Israel and to those who came out of this type of practice and into the church. In answer to Paul's rhetorical question, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" His answer was "No!" Hers was "Yes". She no doubt had convincing arguments to persuade her victims. It is quite possible that this woman held services in her home as one of many places where Christians went to worship and be taught on the first day of the week. She would have found herself in conflict with other house churches in Thyatira. But they tolerated her and this was to their discredit. (Note verse 24) This was probably due to her Jewish roots as well as her claim to be a convert to Christ.

21: 'I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. This suggests that sometime in the past this woman was confronted and chose not to respond in the way the Lord commanded. This could have been done through John and his team in days gone by or by another leader.

#### E. A Warning

22-23: 22: "Behold, I will throw her on a bed *of sickness*, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. 23: And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds."

The NASB properly adds the words "of sickness" in line with Biblical tradition. For example, in II Chronicles 21, the Lord afflicts King Jehoram with illness because of his evil deeds and leading the people into idolatry and immorality. This is the portrait of her future.<sup>63</sup> But the harsh judgment of this 'Jezebel' reflects that of the Queen of Samaria as noted in II Kings 9:7-9.

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<sup>62</sup> I Kings 21:25;

<sup>63</sup> See also I Corinthians 11:27-30

Those who "commit adultery with her" is metaphorical and refers to those who have indulged in and promoted her teachings. They appear to be in leadership with her and have influence. They will be brought into "great tribulation" unless they repent. This is not the "great tribulation" of the end times, but a severe affliction unless they repent. With this false prophetess incapacitated, they have an opportunity to change things and turn them to the way of the Lord. If they do so the "great tribulation" will be avoided. In the "sickbed""Jezebel" herself has no more opportunity to repent as she has hardened her heart against the Lord. But her associates do have the opportunity.

Repentance means to turn away from of change one's mind causing an abrupt adjustment in behavior – ostensibly to follow the truth and live a life of obedience and chastity. In doing so, the affliction will not occur.

Those who follow her teaching (her children) will bear the brunt of the consequences of their foolish belief and corrupt behavior and responsibility for this will be laid at the feet of the leaders of this local church. These consequences involve pestilence and death, (literally, "...I will kill her children with death"). This suggests some sort of disease that leads to death, perhaps a sexually transmitted disease.

The severe tribulation is not just for those who act on the temptations to ungodliness but for those who dwell on these things and elevate them in their hearts and minds. In other words, the motive for what they do may find justification in their cleverness and the teaching of this false prophetess, but Jesus knows the true corruption of the heart and mind. Note Jesus words, "...and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds."

This strongly points to the motives and corruption of thinking of those who do these things justifying them in their "theology". This admonition is from Jeremiah 17:10 where the prophet says (in the Hebrew to English translation)<sup>64</sup>, "I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds."

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<sup>64</sup> The writers of the New Testament, to a man, used the LXX (Septuagint) exclusively for their Old Testament Bible and quoted all references from it. It differs at times from the Hebrew and thus from our English translations as well as the English uses the Hebrew Old Testament, not the LXX.

The severe attitude of the Lord against false teachers throughout His ministry and in the apostolic community cannot be overemphasized. It is incumbent upon all who submit themselves to a teacher that they verify the truth of what is being taught. This is why all who fail to do so are not left off the hook. The best example of this is, of course, those in Berea who, "...received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily *to see* whether these things were so." (Acts 17:11) Today's Christian believes so much that is not true it is shocking.

#### F. An Exhortation

24: "But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them--I place no other burden on you.

Verse 24 lends itself to the idea that there were indeed several house churches scattered about in the city who did not hold with the teaching of this woman. "You" is defined by, "the rest who are in Thyatira" not the rest who are associated with this woman.

The "...deep things of Satan" were no doubt disguised as "spiritual enlightenment." It is also possible that this self proclaimed "prophetess" was teaching a version of the Gnostic heresy as the elements of the teaching are similar to those of the Nicolaitans and the teaching of Balaam we saw in the letters to Ephesus and Smyrna (2:6, 2:14-15). Further, the Gnostics taught that in order to defeat Satan, one had to enter into his stronghold, that is, experience or "know" evil in order to defeat it. The defeating it seems to be lacking at Thyatira.

So called "secrets" and "mysteries" always attract those who are curious and inquisitive about spiritual matters. I always wonder why there are those who will commit to study the things they do not understand but disregard the things of God that are clearly understood such as faithfulness to God and one's spouse, and to righteous conduct, love of others and so on. The teachings of the "prophetess" smack of self-centeredness and the conduct stemming from them leaves no doubt.

"...I place no other burden on you..." This may refer to the apostolic decree from Jerusalem (Acts 15) for the Gentiles to abstain from, "...from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication..." as that seems to correspond, but this cannot be determined with certainty.

25: "Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come." Likely refers back to verse 19, "...love and faith and service and perseverance."

#### G. A Promise

26: "He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; 27: AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received *authority* from My Father; 28: and I will give him the morning star.

26a. "...overcomes..." Challenges to his faith (especially by this false prophetess) that might derail the "love, faith and perseverance" He has commended them for. These may well also indicate the "deeds" Christ calls His own. His new commandment was that the disciples "love one another."<sup>65</sup> "Keeping" them until the end is to guard them and preserve them, and the "end" is until all on earth is finished from God's point of view, either through the death of each saint or the conclusion of the age when Christ returns, whichever comes first.

26b-27: Quoted here are Psalms 2:8-9 (LXX). Here Christ shares His rule and authority with those who keeps His "deeds" to the end. The "rod of iron" is a shepherd's staff or scepter seen in this case as symbolic of the scepter of the ruler of nations. As "iron" it does not bend giving it unchallengeable authority.

The word "rule" is "ποιμαίνω" (poi-mai-noh) meaning to "tend as a shepherd." "Poi-mane" is the word for sheep or flock. This does not diminish the power of the rule, but intensifies the personal attention to it. Further, though the word is often used as a word indicating the protection and preserving of the flock, here it is also used in the context of shattering ceramic pottery to pieces. Isaiah 30:13-14 pictures this as well, Therefore this iniquity will be to you Like a breach about to fall, A bulge in a high wall, Whose collapse comes suddenly in an instant, "...Whose collapse is like the smashing of a potter's jar, So ruthlessly shattered That a sherd will not be found among its pieces To take fire from a hearth Or to scoop water from a cistern." <sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> John 13:34-35

<sup>66</sup> See also: Jeremiah 19:11

The effective rule of the Lord cannot be established without the destruction of all hostile power. A new age cannot be introduced without the dismantling of the power and rule of the old age.<sup>67</sup>

So this phrase prefigures the time of Christ's triumphant return in 19:11-15 just prior to the millennial reign pictured in chapter 20. During these times the saints will rule with Christ with the same authority with which He rules, a rule given Him from the Father that He delegates to His faithful followers. This is also noted by Paul in I Corinthians 6:2-3. It is notable that here and in many other places it is clear that the millennial reign takes place within a world still inhabited by a great many people who survived the Day of God's wrath and Christ's powerful and victorious return.

28: "...and I will give him the morning star." Analogous to the "White Stone" in the letter to Pergamum seeming to indicate an intimate relationship with Christ. We have this stated again in 22:16 where Jesus says it of Himself. II Peter 1:19 uses the term and applies it to the new life in Christ. This phrase is reflective of passages like Daniel 12:3 and Malachi 4:2 where it is messianic. There can be no doubt that the phrase indicates a personal intimacy and approval given to His faithful ones as they enter into a new kingdom and ruling fellowship with Christ.

29: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." See commentary on this phrase in 2:7; 2:11 and 2:17.

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<sup>67</sup> See the chart of Jewish Eschatology in the appendix where "this present age" is placed in contrast to "the age to come." Jewish eschatology and the teaching of our Lord and the apostles placed all history in these simple terms.

# THE BOOK OF REVELATION

## Chapter Three

### **3:1-6 THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT SARDIS**

Introduction:

Sardis (modern "Sart") was founded at least two thousand years before Christ and its origins are sketchy. It sits at the northern end of the Tmolus mountain range. The upper city (acropolis) was surrounded by steep cliffs and defense walls, but settlement extended beyond these boundaries and a lower city also thrived. To the west of the city lies a large cemetery area with large burial mounds from the Lydian period. The city was captured by the Cimmerians in the 7th century, and then the Lydians in c. 630 B.C. It became the capital of the Lydian Empire. The famous Lydian King Croesus ruled the Asia Minor province (known also as Anatolia) from 560-546 B.C. until his defeat by the Cyrus the Great of Persia (mentioned in the Bible<sup>68</sup>). Croesus was the last king of Lydia and renowned for his great wealth.

This wealth came largely from the abundance of gold that was found in the River Pactolus which flowed through the city carrying gold sourced in Mount Tmolus. The second source of wealth came from its famous dyed woven woolen textiles and carpets. Pliny notes that the art of dyeing wool was invented there, and the raw material for which was furnished by the flocks of Phrygia. It was also the place where the metal *electrum* was procured.<sup>69</sup> Silver and gold coins are said to have been first minted there, and it was at one time known as a slave-mart.

The defeat of Sardis and the Lydian rule is legendary. Surrounded by defensive walls and steep cliffs thought to be impregnable to the Persians, the story goes that a guard's helmet fell from his head on the back side of the acropolis and landed somewhere down the cliff. A Persian soldier saw this and watched as the guard went to retrieve it. Secretly following the guard back to the top, the access trail was discovered. The guards in the city were so confident that their city could not be entered, were lax in their duties. This afforded a sudden attack and invasion catching the city literally "off guard" and the Persians became the ruling power.

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<sup>68</sup> Cyrus is mentioned 23 times in the Old Testament but not mentioned in the New.

<sup>69</sup> "Electrum" is a naturally occurring alloy of gold and silver often with other metals such as copper and platinum. It was used most frequently for metal coins in ancient times and Sardis was a center for these coins.

In the Persian era Sardis was the end station for the Persian Royal Road which began in Persepolis, capital of Persia. Sardis remained under Persian domination until it surrendered to Alexander the Great in 334 BC.

Once at least, under the emperor Tiberius, in AD 17, it was destroyed by an earthquake; but it was always rebuilt. It was one of the great cities of western Asia Minor until the later Byzantine period.<sup>70</sup> It hosted several temples as did all the Greco-Roman cities, most of which were destroyed or have not been excavated. Besides the massive temple to Artemis (Cybele, Diana) there was a temple to Zeus on the acropolis as well as a temple to Augustus that we know of. In time it wasn't enemies that brought down the temples, but earthquakes.

The outline we have been following is changed for Sardis. Normally we have:

- A. Address – To whom it is to be sent
- B. Description of Sender – Jesus Christ
- C. Commendations for the church
- D. Criticism for the church –( Except Smyrna and Philadelphia)
- E. A Warning
- F. An Exhortation
- G. A Promise

Here it is:

- A. Address – To whom it is to be sent: 3:1a
- B. Description of Sender – Jesus Christ: 3:1b
- C. Criticism for the church: 3:1c; 3:2b
- D. An Exhortation: 3:2a, 3:3a
- E. A Warning (admonition): 3:3b
- F. Commendations for the church: 3:4
- G. A Promise: 3:5

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<sup>70</sup> From about the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D., the center of Roman and European commerce was established at Byzantium (later renamed Constantinople after the Roman Emperor Constantine). Its culture shifted from Latin to Greek though controlled by Rome. It was also the center of orthodox Roman Christianity. In time the city became more Greek and cosmopolitan. The end of the Byzantine period began during the fourth crusade in 1204 A.D. and was lost completely after several conflicts and finally conquered by the Turks (known as The Ottoman empire).

## TEXT OF THE LETTER 3:1-6

1: "To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. 2: 'Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. 3: 'So remember what you have received and heard; and keep *it*, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. 4: 'But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. 5: 'He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. 6: 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"

## COMMENTARY

### A. Address

3:1a, "To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

### B. Description of Sender

3:1b, "He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this...".  
See commentary at: 1:4 and 1:16b.

### C. Criticism of the church.

3:1c, "I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead."

3:2b, "...for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God."

3:1c, "I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead."

The church at Sardis, especially the leadership, had strayed away from spiritual vitality into an active body involved in many aspects of community life. But works had, it appears, become the focus rather than spiritual life. Further, these "deeds" (works) seem to be of a physical nature rather than of a relational, personal or spiritual nature. Christianity had become a religious expression rather than a

living reality in the lives of the members of this church. The leadership, though keeping the church involved in some projects, had lost the fervor of first worshipping and drawing near to God before reaching out to the community with His word and truth. Thus they are guilty of teaching a distortion about why the church exists in the first place and perhaps substituting human ideals for the clear gospel of salvation.

In addition, based on 3:4, they were apparently indulging in beliefs and/or practices that are described as "soiling (or defiling) their garments." Whatever this was, it was contrary to the righteousness Christ supplies and expects from His followers. It was disgraceful and an insult to Christ leading to a hamstrung witness. Like many of the other churches, they may have been indulging in fornication, temple feasts or the like.

The city of this time was prosperous and we read of no conflict from the Jews or Romans. Perhaps the church had slid into a complacency common to those in prosperity and was no "bother" to the citizens of Sardis.

3:2b, "...for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God."

Jesus declares that their works are not complete or fulfilled in the sight of God. This means that they are failing to fulfill or complete their reason for existing. They had apparently done some things that fit their purpose, but likely had substituted other things for the primary work and purpose for which God had created them. Both churches were "lukewarm."

This is not unknown in the churches of today who are focused on buildings, money, self glorification or perhaps expenditures of time and money in political or social exercises and so on. Of Sardis and Laodicea we read of no conflict with foes within or without the Church. But neither appear to have the faithfulness to witness for God by word and example to the world. Following the example of Christ's ministry would be the first priority, but to set it aside in favor of other enterprises might make a good impression on the world, but God Himself is not so moved. Both seemed to be "lukewarm" as it were.

Further, it appears that there were people in their midst that were being ignored and were weaker or in need of assistance, encouragement in their faith and so on that the church was overlooking.

## D. An Exhortation

3:2a, "Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die;"

"Wake up" or "keep alert" or "keep watchful" is the idea. This theme may reflect the infamous capture of Sardis by Cyrus. Watchfulness had become slovenly and the city fell. "Strengthen the things that remain which were about to die" seems to reflect the need to reprioritize their focus and return to the Lord and His business rather than whatever they had become involved in. There is a similarity to the "lost love" at Ephesus here in Sardis.

3:3a, "So remember what you have received and heard; and keep *it*, and repent."

This admonition supports what has been surmised and parallels 3:2a. The must turn from where they are to where they were...to what they had received and heard and set things back in order. This suggests that the church in Sardis had been in existence for some time, likely since the early Apostolic age. The history of the church does take an upward turn after this period of time and becomes more of an impact in the city and surrounding territories.

## E. A Warning

3:3b, "Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.

The phrase "I will come like a thief" is repeated in similar ways several times in the New Testament.<sup>71</sup> This denotes both the unknown time and unexpected nature of His coming. The idea of "watchfulness", "being ready" and "on the alert" is also admonished regarding His return.<sup>72</sup> In most cases this phrase is used of Christ's second coming in victory to gather His saints and initiate the end times upon the world. But here this application may not be accurate as His "coming like a thief" is dependent upon whether they repent or not.

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<sup>71</sup> Revelation 16:15 as well as in Matthew 24:42-43; Luke 12:30-40; I Thessalonians 5:2-6;

<sup>72</sup> Matthew 25:13; Mark 13:32-37; Luke 12:40; Luke 21:34-36; Ephesians 6:15; I Thessalonians 5:6; Revelation 16:15

There is evidence that the church did indeed take a turn for the better and within a generation it apparently became a Christian center with strong leadership. Of note is Bishop Melito who served in the second century (died around 185 A.D.) A few of his sermons have been preserved and they are inspiring.

#### F. Commendations for the church

3:4, "But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy."

The pronoun "You" looks to address the leadership of the church. And rather than note that these people are in the church, as in other letters, they are noted as being "in Sardis." Perhaps, seeing the decay of life in the church coupled with other distasteful aspects of the church teachings and practice, they have left the local congregation and simply become independent witnesses for Christ.

In any case, these mentioned are the faithful and godly citizens who walk with God and refuse to become involved in ungodly and pagan practices. They reject all that would smack of the filth of the world and stay faithful to Christ and witness of His love, grace and righteousness.

#### G. Promise

3:5, "He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels."<sup>73</sup>

3:5a, "White garments" are those which shine like light and may represent the transformed body as described by Paul in I Corinthians 15. We see in his explanation phrases like,

15:43-44, "... it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body..."

And,

15:49, "Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the

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<sup>73</sup> A "book" is actually a scroll. The "codex" or leafed volume was not to be invented for sometime.

image of the heavenly.

15:51-53, 51: "Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 52: in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53: For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

We also have the description of Christ at the transfiguration,

"And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light..." (Matthew 17:2)

In addition, these white garments often represent righteousness, purity and cleanliness that only those in Christ may receive by His grace. The old filthy garments, i.e. the existence and identity of the past sinful life, is replaced by Christ's righteousness, new life and identity. The "soiled garments", i.e. the existence and identity of the past sinful life is replaced by Christ's righteousness, identity and new life.

3c, "I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels." This seems to be taken from Christ's own words while on earth. He said in Matthew 10:32, "Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before my Father who is in heaven. And in Luke 12:8, "And I say to you, everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man will confess him also before the angels of God..." This confession indicates a relationship between Christ and the name of the one He "confesses" to the Father. "Confession" is the Greek "homo-loh-ge-oh" and carries with it the idea of agreement – saying the same thing - an acknowledgement or declaration of a truth or covenant.

3b, The phrase "book of life" causes some difficulty for those who conclude that the "Book of Life" is a record of those who are saved. Thus, once you are in "The book of Life" your salvation is recorded, but if erased (or "blotted out") of the book, this indicates one has lost their salvation. However, we can discover two ways in which the phrase "The book of life" is used in the Bible.

The idea that God keeps books is an image presented for our understanding. It is an anthropomorphism with metaphorical aspects. God does not need to keep

"books." But this is a powerful illustration of what is important to God as far as man's faith and conduct are concerned and as to the place of importance man holds in the earth. Further, these were not books like we use today, but scrolls. The book (or codex) was not invented for some time after John wrote Revelation.

The first sense and the first mention of this kind of divine ledger is found in Exodus 32:32-33. Moses is interceding for the sin of Israel and says to God, "But now, if You will, forgive their sin--and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!" The LORD said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book."

We see here that God's "book" appears to contain the names of everyone in the camp. If they remain faithful, they remain in the book. Otherwise, they are "blotted" out.<sup>74</sup> We have this again in Deuteronomy chapter 9, the beginning of the final speech Moses made to Israel. In it Moses, recounting the same time at Horeb and the sin of the people states, "The LORD spoke further to me, saying, 'I have seen this people, and indeed, it is a stubborn people. Let Me alone, that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven; and I will make of you a nation mightier and greater than they.'" (Deuteronomy 9:13-14)<sup>75</sup>

The idea of "blotting" (or wiping out) has to do with God's choice of Israel to carry on His redemptive plan to its conclusion, not with their salvation or eternal life. There is the idea (in the Old Testament) that this lineage is an important factor. For example, there are those of the physical lineage of Abraham. But then, there are those both of this physical lineage and those outside of this physical lineage who are also those of faith in God's promise, and a part of His promise, and will not be "blotted out" due to their faith.

The entire lineage of Abraham is contained in a "Book of Life" but those who fail to be faithful or believing are "blotted" out regardless of their lineage. That is, they are no longer part of the line that will bring forth the fulfillment of God's promises nor share in them. For example, Ruth was a Moabite, and definitely not part of any lineage of Abraham let alone having faith in God in her upbringing. Yet, she became an ancestor of David and thus of Christ (through Mary). Her faith, no

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<sup>74</sup> In the writing of these scrolls, there was no way to erase the ink once the text was written. Extreme care had to be taken not to make an error. Papyrus and parchment was extremely expensive. If an error was made, one had to begin again with a new sheet of material. Thus, scribes were highly trained and well respected and paid. As far as "blotting" out something in a scroll, if a man inked a mistake over, this would defile the writing. So only God had the power to eradicate a name without defiling the scroll.

<sup>75</sup> Also Exodus 32:10

doubt, allowed her to remain in the book of life. Rahab as well, a Canaanite, is listed in the ledger of the faithful but not of the lineage of Abraham.

Jesus alluded to this as Matthew 8:5-12 records. After hearing the Roman Centurion's expression of faith regarding Jesus' authority to heal his servant without having to come to his house, Jesus told the following crowd,

"Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline *at the table* with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

That people are in the "book of life" prior to being blotted out is reflected in Psalm 69 where the Psalmist (perhaps David) laments his condition before his enemies and says to God, "Add iniquity to their iniquity, And may they not come into Your righteousness. May they be blotted out of the book of life, and may they not be recorded with the righteous." (69:27-28)

This suggests here that this first "Book of Life" is simply a record of all those who are alive at the moment or, more likely, of those to whom the promises are made and will be fulfilled due to their belief faithfulness. Those rejecting God and His word are "blotted out."

Further, the book of life does not carry with it the concept of "predestination" in Hebrew thought. The closest "predestination" comes in either testament is that God has predestined that all who believe shall be saved. So in one aspect, all begin, it seems, in the "Book of Life" at birth and as they develop, they either remain or are removed.

We see this sense in Revelation 3:5. If one looks carefully, the erasure of those in the "Book of Life" comes to those not clothed in white garments implying that they were previously written in the Book.

"But as we progress in this examination we will find mention of several "books" all having a different purpose including different purposes for what is termed "The Book of Life". For example, Revelation 20:11-15 reads,

11: "Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose

presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. 12: And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. 13: And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one *of them* according to their deeds. 14: Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15: And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

This passage suggests that "the book of life" in verses 12 and 15 is different than the other "books." We'll come back to this.

The second sense suggests that the "Book of Life" contains the names of the eternally saved. For example, Paul writes,

"Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in *the cause of* the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life."  
(Philippians 4:3)

This is the only non Revelation reference in the New Testament. This reference to "The Lamb's Book of Life" corresponds with this idea of the eternally saved in Revelation in 13:8, and 21:27. Unique to this book is the reference that it was written "from the foundation of the world." This term is also found in 17:8, while the first sense of the "book of life" is found in 20:15 and in our present text, 3:5.

Perhaps it may appear as pressing too much, but names written in the "Lamb's Book of Life" (from the foundation of the world) seems to indicate those who are surely saved whereas other "books" indicate judgment by works or deeds. The "Lamb's Book" seems to be from before the "foundation of the world" not indicating "predestination" as noted previously, but foreknowledge. Then you have the "book of life" in which all have been written but some are blotted out while others find themselves transferred (it appears) to the Lamb's book.

For example, Revelation 13:8 says, "All who dwell on the earth will worship him, *everyone* whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain."

As one put it, "From the general book of life your name can be blotted out, but your name can be written in the Lamb's book of life and never be blotted out."<sup>76</sup>

So we need to consider what is being referred to when it comes to the phrase "book of life" remembering that this is a Jewish and Old Testament concept and that John, a Jew, was quite familiar with the Old Testament references but was prompted to add a new nuance and a new book, the Lamb's Book of Life.

This will be studied further during the discussion in chapter 20.

3:6, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."  
See the comments at 2:7a.

### **3:7-13 THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA**

Introduction:

Philadelphia may be the newest city of the seven if indeed it is correct that it was founded in 189 B.C. by King Attalus II Philadelphus of Pergamum and named for him. But some evidence exists that it was founded by the Egyptian Ptolemy Philadelphus in c. 300 B.C., though the conquering of some territories in Asia Minor was secondary to the focus on conflicts in Macedonia and Greece. He was the son of Ptolemy I, the general under Alexander the Great who was given Egypt to rule after Alexander's death. He began the Ptolemaic dynasty and Philadelphus ruled with his father until his father's death whereupon he assumed the throne in about 282 B.C. There is no direct statement that he founded Philadelphia.

The meaning of the name is well known as "he who loves his brother" or, "brotherly love."

Attalus II Philadelphus was also descended from the Greek conquerors associated with Alexander the Great but joined with the Romans when they began their ascendancy. His family had resided in Pergamum for over a century but at the death of his father, he was elevated from his position as a loyal and effective Roman military commander and appointed King of Pergamum by the Romans. Thereafter it is noted that he founded both Attalia and Philadelphia with the help of his friend Ariarathes of Cappadocia.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Brian Gilbert, part of the study group developing this commentary.

Philadelphia was built because it was at the crossroads of important trade routes including the Royal road from Persia between Smyrna and the East as well as the road from Pergamum on the Aegean through Thyatira and Sardis and the road from Attalia on Mediterranean coast. All the East-West and North-South trade routes passed through Philadelphia and this contributed to its wealth. It was a city instrumental in facilitating the Greek culture and language throughout the empire as well as correspondence and the gospel. The apostles and John no doubt found an important center here in spreading the message of the gospel to the rest of the Asia Minor province. (See: Acts 19:10; 19:26)

Philadelphia stands at the foot of the same mountain range as Sardis, the Tmolus mountains (Bozdag today). The city commands the fertile plain created by the Hermus River, the same river flowing through Smyrna and into the Aegean Sea. It lies about 65 miles east of Smyrna, 28 miles southeast of Sardis and 47 miles north of Laodicea. Its wealth came not only as a trade route center but also from agriculture, notable vineyards that produced fine wine and of course the god of the city was Dionysus, the god of wine and fertility. Flocks and herds grazed in lush fields where wool for fabrics and textiles was amply supplied as well as leather for many products.

The massive earthquake of 17 A.D. that leveled Sardis and several cities, also brought heavy damage to Philadelphia. Tiberius authorized its reconstruction as well as that of Sardis, and by the time of the apostles and the later writing of this letter it was a thriving city once again. Throughout its history there is evidence of a Jewish population and 3: 9 notes "A synagogue of Satan" there as well as in Smyrna. It is only one of two churches to whom Christ directs no criticism. The other is Smyrna.

Up to this time, the ancient city has never been excavated and any ruins are so few as to be insignificant. The modern Muslim city of "Alasehir" (the City of Allah) stands on the place of the ancient city and covers much of the historic landscape.

The theme presented to this church and to the reader is one of authority and conflicting authorities, namely Christ versus others. The place of the church in the midst of this is revealed.

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<sup>77</sup> Attested to by, "Stephanus of Byzantium."

## THE TEXT OF THE LETTER, 3:7-13

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

## COMMENTARY

### A. Address – To whom it is to be sent

3:7a, "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:..." Again, the translation "angel" is inadequate. "Messenger" is more accurate and flexible enough to include the leader(s) of the church or those who are in a teaching position.

### B. Description of Sender – Jesus Christ

3:7b, "He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this:"

By way of understanding, descriptive nouns and adjectives in the both testaments normally indicate a relational or an intrinsic part of one's life rather than just an intellectual or impersonal application. For example the word "faith" is not to be understood as something we "believe", "believe in" or "believe about" without it effecting one's entire life and conduct. Faith is linked with relationship and living faithfully because of that relationship. This is not unlike what a marriage ought to

be. In fact, marriage is often used as a metaphor of what it means to have faith in God and especially Jesus. The church is the "bride of Christ"<sup>78</sup> for example and Christ is the "bridegroom"<sup>79</sup>

So, used in only one other place in Revelation (6:10) the phrase, "He who is holy, who is true" indicates more than one would first think. "Holy" is normally thought of as "pure and undefiled". While this is true of Christ, the word also means that Jesus was set forth and separated to God in a specific role He was to accomplish. This was done for the sake of the world.

The term also designates the Lord's "anointed" (Messiah) as in Mark 1:24 and Luke 4:34 where the demons cry out, "What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are--the Holy One of God!" Also in John 6:69 Simon Peter, on behalf of the disciples, tells Jesus, "We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God."

"The One who is true" is often thought of as one who real or genuine or who tells the "truth". But the actual idea is one who is faithful and trustworthy. In 19:11 the rider on the white horse (Jesus) is called, "Faithful and True." He can be counted on to keep His word. This is clear in both Testaments. For example, in Psalm 146:6 God "keeps faith forever" and Psalm 89:33-36 declares,

33: "But I will not break off My lovingkindness from him, Nor deal falsely in My faithfulness. 34: "My covenant I will not violate, Nor will I alter the utterance of My lips. 35: "Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David. 36: "His descendants shall endure forever And his throne as the sun before Me."

In the opening verses of his letter to Titus Paul says,

"Paul, a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago,..."

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<sup>78</sup> John 3:29; Rev. 18:23; 19:7 etc.

<sup>79</sup> Mark 2:19-20; Luke 5:35; and verses quoted above.

"Who has the key of David..." is from Isaiah 22:22, "Then I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder, When he opens no one will shut, When he shuts no one will open."

The context of this is revealing. A judgment of the Lord has fallen upon Shebna, the head of the household of the king of Judah (probably Hezekiah). He presumed upon his position to hew out a sepulcher for himself and his family in the royal grounds. He was deposed for this and Eliakim, whom God calls "My servant", was appointed to this position. Eliakim means, "God who raises up". There is a Messianic aspect to this prophecy. The poetic imagery of Isaiah 22:21-23 tells of the judgment on Shebna,

21: "And I will clothe him (Eliakim) with your (Shebna's) tunic And tie your sash securely about him. I will entrust him with your authority, And he will become a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. 22: Then I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder, When he opens no one will shut, When he shuts no one will open. 23: I will drive him *like* a peg in a firm place, And he will become a throne of glory to his father's house."

The image of a "key" represents "authority". Eliakim was then authorized to exercise full administrative authority in the king's name. The key of David is the key to the house of David and ultimately to the messianic kingdom. Therefore, Jesus holds the key (and exclusive authority) to opening the kingdom of God to those who are welcome and shutting it to those who are not. No one else has this power or authority and Jesus opens or closes the door in this manner.

Matthew 16:13-19 has a similar account. After the feeding of the four thousand, Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi. There He asked His disciples,

13b: "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14: And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." 15: He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16: Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17: And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18: I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. 19: I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

The debate about the proper interpretation of these words is still carried on today. This is not the place to fully discuss this. The point here is that the phrase "keys of the kingdom of heaven" have a close correspondence to the phrase Jesus uses in 3:7 the "key of David". Both point to the promised kingdom instituted by the line of David. The authority of the disciples (The binding and loosing ministry was also given to all the disciples in 18:18) is dependent upon the authority and will of Jesus Himself. There is neither authority, nor a binding or loosing that can take place on earth that has not first been authorized by "heaven". Neither Peter, the church nor the disciples has any authority apart from Jesus' will and authority. Only in the name (or authority) of Jesus can anything be accomplished for the kingdom. Nor can anyone enter the kingdom apart from His authorization.

### C. Commendations for the church

3:8, "I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name."

This follows directly upon verse 7. In the message to the church at Philadelphia, Jesus acknowledges their works and authorizes an "open door" to be placed before them. This "door", in the context, looks to be the door to the kingdom Jesus has unlocked and which no one can shut. He does this because it seems by this verse that this is apparently a small, poor congregation of little influence in the city. Further, they have kept His Word and not denied His name. The "word" they have kept is "the word of My perseverance" discussed in verse 10 below.

His opening this door allows them greater power and influence than they might otherwise have. For what purpose? In the thinking of the apostles, an "open door" was a direction or opportunity where the proclamation of the gospel could be made and souls won to Christ. This is clear from: Acts 14:27; I Corinthians 16:8-9; II Corinthians 2:12; and Colossians 4:3. So this small, rather insignificant congregation will, with Christ's assistance, make an impact on the city for the kingdom of God. This is borne out by the statement of the Lord in verse 9.

The latter half of verse 8 indicates that this church has suffered persecution and harassment without caving in to the pressure from the Jews who have made things very tough on any fellow Jews who have turned to Christ. There may have been

persecution by the Roman authorities as well, pressuring the believers to deny Christ and honor the emperor or the local gods. In spite of the persecution, they have remained faithful and true to Christ and His word. Like Jesus noted of Himself in verse 8a, they have been steadfastly holy (set apart) and true (faithful to Him and the truth). They have not denied His name meaning they have not denied that only He is Lord and holds supreme authority.

3:9, "Behold, I will cause *those* of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie--I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and *make them* know that I have loved you."

For comments on "the synagogue of Satan" see commentary to the church for Smyrna at 2:10. Their bowing looks to be the result of the "open door which no one can shut." There will be a movement of Jews in the synagogue to seek the truth and they will be won to faith in Jesus. Christ's love and sacrifice will be clear to them and their hearts will be won over to the truth.

"Bowing down" does not suggest worship but submission to the truth held fast by these people. In contrast to the "brotherly love" the city was named for, (Phileo) they will come to know the "agape" love of the Lord. This is the Greek term for "love" used in verse 9.

They are bowing to God in actuality. This theme is reflected in many places in the Bible. In Isaiah 60:14 we read, "The sons of those who afflicted you will come bowing to you, And all those who despised you will bow themselves at the soles of your feet; And they will call you the city of the LORD, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel." And in Isaiah 49:23, "Kings will be your guardians, And their princesses your nurses. They will bow down to you with their faces to the earth And lick the dust of your feet; And *you* will know that I am the LORD; Those who hopefully wait for Me will not be put to shame."

D. Criticism for the church – (Except Smyrna and Philadelphia) - None

E. A Warning - None

F. An Exhortation – Actually in verse 11b. We will discuss that when we get there.

G. A Promise

3:10a, "Because you have kept the word of My perseverance.."

This is actually part of the promise to the churches, but needs to be discussed because it becomes a part of the reason for the promise yet to be mentioned. "The word of My perseverance" they have kept indicates that under trial and persecution they, like Christ, remained faithful to God. They kept their "word" as He kept His.

Perseverance is an attribute expected of those who follow Jesus. The Greek is "hupo-mon-eh" meaning "to remain under". Perseverance under persecution or duress is a key element separating the faithful and true believers from the "hangers-on." But by God's grace, it is also a means of bringing out the strength of His people as we will see in a moment.

John opens the book with this statement in 1:9, "I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance *which are* in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus."

The word is used 33 times in the New Testament, and translated "endurance" and "steadfastness" as well. No verse is more poignant than Luke 8:15, "But the *seed* in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance."<sup>80</sup>

3:10b, "... I also will keep you from the hour of testing,<sup>81</sup> that *hour* which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth."

This passage has been the source of much debate. Some teach that this indicates the pre-tribulation rapture and that verse 11<sup>82</sup> backs that up. Others say that this is not a pre-tribulation rapture,<sup>83</sup> but an announcement of pending wrath upon the

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<sup>80</sup> See also, Romans 2:7; 5:3-4; 15:4-5; II Thessalonians 1:4; I Timothy 6:11; Hebrews 12:1; James 1:3-4, etc.

<sup>81</sup> See the appendix article entitled, Revelation 3:10, Looking at "Testing"

<sup>82</sup> "I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown."

<sup>83</sup> Where does the concept, "the pre-tribulation rapture" come from? It is not mentioned in Scripture nor even alluded to. To discover the source of this teaching one must refer to John Nelson Darby, 19<sup>th</sup> century clergyman who developed the dispensational method of interpreting the Bible. Prior to Darby, this idea was never mentioned in all of church history though feeble attempts out of context have been made by some. Many denominations disregard the teaching totally including the Catholics, Lutherans Methodists and many others. This system was promoted by the popular teachings of Schofield, McGee and many others and taught by Dallas Theological

earth. In either case the church will not be subject to it. But wait, what if the great "tribulation" and the "hour of testing" are two different events; the great tribulation affecting the believers and the hour of testing affecting the world but not believers? So let's take a little time with it although we will cover many of the items later on.

First, the word "keep" in the Greek may also be understood as "protect" or "guard". It can mean either "Keep you from suffering the hour of testing" or "Keep you through the hour of testing". Sheltered or protected from this hour seems to be the idea. Either way, the saved will not undergo this hour.

The phrase "hour of testing" occurs nowhere else in Scripture. So we have no other reference to help us grasp what this is talking about. But we can begin to discern to what it refers by examining the context and viewing what it does not seem to indicate.

The word "hour" is often used in a special way in scripture. The simple Greek word "oh-rah" is the word translated "hour" and from which we get our word "hour." Though it can reflect the time of day or an approximation of a time period, it also points to a specific appointment or time of something coming to pass but without indicating the exact "when". In other words, an appointed or general "occasion" something will assuredly take place but without the specific "when."

For example, In Matthew 10:19 Jesus said, "But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say." In John 7:30 we read, "So they were seeking to seize Him; and no man laid his hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come." John 12:27, "Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour." And Revelation 17:12, "The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour." And so on. In each case, the Greek word "oh-rah" is employed.

In the case of this context we notice a few things. There is no criticism or warning given to this church so the "hour of testing" is not directed at the church at all, but at the world – at "those that dwell on the earth." Next, when the term "world" is used in scripture, other than indicating the creation, it generally designates the kingdom of man as opposed to the kingdom of God. For example, in the New

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Seminary, BIOLA University and many Christian institutions across the country. See the appendix for statements of noted scholars who object to this doctrine.

Testament, we see passages frequently such as Romans 12:2,

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

Or I John 2:15-17,

15: "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16: For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17: The world is passing away, and *also* its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever."

Now, the only question remaining is what this phrase is talking about. If, as the dispensational teachers say, the Great Tribulation, the "Hour of Testing" and the Day of the Lord (or the Day of God's Wrath) are all the same event, then the church will not be affected at all.

But if they are two different events, and this event is linked with the latter, then we need to reevaluate that position. It is my position that they are two different events and that the hour of testing refers to the "Day of God's Wrath", and the "Great Tribulation" is a worldwide persecution of the church.

The church will not be subjected to the final outpouring of God's wrath upon the unrepentant dwellers on the earth as described later in this book. Have we ever seen evidence of a divinely appointed outpouring of His wrath or judgment on the earth? Yes we have.

We see a world-wide catastrophe in the flood but with the promise that God would not judge the earth with a flood again. But there are more indicators that direct us to this future "hour" or testing on the world and of what it consists. One is that the ensuing chapters describe rather graphically an outpouring of God's wrath on the world. Second, Jesus spoke about this in nearly the same terms. In Luke 12:49, Jesus is quoted as saying, "I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled!" He was speaking in the context of His coming and His wrath upon the wicked. Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 all record the Olivet discourse where much of this is discussed. We have a chilling portrait of this in Revelation 8:5, "Then the angel took the censer and filled it with

the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake."

And in 8:7-8, 7: "The first sounded, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. The second angel sounded, and *something* like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea; and a third of the sea became blood,..."

In Luke 21:25-36 we read Jesus words, speaking first of His coming again and then the outpouring of God's wrath on the earth,

25: "There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, 26: men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 27:"Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN A CLOUD with power and great glory. 28: "But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." "Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap; for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."<sup>84</sup>

And in Revelation 6:12 onward, especially 16:1-18:24 (with interludes) we find an outpouring of God's wrath upon the earth that corresponds with the prophecies of old. So, to what purpose? The purpose of this is clear. To get any who would repent and be saved to do so. (See: 9:20-21; 16:9-11) I am persuaded that the "hour of testing" in 3:10 may well point to these events.

But some propose this is the "great tribulation" and speak of a "pre-tribulation" rapture where Christ returns prior to the "great tribulation." However, there needs to be a distinction made here because the verse 10 does not mention the "great tribulation" at all whereas it is mentioned in 7:14 suggesting that John is aware of a difference or else why not use this term in 3:10b? Still, a discussion needs to take

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<sup>84</sup> Note also: 1:7; 6:4; 6:8; 8:13

place about whether or not there is a difference between the "great tribulation" and "the hour of testing". The Scripture in both testaments also speaks of a "great and terrible Day of the Lord" or "The Day of God's wrath" poured out upon the earth. Also, of what does the "great tribulation" consist?

These eschatological events are actually defined for us in scripture. They are pretty clear as to of what each one consists. The confusion comes when these terms are pressed into a dispensational or theological mold and interpreted in ways that do not accurately paint the same picture Scripture does.

But perhaps the best place to start is Matthew 24 where Jesus outlines for His disciples events to transpire prior to His return both to gather His faithful and bring judgment to the earth.<sup>85</sup> Note the sequence of events. (We will cover this more thoroughly beginning in chapter 6 of Revelation). We pick it up at verse 14,

24:14-31,

14: "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come. 15: "Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), 16: then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. 17: "Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. 18: "Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. 19: "But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! 20: "But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath. 21: "For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will.

After the "abomination of desolation" (mentioned in Daniel 9:27, 12:11) then the great tribulation will follow. It is defined as a time never witnessed before, noting that if it is not cut short no life would be left... but for the sake of the elect it will be cut short. We must note that the word "tribulation" is defined in several places as persecution and even execution of the faithful to Christ such as in Matthew 24:9-10, "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will

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<sup>85</sup> See also Mark 13 and Luke 21.

be hated by all nations because of My name. 10: "At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another."

"Tribulation" here includes being "killed and hated" by all nations. One can only imagine what the "great" tribulation might be. We will discuss this later on. The word (thlip-sis) is also translated "affliction." It is used 45 times in the New Testament and of these it describes Jesus and the faithful 40 of those times the rest applying to the pain of child birth or something the Lord will press, in turn, upon those who afflict the church.

One more thing to notice. Jesus tells His followers that when they, "... see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place...", they are to flee. Not only flee but flee immediately not even stopping to grab a cloak. Why? Because of the great tribulation that He is about to describe. If this were the "hour of testing" or "The Day of God's Wrath" or "The Day of the Lord" that comes upon the whole earth then where would there be to flee to? And, there is no mention of not needing to flee because they would be raptured.

Plus, commands to flee are most often given in order to avoid human persecution, such as the Angel of the Lord telling Joseph to, "Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt" or as Jesus told His disciples when sending them out, "But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next;...". There is no command to flee from God or attempt to escape a judgment from God.

Continuing meanwhile,

22: "Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. 23: "Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There *He is*,' do not believe *him*. 24: "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. 25: "Behold, I have told you in advance. 26: "So if they say to you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness,' do not go out, *or*, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe *them*. 27: "For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. 28: "Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

Now notice the "when" of Christ's return. He has not mentioned His return in the passage until now.

29: "But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30: "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. 31: "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other."

There are several quotes from the Old Testament prophets here and they will be discussed in due time. But from what is said, both "tribulation" and the "great tribulation" involve persecution of the saints. Christ's return comes when? "After the tribulation of those days."

However, if the saints are not here at that time, why the warnings? The same in Revelation. If the church is raptured before these events take place, what point is there to the mandate to be faithful and to persevere? I have often thought that the holocaust perpetrated by Hitler and the Nazis could be seen as the Biblical great tribulation except some things do not appear to fit. Yet, the way I see all of this could be convoluted to some degree, as absolute clarity does not seem likely. But if there is still coming a greater tribulation than that, it will have to be a doozy.

The second half of verse 29 begins the prophetic warning of the coming of the "Day of the Lord" prophesied in many Old Testament passages, notably Joel 2-3; Isaiah 13:9-11; and Zephaniah 1:14-18. Peter speaks of it in Acts 2:16-21 and invites his hearers to repent. When this "day" hits, the believers will not be subject to it. Christ will either have taken them from the earth before this great and terrible day or they will be sheltered and protected from this time. I tend to the "sheltered" concept because of the material we have yet to cover. For example, 16:15 is a promise of His pending appearance announced in the midst of the pouring out of the seven bowls of God's wrath. But His coming to gather His saints seems to coincide with the beginning of these final and judgmental events on the earth.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Luke 21:7-28 expresses these teachings with added nuances. Its worth reading and comparing with Matthew 24.

Ladd notes, "God will pour out His wrath upon the followers of the beast (9:20; 16:9,11) to compel them to repent before it is too late. The Greek expression "Those who dwell upon the earth" appears several times in the Revelation and always designates the pagan world (6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 14; 17:8)"<sup>87</sup>

Thus we postulate that the great tribulation and the "day of the Lord (or day of God's wrath) are two separate and distinct events. We will deal with this more as we progress through the book but we can affirm that it looks like the "hour of testing" coming upon those who dwell upon the earth will not affect those who believe.

3:11a, "I am coming quickly..."

A phrase that put the early church on alert was, "I am coming quickly."<sup>88</sup> "Quickly" (or "soon" – "without delay") from our point of view, needs to be re-evaluated. Unquestionably, the early church expected Jesus to return shortly after His ascension and establish His kingdom in power and glory on the earth. What else was there left to be done? The Jews had been under oppression from one world power after another for over seven hundred years. The promises to Abraham's descendants were two thousand years old. Relief, restoration, peace and prosperity were promised. Jesus had fulfilled the ancient promises and prophecies in term of God's redemptive plan. So what was left to do? His coming was imminent as far as they were concerned. In Matthew 24:3 Jesus' disciples were eager to know when He would return.

However, it soon became apparent in the lifetime of the apostles that Jesus' return was not to be as they first expected. This writing was 60 years after Christ ascended. Peter got the idea when he wrote II Peter, chapter three and concluded, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." So it became apparent that the salvation of souls was preeminent in the plan and timing of God.

## F. Exhortation

3:11b, "...hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown."

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<sup>87</sup> George E. Ladd, A Commentary on The Revelation of John, Eerdmans, 1972, page 62.

<sup>88</sup> Revelation 3:11; 11:14; 22:7, 12, 20. See also: James 5:8-9; I Peter 4:7; Hebrews 10:35-37

They have little, but it is of great worth to the Lord, namely being faithful to His word and His name. "Jesus only is Lord" is their confession in the face of both Roman and Jewish authorities.

"Crown" is "stephanos", a "wreath" – normally associated with the athletic games of Greece and Rome with which the winners of their respective events were honored. In the case of the church at Philadelphia, there is an implication that the "crown" is already assured to them. The crown symbolizes "victory" and they already have shown their victorious spirit. Jesus encourages them to hold on to this and not allow anyone to take it from them. Paul speaks of this in II Timothy 4:7-8,

7: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; 8: in the future there is laid up for me the crown (*stephanos*) of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing." (Italics mine)

John, in his second epistle also notes,

"For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ *as* coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward." II John 1:7-8

It is up to them to hold fast to that which they have and not be dissuaded from doing so. This is directed to what they have held onto. Paul does a good job of explaining what this means in Colossians 2:16-19,

16: "Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—17: things which are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. 18: Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on *visions* he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, 19: and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God."

The danger is always succumbing to the teachings of false teachers and prophets religions and practices that diminish the truth and Christ's finished work on the

cross.

In John's day, the great threat was Gnosticism (also called Docetism). But that is but one of hundreds of spiritual, philosophical or religious "pitches" we must deal with in our world. the message of the entire book is reflected here, "Hang on", "remain unmovable in your faith in Christ regardless of what happens, and you will be rewarded."

This promise is found at the end of each and every letter and is the basic message of the book.

### G. Promise (additional)

3:12a, "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore;..."

The language is clearly metaphorical as no one will be turned into a stone pillar. Nor can a pillar move about. But here we see the point of the image. He who overcomes<sup>89</sup> will become have a permanent and un-moveable place in the "temple" of God. The heavenly temple in Revelation represents God's dwelling place. But in the heavenly Jerusalem that comes down to earth in 21:22, there is no temple because Christ and the Lamb are its "temple." Thus the verse can be understood as symbolic of the permanent place of the believer in the eternal kingdom of God.

As an ancillary note, the concept of the term "temple" and what this means in the end times is also another controversial subject. There are several possible interpretations of this and each has arguments to support its position.

#### 1. The physical temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem prior to Christ's return.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> See comment on this at: 2:7b.

<sup>90</sup> There is considerable thought given to the idea that the Jewish Temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem again prior to the return of Christ. Firing these ideas are the prophecies about the temple interpreted to represent this end time rebuilding such as Isaiah 2:2-3, Micah 4:1-2 and others. Further, it is argued that II Thessalonians 2:4 supports this idea since, according to this view, the man of lawlessness could not place himself in the temple of God unless it existed. On the other hand, there is no other support for the rebuilding of the temple Jesus told His disciples would be destroyed. Neither did He say it would never be rebuilt. But the scripture also is clear that God does not dwell in a temple made by human hands and that the temple itself, and Israel's supposed security because it stood in Jerusalem, was quite displeasing to God. (Note: Jeremiah 7:4; Micah 3:9-12 etc) Then, Revelation 21: 22, in describing the Holy City New Jerusalem says, "I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." In Jeremiah 3:14-17, it is declared that the Ark of the Covenant (the centerpiece of the temple and its containment the reason for the building of the temple) would never be made again or missed. To what purpose would the rebuilding of the temple be with no Ark? One has to decide what the word "temple" could refer to

2. The temple, now destroyed, will not be rebuilt but now is understood as the body of Christ as noted in II Corinthians 6:16 and Ephesians 2:21.
3. The "temple" is ultimately understood as God and Christ themselves. (Revelation 21:22)
4. Similar to 3, the temple simply represents a place in the presence of God.

In this passage, the "temple" is God's realm (as in definition 4) where nothing and no one can enter to disrupt God's environment or rule, power and authority. This is made clear in 21:2-7, and 21:27. Here is the place of eternal life. Those who are the saved are those who are pillars in this place of eternal life.

Revelation consistently refers to a heavenly temple as the dwelling place of God<sup>91</sup> but in the consummated kingdom of God there will be no temple for God and the Lamb are its temple (21:22). This is spiritual language.

3:12b "... and I will write on him the name of My God..."

This is the image of one who is in the possession of another. Throughout history - including Biblical history, property, cattle, slaves, documents, possessions and so on, have been marked, stamped, sealed, branded, tagged to indicate to whom they belong.

This particular verse is reminiscent of Exodus 28:36-37 where God directs Moses regarding the manufacture of the accouterments of the tabernacle and the priests. For Aaron's garments as high priest God says,

36: "You shall also make a plate of pure gold and shall engrave on it, like the engravings of a seal, 'Holy to the LORD.' 37: You shall fasten it on a blue cord, and it shall be on the turban; it shall be at the front of the turban."

On the other hand, the followers of the beast will bear his name on their foreheads or hands (13:16-17) while the followers of The Lamb will be sealed with His mark (name) on their foreheads (7:3 together with 14:1 and 22:4).<sup>92</sup>

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since it has been used for the human body, the body of Christ, the place where God dwells, the physical temple built in Jerusalem, and the realm of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life and so on. See: I Corinthians 6:19; Ephesians 2:21; I Corinthians 3:16 etc. Finally, to rebuild the temple and reinstitute the sacrificial system would be a denial of Christ's "finished" work and an insult to God who sent His dear Son to complete and fulfill all of that.

<sup>91</sup> As does Hebrews 9:8, 11; 10:19 etc.

<sup>92</sup> This will be discussed later but just to note here that these marks do not necessarily consist of a physical mark. The real issue is the focus and faith of the individual. The Jewish phylacteries are imaged here, but the reality is

3:12c, "... and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God..."<sup>93</sup>

Indicating citizenship in the kingdom of God. The "New (or heavenly) Jerusalem" is symbolic of the promise God made to Abraham in ancient times. This is expressed beautifully in Hebrews 11:8-10,

8: "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9: By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; 10: for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God."

In contrast to the Israelites coming to Mount Horeb (Sinai) to receive the Law, the writer of Hebrews teaches,

22: "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, 23: to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of *the* righteous made perfect, 24: and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than *the blood* of Abel."

And to all of us,

"For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking *the city* which is to come." (13:14)

Paul likewise spoke of this (Galatians 4:26; Ephesians 2:6; Philippians 3:20) as did Jesus (John 14:2). The "heavenly or new Jerusalem is mentioned three times in Revelation, (3:12; 21:2, and 10).

The point is that the hopes of all of those who love God is to one day be with God protected and reestablished with Him in Paradise. The world is a cruel place, not

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always a matter of the heart and mind regarding one's trust and faith..either in God or in the system that opposes God.

<sup>93</sup> As Jonathan Kolson of the study group suggested, "God stamps His name and address on us who are His own."

due to God's will, but to man's. Man was given the free choice and power to reject God's rule in favor of his own. This very act of self promotion and self seeking rather than seeking God is the root of all the evil in the world. But rather than turn to God, man is pictured as turning to Satan (the serpent) and submitting to his word and authority thus giving Satan the dominion that had once been given to man by God's grace. The entire creation was effected. And here we are.

So the hopes of those who hope in God are reassured.

3:12c, "...and My new name."

The bestowal of a new name (note: 2:7) means a change of status, either of relationship or family, or position. It signifies leaving the old behind and entering a completely new and different existence with a new identity. For example, Isaiah 1:24-28 says,

24: "Therefore the Lord GOD of hosts, The Mighty One of Israel, declares, 'Ah, I will be relieved of My adversaries And avenge Myself on My foes. 25: I will also turn My hand against you, And will smelt away your dross as with lye And will remove all your alloy. 26: Then I will restore your judges as at the first, And your counselors as at the beginning; **After that you will be called the city of righteousness, A faithful city.** 27: Zion will be redeemed with justice And her repentant ones with righteousness. 28: But transgressors and sinners will be crushed together, And those who forsake the LORD will come to an end."

The theme there is striking like the book we are studying. Another example of the meaning of a name change is found in Isaiah 72:1-2,

1: "For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, And for Jerusalem's sake I will not keep quiet, Until her righteousness goes forth like brightness, And her salvation like a torch that is burning. 2: The nations will see your righteousness, And all kings your glory; **And you will be called by a new name Which the mouth of the LORD will designate."**

And in the famous passage of Isaiah 65:11-25, the pertinent passage quoted below.

11: "But you who forsake the LORD, Who forget My holy mountain, Who set a table for Fortune, And who fill *cups* with mixed wine for Destiny, 12: I

will destine you for the sword, And all of you will bow down to the slaughter. Because I called, but you did not answer; I spoke, but you did not hear. And you did evil in My sight And chose that in which I did not delight."13: "Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, My servants will eat, but you will be hungry. Behold, My servants will drink, but you will be thirsty. Behold, My servants will rejoice, but you will be put to shame. 14: 'Behold, My servants will shout joyfully with a glad heart, But you will cry out with a heavy heart, And you will wail with a broken spirit. 15: 'You will leave your name for a curse to My chosen ones, And the Lord GOD will slay you. **But My servants will be called by another name.** 16: 'Because he who is blessed in the earth Will be blessed by the God of truth; And he who swears in the earth Will swear by the God of truth; Because the former troubles are forgotten, And because they are hidden from My sight! 17: For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind.'"

Jeremiah has a poignant passage,

14: 'Return, O faithless sons,' declares the LORD; 'For I am a master to you, And I will take you one from a city and two from a family, And I will bring you to Zion.' 15: "Then I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you on knowledge and understanding. 16: "It shall be in those days when you are multiplied and increased in the land," declares the LORD, "they will no longer say, 'The ark of the covenant of the LORD.' And it will not come to mind, nor will they remember it, nor will they miss *it*, nor will it be made again. 17: "**At that time they will call Jerusalem 'The Throne of the LORD,' and all the nations will be gathered to it, to Jerusalem, for the name of the LORD; nor will they walk anymore after the stubbornness of their evil heart.**" (3:14-17)

These are but a few passages indicating the significance of a "new name." In addition one can easily see how the Book of Revelation reprises these themes. These are but a few passages that shed light on what the Lord intends us to understand when studying Revelation.

Rev 3:13, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

(See 2:7 for comments on this phrase)

### 3:14-22 THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT LAODICEA

Introduction:

Laodicea is one of three sister cities in the mountainous territories about 110 miles east of Ephesus. The other two were Hierapolis six miles due north near modern Pamukkale and Colossae some eleven miles to the southeast.

Paul's concern for the church at Laodicea is noted in his letter to the church at Colossae,

2:1, "For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face,.."

Hierapolis is mentioned along with Laodicea in Paul's letter to the church in Colossae, 4:12-13,

12: "Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bonds slave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. 13: For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis."

Paul also wrote a letter to Laodicea also mentioned in the same passage above,

15: "Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house. 16: When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter *that is coming* from Laodicea."

The "letter to Laodicea" mentioned in Colossians 4:16 is lost to us.

Laodicea was situated on a plateau on the south side of the fertile valley of the Lycus (or Lycos) River. The Lycus River flowed into the Meander River and on to the Aegean Sea from there. Laodicea became prominent after it was established by Antiochus II as a major stop on the trade route from Ephesus to the east in the third century B.C. He renamed it after his wife Laodike and had moved some 2000 Jews to the city from the east. The actual ancient pronunciation for the city's name is "Lah-oh-dee'-kee-ah" and means "right" or "just" "people."

It is unlikely that the church at Laodicea as well as the churches at Hierapolis and Colossae were founded by the apostle Paul. This may have been accomplished by Epaphras, a close associate of Paul, as suggested by Colossians 1:7 and 4:12-13. All three churches were close in proximity and shared in the reading of Paul's letters to them. For a church at the heart of the crossroads from east and west, it is indeed odd that it had little effect on its citizenry. Perhaps wealth brings about complacency. Persecution on the other hand, seems to inflame perseverance and an evangelical spirit.

Laodicea was indeed a wealthy city. The land was fertile and the pastures produced great flocks of sheep. The area was a great center for the wool industry. One strain of sheep had wool that was a distinctive jet black, and highly sought after. There was also the associated trade guild of the dyeing of woolen garments. Wool fabrics, carpets, textiles of all sorts brought a good income to the tradesmen there.

The city also became wealthy by being the financial and banking headquarters for the whole area and the political center for the district. In addition, and relating to some of the comments in this letter to them, Laodicea was also known for its medicines and eye salve. The eye salve was made from powdering Phrygian stone and blending it into an ointment that could be placed in one's eyes. There seems to have been a school of medicine there and two physicians from Laodicea are known because they are commemorated on the coins of the city, namely Zeuxis and Alexander Philalethes.

Speaking of medicine, to the north, thousands of people flocked to Hierapolis to bathe in the hot spring fed spas and drink the water due to the claims that the water had medicinal benefits. They do so to this day.

However, due to its location on a plateau, Laodicea originally had no local or natural water supply. So water had to be imported. Laodicea has an elevation of around 1200 feet from sea level and was fed from hot springs some six miles to the south at the modern city of Denizli a few hundred feet higher in elevation. The principle water supply, the Baspinar Spring, still provides abundant water for the modern city. It is quite alkaline and salty and filled with lime and calcium as well. Modern filtration and purification systems are in place to soften the water in Denizli, but in ancient times it was directed "as is" to Laodicea through a system of rectangular clay and travertine pipes and some travertine canals. The hard water filled the pipes with deposits and they had to be regularly replaced. As it flowed

the several miles through the pipes it cooled and by the time it got to Laodicea it became the lukewarm metaphor the Lord uses in His comments about them.

The water was drinkable but not refreshing. It was neither cold nor hot as Colossae or Hierapolis could claim about their water supply. Colossae had cold fresh water from the mountains, Hierapolis hot therapeutic springs. The hard water flowing into Laodicea was mostly used for the vast array of gardens, baths and fountains found in the ancient city. Four water features are visible in the city of Laodicea, which are the stadium nymphaeum, the west agora nymphaeum, Caracalla nymphaeum and Septimius Severus nymphaeum. These were park like gardens and the water features were for relaxation by observation only. The wealth of the city was revealed in four of these features, attractive to visitors and residents alike.

The city was also wealthy enough that when the devastating earthquakes hit the region in 60 A.D. the city turned down Roman offers to assist in its rebuilding because it had ample funds to rebuild itself.

Water was the most important vital source for Laodicea, which developed on the low platform in the centre of the Lycus Plain. One of the principal reasons for the heavy- evacuation of the site in the 7th century AD was caused by the breakdown of this water supply system.

However, at the source of the water supply for ancient Laodicea is the modern city of Denizli. Denizli has abundant water sources, hosts nearly a million people and flourishes with beautiful parks, lakes and fountains . Because of the similarities of the water to sea water this province was named the Denizli. Modern filtration and purification plants are necessary to supply the city with drinkable water.

A good article on the ancient city of Laodicea is reproduced below.

### **The Church at Laodicea in Asia Minor**

*by David Padfield\**

Laodicea was the chief city of the Lycus River Valley region. The full name of the city was *Laodicea ad Lyceum* (Laodicea on the Lycus). The city was originally known as Diospolis ("the City of Zeus").

The Greek deity considered to be the greatest of the Olympian gods. Homer, the Greek poet, often called Zeus "the father of gods and men," the ruler and protector of all.

The city was founded between 261 and 253 B.C. by Antiochus II Theos, king of Syria, and named in honor of his wife, Laodice (Laodike). "The early population of the city probably consisted of natives of the area, Hellenized Greeks and veteran soldiers in the army of Antiochus II" (Fatih Cimok, *A Guide to the Seven Churches*, p. 88).

The city became part of the kingdom of Pergamon and later passed into Roman hands in 133 B.C. Cicero, the famous Roman orator and statesman, served as governor of the province, residing mostly in Laodicea.

Laodicea was a great center of banking and finance (Rev. 3:14-21). It was one of the wealthiest cities of the ancient world! When Laodicea was destroyed by an earthquake in 60 A.D., they refused aid from the Roman empire and rebuilt the city from their own wealth. "One of the most famous cities of Asia, Laodicea, was in the same year overthrown by an earthquake and without any relief from us recovered itself by its own resources" (Tacitus, *Annals*, 14:27).

"The city was at the crossroads of north-south traffic between Sardis and Perga and east-west from the Euphrates to Ephesus. Laodicea quickly became a rich city, rich enough to be able to rebuild itself without outside help after the destructive earthquake of 60 A.D. In common with many of the Hellenistic cities there was a prosperous Jewish colony established there well before the Christian era. The city's reputation was for its money transactions and the good quality of raven-black wool grown in the area." (Blake and Edmonds, *Biblical Sites in Turkey*, p. 139-140).

Laodicea was a great center for the manufacturing of clothing -- the sheep which grazed around Laodicea were famous for the soft, black wool they produced. Laodicea was well known for its school of medicine.

"One of the principles of medicine at that time was that compound diseases required compound medicines. One of the compounds used for strengthening the ears was made from the spice nard (spikenard? an aromatic plant). Galen says that it was originally made only in Laodicea, although by the second century A.D. it was made in other places also. Galen also described a medicine for the eyes made of Phrygian stone. Aristotle spoke of it as a Phrygian powder. Ramsay tries to explain what kind of medicine it was by saying it was not an ointment but a

cylindrical collyrium that could be powdered and then spread on the part affected. The term used by John in Revelation is the same that Galen uses to describe the preparation of the Phrygian stone. Would not these medicinal concoctions be a reason why John cautions the Laodiceans to buy 'ointment for your eyes so that you may see' (Revelation 3:18)?" (Blake and Edmonds, *Biblical Sites in Turkey*, p. 140).

"The principal deity worshipped in Laodicea was the Phrygian god Men Karou, the Carian Men. In connection with this god's temple there grew up a famous school of medicine, which followed the teachings of Herophilus (330-250 B.C.) who began administering compound mixtures to his patients on the principle that compound diseases require compound medicines." (Otto F.A. Meinardus, *St. John of Patmos*, p. 125).

Two of the doctors from Laodicea were so famous that their names appear on the coins of the city (Zeuxis and Alexander Philalethes).

The hot springs at Hierapolis, just six miles across the Lycus River valley and to the south, are probably what John had in mind when he spoke of lukewarm water (Rev. 3:15-17). No other city on the Lycus Valley was as dependent on external water supplies as Laodicea. Water was also piped in through an aqueduct from Colosse.

"The lukewarmness for which, thanks to this letter, the name of Laodicea has become proverbial, may reflect the condition of the city's water supply. The water supplied by the spring ... was tepid and nauseous by the time it was piped to Laodicea, unlike the therapeutic hot water of Hierapolis or the refreshing cold water of Colossae (Rudwick and Green 1958); hence the Lord's words, 'Would that you were cold or hot!'" (*The Anchor Bible Dictionary*).

"Water piped into Laodicea by aqueduct from the south was so concentrated with minerals that the Roman engineers designed vents, capped by removable stones, so the aqueduct pipes could periodically be cleared of deposits." (John McRay, *Archaeology And The New Testament*, p. 248).

Our Lord did not accuse the brethren in Laodicea of apostasy, nor with following some false prophet or engaging in emperor worship. The church is accused of being "lukewarm" -- this is the only congregation about which the Lord had nothing good to say!

The remains of the city are basically unexcavated\*\*, so most of what we know about the history of the city comes from written sources. The remains of two theaters, one Greek and one Roman, are on the northeastern slope of the plateau. A large stadium which also served as an amphitheater, dedicated by a wealthy citizen to the Roman emperor Vespasian in 79 A.D., can be found on the opposite end of the plateau. The stadium was used for both athletic contests and gladiatorial shows. Archaeologists discovered a life-sized statue of the goddess Isis in the ancient nymphaeum, or monumental fountain.

The Gate to Ephesus, triple-arched and flanked by towers, was devoted to the Emperor Domitian (81-96 A.D.). On the south-west side stand a number of buildings built under Vespasian (69-79 A.D.). An aqueduct bringing water into the city ended in a 16 foot tall water tower which distributed water throughout the city.

"An inscription erected by a freed slave from Laodicea was dedicated to Marcus Sestius Philemon. It will be recalled that a Philemon who owned the slave Onesimus (Philem. 10) was a leader in the church of Colossae. We cannot identify this Philemon with the slaveholder to whom Paul wrote, but the coincidence of the inscription from the same area is intriguing, especially since it refers to the manumission of a slave." (John McRay, *Archaeology And The New Testament*, p. 247).

What can you learn from these churches? Laodicea took great pride in her financial wealth, yet the Lord told them to buy "gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich." Laodicea took pride in its clothing, yet the Lord told them to buy "white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed." Laodicea took pride in its eye medicine, yet the Lord told them to buy "anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see."

The Lord promised to "dine" ("sup" KJV) with the one who would hear His voice and open the door (Rev. 3:19-20). "The word translated sup is *deipnein* and its corresponding noun is *deipnon*. The Greeks had three meals in the day. There was *akratisma*, breakfast, which was no more than a piece of dried bread dipped in wine. There was *ariston*, the midday meal. A man did not go home for it; it was simply a picnic snack eaten by the side of the pavement, or in some colonnade, or in the city square. There was *deipnon*; this was the evening meal; the main meal of the day; people lingered over it, for the day's work was done. It was the *deipnon* that Christ would share with the man who answered His knock, no hurried meal, but that where people lingered in fellowship. If a man will open the door, Jesus

Christ will come in and linger long with him." (William Barclay, *The Revelation Of John*, Vol. 1, pp. 147-148).

Are you willing to open the door for your Savior?

\* From: padfield.com, The Church of Christ in Zion, Illinois

\*\* As of this writing.

### **TEXT OF THE LETTER, 3:14-22**

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

### **COMMENTARY**

A. Address – To whom it is to be sent

14a: "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

Again, the translation of the Greek "angelos" as "angel" is misleading. The basic root meaning of "messenger" is to be preferred. Angels are not normally spoken to in the negative terms relating to the leadership and condition of the churches as seen in most of these letters.

B. Description of Sender – Jesus Christ

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

"Amen" is a Hebrew word meaning pretty much what the next phrase states, "the faithful and true witness." In Isaiah 65:16, God is called "the God of truth" (truth being a translation of the Hebrew word, "amen"). In our use of the word, the intent is to express faith and belief in the truth of what has been witnessed or spoken. The term "faithful witness" was also used by John in 1:5 to describe Jesus.<sup>94</sup>

"The beginning of the creation of God..." is not suggesting that Jesus was a created being and is little more than an angel as some groups state. The Greek word for "beginning" is "ar-che" and reflects the idea of headship in the creation. The "origin" of creation is also accurate and corresponds with John 1:1-3,

1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2: He was in the beginning with God. 3: All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being."

Paul, in I Corinthians 8:6 reflects the same theme,

"...yet for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him."<sup>95</sup>

C. Commendations for the church - None

D. Criticism for the church

15: "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot."

"I know your deeds" may be a phrase employing sarcasm since their "deeds" are that they are "lukewarm", ineffective. Little fervor for the things that God called them to be and do. They have shut the Lord out of their life as 3:20 suggests. He is, "on the outside looking in", so to speak.

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<sup>94</sup> See the commentary at 1:5a, page 20 for more about this phrase.

<sup>95</sup> See also: John 1:10; Romans 11:36; Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:2, 2:10.

Though "water" is not mentioned specifically in this passage we have already noticed that the Lord makes statements in each letter that reflect something about the city in which the church resides. In verse 16, He spews "them" out of His mouth suggesting that indeed the lukewarm hard mineralized water is implied in the reference. Here, the church is neither hot nor cold. The reference seems to be that both on the north and on the south we have therapeutic or refreshing water prominence. Hierapolis some six miles to the north boasted of hot springs and mineral spas that brought healing to the body while eleven miles to the south, Colossae enjoyed the fresh cold water of mountain streams. Laodicea's water was imported from alkaline hot springs near modern Denizli a few miles to the south and by the time it reached Laodicea, it was barely cool – lukewarm indeed.

So Laodicea's condition was that the church neither offered healing and help for those who were lost and hurting, nor refreshing or relief for those who thirst for righteousness. This reflects a lack of fervor for the Lord and His calling. They did not deny Him, but neither were they enthusiastic proponents of His Lordship and message. Wealth can bring about spiritual complacency, and it seems to have done so in the church at Laodicea.

#### E. A warning

16: 'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.'

This underscores their comparison to the un-refreshing "water" at Laodicea. The original has the stronger and more insulting idea of vomiting" rather than "spitting. However, in the "spitting" of them out of His mouth He is not suggesting that they are being rejected totally from His grace, presence and mercy as verses 18-20 will reveal. But it does strongly reveal how He feels about them at the moment and hopefully this will rouse the church from its spiritual lethargy.

#### F. An Exhortation

17: 'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, 18: I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe

yourself, and *that* the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.

17: Verses 17-19 are interconnected. First, The church, like the city, boasted pridefully of its prosperity and credits itself with the riches it had banked. As many wealthy often claim, they are in need of nothing indicating that money supplies all that is needed. However, in our time, the number of rich that find themselves depressed or even suicidal testify that they are lacking something money cannot buy. The claim of the church in Laodicea is similar to the claim of Ephraim in Hosea 12:8, "And Ephraim said, 'Surely I have become rich, I have found wealth for myself;'" And the Lord's comments reflect Proverbs 13:7, "There is one who pretends to be rich, but has nothing; *Another* pretends to be poor, but has great wealth."

"Wretched", "miserable", "poor", "blind" and "naked" stand in stark contrast to their view of themselves. They would have never come to the place to see this for themselves. Perhaps now they will, and be ashamed. This is the actual spiritual condition of the church. This compares the church to a poor, blind, sickly, beggar destitute and in rags.

Outward prosperity, though often touted as so, is not a measure of inner spiritual prosperity. Nor is it an indication of the true blessings of God which deal principally with one's relationship with God through faith in Christ. Still, it is proper to view material prosperity as part of God's material blessings and remain thankful and humble for everything we have, remembering Jesus' words, "...for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God."<sup>96</sup>

18: "I advise" is really more, "strongly advise" (due to the prefix in the original Greek)... "to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich...", and this begins a series of three metaphors based in the things that made the city prosperous but with new and contrasting meanings. The church needs to see the value of what true wealth actually consists. In other words, one set of what is valued needs to be exchanged for a totally different set of what has true value.

Since no one can literally "buy" the spiritual riches Christ speaks of with money, the point is that the source of these riches is not found in themselves or the wealth

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<sup>96</sup> Luke 16:15

of the city or church, but in Christ Himself. Isaiah 55:1 urges, "Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost." Someone noted properly, "Don't sacrifice the eternal on the altar of the immediate."

And Jesus noted, "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid *again*; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." (Matthew 13:44) But in order to "buy" these things, the price is that the church must be "zealous and repent"(verse 19), and open their personal "door" to Christ (verse 20).

Jesus came preaching "the kingdom of God" the gospel repeats over and over. His message is an important basis for understanding much of the New Testament including this book.

The first "purchase" is the "gold refined by fire." Referencing Laodicea as a financial and banking center, this is generally understood as a genuine, untarnished faith in Christ alone; where a relationship with Him becomes more important and precious than the worldly wealth they enjoy.<sup>97</sup> The so-called gold they possessed was impure and tarnished. "The love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs," Paul reminds us in I Timothy 6:10

His gold is pure, refined by fire, perhaps suggesting a faith that is even strengthened by persecution, which is typically represented by the "fire" of challenge and persecution. At the present they present nothing of worth for the citizens of Laodicea to even be stirred up about.

The second "purchase" are "white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and *that* the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed..." Laodicea carried fame for its garment and textile industry. Their naked shame is their lack of righteousness living due to the lack of spiritual devotion to Christ. In fact it is likely hypocrisy in that they present a façade of righteousness to the world but, perhaps like the Pharisees, are filled with all kinds of filth. Christ is appealing to them to become genuine both within and without. This can only be accomplished by what he can provide, but they must first purchase it from Him. His imputed

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<sup>97</sup> Note: I Peter 1:7.

righteousness, not man's assumed righteousness based on conduct, is the only thing that can cover their nakedness both before God and man.

The third "purchase" is an "eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see." The medical school in Laodicea was where this eye salve was applied to those with eye disorders. The church is blind, but the earthly eye salve will be of no help in opening their eyes. Only the Lord and His provision can bring clear sight and focus...and their focus needs to be on Him and not on all the glitter that so easily seduces.

These are spiritual "purchases" that have far greater value than the earthly riches they pride themselves in possessing.

19: "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent."

This is both an encouragement and a warning. Though they have decayed into a lukewarm disgusting church in God's eyes, He still loves them. But His love will take the form of "reproof and discipline". Proverbs 3:11-12 says, "My son, do not reject the discipline of the LORD Or loathe His reproof, For whom the LORD loves He reproveth, Even as a father *corrects* the son in whom he delights." Hebrews 12:5-11 expands on this very passage. Jeremiah 7:28 reflects a similar theme, "You shall say to them, 'This is the nation that did not obey the voice of the LORD their God or accept correction; truth has perished and has been cut off from their mouth.'"<sup>98</sup>

"Love" here is "phil-eh-oh" and implies a relational love, that of a friend or perhaps a mentor to a mentee in this case. "Reprove" is to expose, convict, and admonish while "discipline" is to train up as a parent would a child, correct, or chasten with a rod.

"Therefore be zealous and repent." Jesus opens a door for them so to speak. Though He is vomiting them out of His mouth, in a seemingly final rejection, not all is lost. There is still hope as long as they come to their spiritual senses and be zealous and repent. This needs to be done because the reproof and discipline are at the door as well. He will make the effort, like a father with his child, to straighten them out.

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<sup>98</sup> See also: Jeremiah 30:11; 31:18; Zephaniah 3:2; I Corinthians 11:32.

"Zealous" is to be moved by "warmed" emotion. In this case the "warmed emotion" could be embarrassment or fear...or both. "Repent" is a complete change of heart and mind and the drive to pursue the new change of direction. Romans 12:2-3 comes to mind,

2: "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. 3: For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith."

This would fit the Laodicean congregation quite well.

20: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me."

Again, a metaphor to illustrate a spiritual truth. Though this verse is often used in evangelism, it is directed to those in the church who have closed the (metaphorical) door on Christ. Though some see an eschatological implication in this statement in that, it points to Christ's imminent return and a banquet feast (both mentioned in the N.T.), it is more likely in this context a summons to the lifeless and complacent church to return to its spiritual roots and bring Christ back into the center of it all.

Though the church is in a loathsome state, Christ is still willing to renew fellowship with anyone who will open the door to Him. He has not abandoned anyone just as He has promised. It is people who stray away, but like the good shepherd that He is, He comes knocking. One must first hear His voice. Hopefully this letter will be His voice to that one. If he (or she) listens and opens the door He promises He, "...will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me."

This is much like John 14:23, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him."

A shared meal meant more in the ancient Jewish home than it does to us today. It represented a bonding and an identity between the persons who shared the meal.

The "communion", for example, intends to illustrate this. And then, it was one thing for Jesus to associate with the outcast, but he was criticized harshly for eating with them (Luke 5:30; 15:2). Peter was dealt the same criticism in Acts 11:2-3. "And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him, saying, 'You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.'"

So the restoration of full fellowship is seen in Jesus' offer and promise in this verse. And even more is promised.

21: "He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."

To "overcome" as Christ overcame means to be faithful to God and His purposes until the very moment of death regardless of the circumstances or persecutions one must endure. Those who do so will join Christ in His future rule. This is not an unknown idea in the Scriptures.<sup>99</sup> The idea of a "throne" is again a representation of authority and the ultimate victory of the saints.

Jesus' reign has already begun we see because, 1. He ascended and sits on the throne of ultimate authority – His Father's throne, and, 2. His death for our sins qualified Him for this as Peter said,

"Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET.'" Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified."<sup>100</sup> Acts 2:33-36

22: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Again, one must pay attention to what the Spirit says.<sup>101</sup> In every letter, it is the Spirit who ministers each convicting, purifying message to the churches so they will be strengthened to stand fast through any opposition or persecution

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<sup>99</sup> See: Luke 22:30; Mathew 28:18; I Corinthians 6:2-3; Ephesians 1:20-23; II Timothy 2:12;

<sup>100</sup> See also : Psalm 110:1; Hebrews 1:13.

<sup>101</sup> For more on this, see the comments at 2:7a.

whatsoever. Otherwise, all of this is a rather wasted effort if the church will never suffer the things described in this letter even associated with persecution, let alone a time of great tribulation as Jesus describes in Matthew 24.

Yet the message is certainly timeless and we see in the historical church as well as those today the need for these messages. Summary assignment: Taking all seven letters into consideration, what would you put forth as the most important overriding themes the Lord is wishing to convey to His church, and why?

# THE BOOK OF REVELATION

## Chapter Four

### Introduction

It is interesting to note that God didn't take the opportunity to explain what His word meant by quoting famous philosophers, theologians or thinkers who could, I'm sure, certainly help God in His effort to communicate the meaning and intent of His word to us.

Or perhaps we ought to work at grasping the text as the early readers did. This book is a Jewish document and it is incumbent upon us to see it as the Jewish believers would have understood it when presented to them two-thousand years ago - before we add our thoughts to the process.

For example, the beginning of the chapter reads, "After this..." Here, John moves to a new setting or theme signaling the conclusion of the letters to the churches, though as we will see, not of the vision he began with. This is his way of beginning a new "chapter" as it were.<sup>102</sup> The first vision in chapter one, while he "was in the Spirit," is of the glorified and exalted Christ caring for and addressing His churches in key places in the province...places John would be able to visit and minister to. This was John's first chapter.

Further, the words, "After this..." or "After these things" are repeated by John eleven times in the Book of Revelation and over fifty times in the Old Testament narrative signifying a break from the previous to present the next item, point or theme as well as adding continuity to the book.

This second vision begins what "must take place" after the churches have now been admonished. The pattern already revealed for the Revelation is set in a series and sequence of sevens. We have already seen the numeral "seven" used in the book twice and we will see this many more times.

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<sup>102</sup> As we see in several books, the author sets his own chapter or topical demarcations. For example, in Genesis the textual "chapters" (or main themes) are introduced by a statement, "This is the account of..." or "These are the descendants (generations) of..." or a similar statement. These are found at: 1:1; 2:4; 5:1; 6:2; 6:9; 10:1; 11:1; 11:10; 12:1etc. The artificial chapter pattern, though helpful for reference, is not original but actually added to the Bible around the 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (C.E.).

As an introduction to what is about to be revealed, we are presented with two new visions, one of God and the other of Christ in all their majesty, authority and power, emanating from heaven.

In chapter one, John's vision began with Christ in the midst of seven lampstands, and instructs John to write letters to each church represented thereby. He even placed His hand upon John (1:17).

But now, "God and Christ are far removed from the earth and its inhabitants, who during this present evil age are under the domination of Satan and his demonic forces, both supernatural and human. But Christian readers are assured that God and Christ are not unaware of their desperate plight, are not without deep concern about their sorrows and tribulations..."<sup>103</sup>

This is a fine statement bringing us to the focus of the text. John's experience was indeed a vision provided for him as all things in heaven are invisible to the human eye and instrument.<sup>104</sup> What John sees is a representation of heavenly things in an empirical form to impact John with the essence of what God wishes to convey to the churches through him. That is why John is often called "The Seer." What is seen is not the actuality, but a presentation.

#### THE SECOND MAJOR VISION (4:1-16:21)

4:1a, "After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven....,

The phrase, "After these things..." occurs thirty times in the scriptures and eight times in the book of Revelation with exactly the same words used each time as a simple formula to indicate a progression in the thought of the author.

"Behold" is used to draw the attention of the reader to the object in question, in this case a door open in heaven (the word "*standing*" is supplied by the translators). This door (or better "portal") was seen by John as being in the clouds of the sky. This tells John that there is access to a realm he has never seen before and the reader is invited to stand in awe with John at this amazing sight. Though there are many uses of the term "door" as a metaphor, this one is particular in that it is the "door" or "portal" of revealing that which is to come.

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<sup>103</sup> Martin Rist, *The Interpreter's Bible*, Volume 12, page 400, Abingdon Press, 1957-1982

<sup>104</sup> Romans 1:20; Colossians 1:15-16; I Timothy 1:17.

John's ecstatic state is fluid. A moment ago he was, "in the Spirit" near the Lord who was standing amidst the seven golden lampstands dictating letters to churches. Now the environmental scene shifts and John is peering into the sky and sees an open door far above. This was the second time his attention had been drawn to the sky. The first is in Acts 1:9-11, at Jesus' ascension,

9: "And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10: And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. 11: They also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.'"

4:1b, "...and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things."

First, we have a continuity of events as John notes the same voice he heard at the beginning of this vision is again speaking to him. Plus, the phrase, "...after these things" is repeated again in the same context.

The movement of John "the seer" throughout the book is rather interesting. In this chapter, while in the Spirit, he is found to be in the heavenly realm where God and Christ reign yet the seven lamps are still there. John remains there until the end of chapter 9, for in chapter 10 he views things from an earthly perspective. Then in 11:15-19, the vision is abruptly from the heavenly perspective once again. In 12 it seems to be between heaven and earth as he reveals activity in both spheres. In 13 and 14 it is definitely an earthly perspective but in 15 heaven again, and so on.

The point is that the Spirit of God is the instrument to bring John to the place where John views and records the vision. It is a spiritual experience, not a physical movement. In other words, John himself is not physically moving. He remains on the island of Patmos as he notes in 1:9.

4:2a, "Immediately I was in the Spirit..."

The means for traveling into the heavens was an ecstatic and spiritual experience, not a physical movement. He was "in the Spirit" in this event, not moved into heaven in flesh and blood, which is prohibited. This is reconfirmed (he was already "in the Spirit"), so that it is clear that John is still experiencing an ecstatic spiritual work and not a physical movement. There is no indication that John had left the ecstatic environment.

"One school of interpretation finds in the language of this verse the rapture of the church. John represents all Christians; the trumpet voice is that which is to be heard at the parousia (I Thess. 4:16); and the rapture of John stands for the rapture of all Christians at the end of the age. According to this view, the time of the great tribulation when God's people are persecuted by the Antichrist has nothing to do with the church but is the time of "Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30:7), that is, the Jewish people with whom God is to revive his dealings in the last days. Support of this position is sought in the fact that the word "church" occurs twenty times in the first three chapters but not once after chapter four until 22:17. Further support is sought in the identification of the 24 elders (4:4) with the raptured, rewarded church. The older dispensational literature spoke quite dogmatically of the rapture of the church in this place; one of the more recent commentaries admits that this truth is not explicitly taught, but insists that it may nevertheless be assumed.<sup>105</sup>

However, the entire question of a so-called pre-tribulation rapture is an assumption which does not command the support of explicit exegesis of the New Testament.<sup>106</sup> There is no reference in 4:1 to the rapture of the church; the language is addressed exclusively to John and refers only to his reception of the revelation of the book."<sup>107</sup> Finally, the exact same phrase is used in 11:12 and if consistent, this could also be deemed a "rapture" of the church. But then one would have to do a complicated explanation to justify that also, let alone explain the two references.

Though the word "church" is not used after chapter three, we see that in its use prior to chapter four it did not define just the faithful to the Lord, but an assembly often comprised of both the faithful and those who were fraught with many different problems. By the mid first century, the word "church" began to define a place or structure where people gathered together in Christian worship and activity much as it does today. In describing His return in the gospels, Jesus does not use

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<sup>105</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Chicago, Moody, 1966, p.103.

<sup>106</sup> See: George E. Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1956

<sup>107</sup> George Ladd, *A Commentary on The Revelation of John*, Eerdmans, 1972, pgs. 71-72.

the word "church" even one time when He speaks of those of His own He will gather to himself nor is the word "church" ever used in the epistles to define those who will be raised to Jesus at His coming.

The absence of the word "church" or "churches" from chapter four onwards does not indicate that the remainder of the book is without application to believers because they are now departed from the planet by some "rapture." To designate the faithful, the word "saint" or "saints" is utilized far more than the word "church" is used for this designation.

So after chapter three, we find that John employs the word "saint" and this is a designation of the faithful alone. In nearly every case while the "church" is often being reprimanded in chapters two and three, the saints are described in 14:12 as those, "...who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus."

If the church of chapters 2 and 3 are understood as being raptured in chapter 4, one has to wonder if that includes Jezebel, the false teachers, the immoral and ungodly members as well or do we have to further differentiate the meaning of the word "church" in 2 and 3. And if so, on what grounds do we make the corresponding statements such as "the church is raptured" in chapter 4? Is Jesus in error in using the word "church"? Do we assume that the term, "After these things" means that several thousand years have passed between chapter 2 and 3 and that the term "church" now has a more defined meaning?

Of course to answer this challenge, many purport that the seven churches are actually seven ages of church history until Jesus comes. So the nature of each church describes the specific age in which the church existed historically. The church at Laodicea is the church of the last times, and most of these proponents see it as the 20th-21<sup>st</sup> century church.

Well, there are considerable problems with this approach. First, the textual and historical gymnastics involved to show that Revelation 4:2 indicates the "rapture" is staggering. For example, the entire history of the church reflects all seven of the churches written to, and to try to separate them into historical compartments is not only completely unjustified by the text itself, but artificial in the extreme. One has to exclude or include specific historical facts to twist and force the letters into this format.

Then, if Laodicea is the church of the time of Jesus return, are we to understand

that though Jesus vomits the lukewarm church at Laodicea out of His mouth He was just kidding? Is it, "Y'all come" as long as you belong to a "church"? Are the Catholics right? All the other exclusive groups? What do the dispensationalists mean by "church" and on what grounds do they assume it is raptured in the movement of John's vision from earth to heaven? Must we now propose a theological definition of the word "church" so that only the faithful in the church are "raptured?" Then what do we do with Jesus and John's application of the word church to the entire assembly, both faithful and unfaithful?

What textual or Biblical justifications do we have to do this? Well, there are none. In addition, John is whisked away "in the Spirit" into a wilderness in 17:3 and to a great and high mountain in 21:10. Are we to assume that this is some future journey of the "church" as well? Then what of the other 16 times the phrase "in the Spirit" is used in the New Testament?

Further, John uses the simple pronoun "I" or "me", not "we", "us" or "our". It is John and John alone that is the subject of the spiritual movement.

The problem with people who believe this theological point of view is that most would rather hold on to their "doctrine" than do an inductive study of the word of God.<sup>108</sup> Not only that, Jesus speaks to this event and the timing of His return specifically in Matthew 24:9-13 and 24:29-31, and Paul does also in II Thessalonians 2:1-4, both contradicting this view.<sup>109</sup>

The term simply describes a state of spiritual ecstasy induced by The Holy Spirit so that those so engulfed are able to perceive realities or images that God wishes to convey to his people. Such is John's reiteration that he is still in this state when the vision changes before him. Here, John would be shown what was to take place in the future.

Ezekiel had a similar experience,

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<sup>108</sup> See: Introduction, VI, Studying the book, methods of study, pg. 11.

<sup>109</sup> Another argument is that the Pre-tribulation rapture never appears in any church writings prior to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Grant Jeffery disputes this quoting from the 4<sup>th</sup> century churchman, Ephraem the Syrian. A closer look at Ephraem's dissertation reveals that he identifies the "great tribulation" with the "Day of God's Wrath, a view this author rejects. Ephraem is correct when he proclaims that the church will never suffer this time and Ephraem sees the "rapture" as a "post-tribulation" phenomenon. See the comments for the letter to the church at Philadelphia, particularly pages 90-103.

3:10-14, 10: Moreover, He said to me, "Son of man, take into your heart all My words which I will speak to you and listen closely. 11: "Go to the exiles, to the sons of your people, and speak to them and tell them, whether they listen or not, "Thus says the Lord GOD." 12: Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard a great rumbling sound behind me, "Blessed be the glory of the LORD in His place." 13: And I *heard* the sound of the wings of the living beings touching one another and the sound of the wheels beside them, even a great rumbling sound. 14: So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away; and I went embittered in the rage of my spirit, and the hand of the LORD was strong on me."

This is no doubt what John also experienced.<sup>110</sup>

At this point, the interpretation and understanding of the book will diverge into two or more portraits depending on one's interpretation of this verse.

4:2b-4:3, 4:2B, "... and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. 4:3: And He who was sitting *was* like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and *there was* a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance.

It is important to note that John is centering the reader's attention on God and His sovereign glory. The cry is to worship the holy, almighty Creator. John wants us to – above all; in light of all; regardless of all; in spite of all to first fix our eyes on out glorious God and Savior and keep them there in faithful steadfastness.

The reason for this will be revealed. John will write of visions and events that could tear the focus of God's people away from Him and His provision in Christ and possibly confuse their faith and their path, befogging their vision and their hope. God Himself is going to turn the world topsy-turvey using Satan and the "Anti-Christ" to bring about the salvation of all that would otherwise never repent. The faithful must see clearly through all this. Note I Timothy 4:1ff. and II Thessalonians 2:3ff.

As we move with John through his vision and consider many of the similar visions of Old Testament saints (especially Ezekiel, Isaiah and Daniel) and see what transpires in John's vision, the more one senses that John is viewing an expanded and fluid Holy of Holies within a heavenly temple much like the temple on earth.

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<sup>110</sup> See also: Ezekiel 8:3; 11:1; 11:21; 40:1-2.

Hebrews 8:5, 9:8-23 and 10:1 speak of the earthly temple and the Law as a "shadow" of the heavenly reality. John's experience seems to place him in a realm that is the reality reflected in the earthly temple and its holy accouterments.

"A throne", the symbol of sovereignty and ultimate power and authority. The throne is not described, nor is the one who is sitting thereon. There is no anthropomorphic attributes given to the one sitting on the throne. But the vision has enough definition to enable John to ascertain a throne and someone sitting on it. It is a fascinating mystery, yet not a mystery at all at the same time. The vision of the one sitting on the throne is that of bright flashing colors with lightning coming from the throne itself (verse 5). The colors of the one sitting thereon are likened to Jasper and Sardius stones with an emerald colored rainbow surrounding the throne. The Jasper is a white translucent crystal like stone akin to white quartz with other colors intermixed with it. It can be found with other colors also. The Sardius (or Sardine) stone is a red stone with shades from dark orange to deep red. It is of the agate family and also called Carnelian in the Bible. The rainbow is the green of Emerald, perhaps in varying shades as it surrounds the throne.

The stones are not unfamiliar. Both are found on the chief priest's breastplate, the first stone the Sardius (or Ruby), and the twelfth the Jasper . Here we have a flashing and brilliant image representing the God of Israel and his sovereign authority over all the tribes as well as God being the glory and strength of Israel.<sup>111</sup> One student noted that the two stones suggested "The First and the Last" designation God makes of Himself.

Here's why. In the breastplate of the High Priest are twelve stones, each representing a tribe of Israel. They would be in rows set from right to left facing the breastplate. The order below is of Jewish tradition as the accounts of the births or their order are different in each passage we will record below.

Four Rows of Stones		
First Row		
Sons of Leah		
Sardius or Ruby	Reuben	ראובן

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<sup>111</sup> I Samuel 15:29

Topaz	Simeon	שמעון
Emerald	Levi	לוי
<b>Second Row</b>		
Garnet or Emerald perhaps Turquoise	Judah	יהודה
Sapphire	Issachar	יששכר
Diamond	Zebulun	זבולן
<b>Third Row</b>		
<b>Sons of Bilhah, Rachael's maid</b>		
Ligure or Jacinth	Dan	דן
Agate	Naphtali	נפתלי
<b>Son of Zilpah, Leah's maid</b>		
Amethyst	Gad	גד
<b>Fourth Row</b>		
Beryl or Crysolite	Asher	אשר
<b>Sons of Rachel</b>		
Onyx, or Sardonyx	Joseph	יוסף
Jasper	Benjamin	בנימין

The birth order in the text of Genesis 29-31 is as follows: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Benjamin.

However, the order of the sons in Genesis 35:22-16 is slightly different: Reuben,

Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Benjamin, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher.

And Genesis 49 has a different order still: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Joseph, Benjamin.

In all cases, Reuben is the first born and it is established by two accounts that Benjamin was the last born as is supported by Genesis 43:29; Deut. 27:12, etc.

4:3b: The Emerald rainbow was seen either as the common arc or as a full circle halo around the throne as the Greek can be understood either way. The first thing we think of when a Biblical rainbow is mentioned is the covenant/promise God made to Noah not to destroy the creation by flood ever again. The "Emerald" represents the tribe of Levi (and perhaps Judah), and the rainbow might suggest that the promises made through the lineage of these two tribes is fulfilled, that of the priesthood of Levi and that of the Messiah (the Royal king). But we cannot say with certainty what all the colors and symbols are meant to convey except that we have the authority and glory of God and a bonding with those who belong to Him by faith in God's son. Each one of the stones and the rainbow easily supports that idea.

Ezekiel writes of a similar vision,

"...And there came a voice from above the expanse that was over their heads; whenever they stood still, they dropped their wings. Now above the expanse that was over their heads there was something resembling a throne, like lapis lazuli in appearance; and on that which resembled a throne, high up, *was* a figure with the appearance of a man. Then I noticed from the appearance of His loins and upward something like glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, and from the appearance of His loins and downward I saw something like fire; and *there was* a radiance around Him. As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so *was* the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such *was* the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw *it*, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking." (1:25-28)

4:4, "Around the throne *were* twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones *I saw* twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads."

The vision speaks of something like concentric circles or arcs around the throne; the inner circle consisting of the emerald rainbow, then these twenty-four elders, and then in verse 5 we have in front of the throne, seven lamps representing the "seven spirits" noted in 3:1. The next circle is that of the "four living creatures", then in chapter 5:11, we have myriads of angels surrounding the throne. The form of the circle suggests eternity or infinity and perhaps the endless and invulnerable power and authority of God.

The twenty-four elders clothed in white garments sitting on twenty four thrones with gold crowns on their heads have been subject to diverse interpretations. Let's look at them carefully and then possible interpretations. They appear seven times throughout the remainder of the book through chapter 19 and are seen performing various roles and are linked to the four living creatures at nearly every instance where they are seen.

First, in 4:10-11, at the instigation of the four living creatures giving glory to Him who sits on the throne, they, "...fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created."

Second, in 5:4-5:5, John notes, "Then I *began* to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it; and one of the elders said to me, "Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals."

Third, in 5:8-12 we read, "When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. "You have made them *to be* a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."<sup>112</sup> Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches

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<sup>112</sup> Could they be describing what they themselves represent?

and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." And in 5:14, "And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshipped."

Fourth, they appear in 7:11-17, "And all the angels were standing around the throne and *around* the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, *be* to our God forever and ever. Amen." Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?" I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. "For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. "They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes."

Fifth, they appear in 11:15-18, "Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become *the kingdom* of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever." And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, "We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign. "And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time *came* for the dead to be judged, and *the time* to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth."

Sixth, we have them with the 144,000 in 14:1-3, "Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb *was* standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard *was* like *the sound* of harpists playing on their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth."

Seventh, at the victory and judgment over the "great harlot", we read in 19:4, "And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!"

The question of why these Elders and creatures are found within the text worshipping God and singing His praises can be important. Especially as it impacts the reader. They first appear prior to the opening of the seven sealed book and then, after the terrible events and the tribulation pictured there in the first six seals, and the sealing of the 144,000 and then the introduction to the great day of the wrath of God and the Lamb, they re-appear in worship, saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, *be* to our God forever and ever. Amen."

Then, after the seven trumpet plagues of God's wrath are poured out upon the unrepentant, they appear once again. And so on. This is a clear message that God still cares for and has not abandoned either His people or mankind regardless of the circumstances one finds himself in. He is to be trusted, worshipped and clung to in spite of what the world throws at the believer and for the unrepentant, he has foretold what will happen and they must recognize the hand of God and repent while there is yet time.

Now, what or who do these elders themselves represent, if not simply twenty four elders around the throne of God seen in that context as are the rest of the heavenly beings? There is no other reference to this scene in the scriptures and the noun has no definite article (anarthrous) implying an unknown reference.

There are, as I said, many views. Let's look at the twenty four elders themselves for a moment.

A. The number 24 brings to mind immediately the 12 tribes of Israel. Some would also add the 12 apostles. But the number 12 itself is significant. It signifies a perfect or divinely chosen governing authority. This stems from the multiple of 3 and 4, 3 being the number of the sacred or divine, and 4 the number of the earth based on the creation account and the four main compass points. Thus, a sacred or divine governing of the earth. Multiples of 12 are frequent in the scripture as we see here with the 24 elders and the 144,000. This number of elders (24) would basically signify divine authority.

B. The above view finds support in that the elders sit on thrones and wear golden crowns. The thrones tell us of their authority and the wreaths suggest authority as having been delegated to them due to their faithfulness. These are victory wreaths.

C. White robes generally symbolize righteousness, purity, perfection or completion.

D. The word "elder" is πρεσβύτερος, indicating an older man and used in the New Testament to describe a person having risen to a place of honor, godliness and wisdom and selected to be a judging and ruling authority in the churches. In Judaism, it was actually an office. A council of elders was part of the Jewish leadership in ruling over the affairs of the Jews (see: Exodus 19:7 and Luke 22:66 for example).

All together we have a powerful image of authority, possibly earned or honored with as the crowns are not "diadems" but "stephanos". The very age and experience of the elders would have merited the wreaths as long as they were men of faith and lived righteously. In other words, John is presented with those to whom he must pay attention and give respect and honor. But in 4:10 the elders are seen as submitting their authority to God in worship and in the casting of their crowns before Him indicating that God has supreme authority. No matter their earthly status, all will bow the knee to Him (Philippians 2:9)

Now, are these 24 elders representative of anything else? There is nothing in the text defining this so the following suggestions have been made. In fact, John often interprets then images he sees for us. Note: 1:20; 4:5; 12:9. But here he does not.

A. An older idea is that the elders represent the "perfected" church in heaven in anticipation of the future state, the number 24 representing both the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles, in turn representing the church comprised from saints of both testaments. In 21:12-14, for example, the names of the twelve tribes are inscribed on the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem and those of the twelve apostles on the twelve foundations.

B. A second view is that these 24 elders represent the raptured church based in the interpretation of verses 1 and 2 where John, personifying the rapture of the church, was called "up here". Clothed in Christ's righteousness, the elders, (symbolizing the church) sit on thrones (as in 3:21) and their crowns are victor's wreaths (as in II Timothy 4:8).

Neither of these views finds textual support in all of scripture and an artificial portrait is assumed due, not to textual support, but to theological ideology. Also, in 7:13-14, John addresses one of the Elders as "Sir" or "My Lord", which is odd for a fellow believer. "Brother" would fit better. Still, "Sir" for an Elder would be understandable. Further, these beings are termed "elders", not "elder saints" or just "saints" as is used by John to describe the faithful.

There is actually a view that at least does have some Biblical support, but I find it unappealing as well.

C. The 24 elders represent a body of angels executing divine mandates in the creation. Angels are seen in white apparel, have certain authority, and God is pictured as surrounded by a council of "holy ones" in Psalm 89:7. In Isaiah 24:23 God is the Lord of hosts and, "...will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, And *His* glory will be before His elders."

However, in 7:11, the angels are seen separately from the 24 elders, "And all the angels were standing around the throne and *around* the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God..."

So I feel, though an option, not fully satisfied with it. However, this verse finds the elders a consistent part of the company of beings that surround the throne and together worship and serve the creator. They are linked with the four living creatures consistently. We see this in chapter 4, where the 24 elders and the 4 living creatures are linked together in a symphony of worship, and in chapters 5, 7, 14 and 19:4 as well.

D. Another view is that these are representative of the 24 courses of Levitical priestly service at the tabernacle and later temple, the heavenly reality of the earthly "shadow" such as we find referenced in Hebrews, chapter 8 and 9. There is some support for this as in 5:8 they hold harps and bowls representing the prayers of the saints.

This view is inconsistent with the way the elders themselves are portrayed. The priesthood was temporary, and they wielded no royal or governing authority. One would be closer if 24 righteous kings of Judah were the representation. Even so, whether Jew or Gentile Kings, all recognize God's ultimate sovereignty and authority.

E. Perhaps 5:8-12 actually notes the Elders as defining themselves.

F. Other suggestions have been offered referencing astrology, astronomy, and mythology not found worthy of discussion here.

But it is obvious that identifying these elders is not a clear task and there is no universally accepted view. Perhaps the better question is, "What do the four living creatures and the twenty four elders have in common that they are linked together in so many passages?" And, "What is it that they are seen as doing that might be important to do as an "elder" in John's vision so that John is impacted?"

Perhaps we might find a hint helping us identify the 24 elders in doing so. We shall do so when we arrive at verse 6 -11.

4:5a, "Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder."

These manifestations are frequently used in the scripture when God is present and about to make a declaration to His people or pronounce judgment. (Exodus 19:16; 20:18; Deuteronomy 33:1-3; Job 37:2; Isaiah 29:6; Jeremiah 10:13; Zechariah 9:14; Matthew 24:27; Revelation 10:3-4; 16:18; etc.) They represent the power and glory of God.

In Ezekiel's vision we read,

"As I looked, behold, a storm wind was coming from the north, a great cloud with fire flashing forth continually and a bright light around it, and in its midst something like glowing metal in the midst of the fire. Within it there were figures resembling four living beings. And this was their appearance: they had human form." 1:4-5

We will see similarities to Ezekiel's vision all through Revelation.

4:5b, "And *there were* seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God...;"

The "lamps" are either burning torches or oil filled vessels with spout and burning wicks or oil burning in the bowl without spouts or wicks as the Greek could indicate either one. There are seven as in 1:4 and 3:1. God possesses them and it seems that God manifests Himself some way through the agency of "seven

spirits." Fire is a purifying agent and perhaps this is the point we are to get as we find correspondence with spiritual purification in our relationship with God through faith in Christ.<sup>113</sup> In addition, these "seven spirits" are seen in various forms and point to God's ability to see and know everything that is happening everywhere as well as in the human heart and mind.

4:6a, "... and before the throne *there was something* like a sea of glass, like crystal;<sup>114</sup>

John is forced to use a simile to describe the next thing he saw, using the terms: like "glass", like "crystal" was this expanse before the throne. This harkens back to a similar image in Exodus 24:9-10,

"Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself."

And, also using similes, in Ezekiel's vision we read,

"Now over the heads of the living beings *there was something* like an expanse, like the awesome gleam of crystal, spread out over their heads."  
(1:22)

Though attempts have been made to explain the significance of this "sea like glass" none project confidence. What we know is that the throne of God is seen on this sea. It is either being supported by the "sea" or simply stands on the "sea".<sup>115</sup> Either way, the "sea" like crystal/glass seems to be a floor for the throne of God.

It is seen only one more time in the book, in 15:2, "And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God.

The only Biblical reference corresponding to this idea of a "sea" is that of the "bronze sea" first spoken of in I Kings 7:23. Solomon commissioned Hiram of

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<sup>113</sup> See notes at 1:4 (page 20) regarding the seven Spirits of God.

<sup>114</sup> In Revelation 15:2-3, John speaks of this once again.

<sup>115</sup> Again, note Ezekiel 1:26-28; 10:1; Exodus 24:10.

Tyre to cast this piece. It was about twelve feet wide from brim to brim and six feet tall. Then it was placed on the backs of twelve bronze bulls (oxen), four at each compass point. Altogether, this made the "sea" (if the oxen were full size) about ten to twelve feet off the ground. The account in I Kings 7:23-44 is reflective of much of the visions both Ezekiel and John record.<sup>116</sup>

If the four living creatures (the same term Ezekiel uses) are stated as actually supporting the "sea of glass" then we have no question as to the inference. Still, there is that distinct possibility as they are seen in front and around the throne at equidistant intervals. The sea is seen as "before" or "in the presence" or "face" of the throne and the living creatures "around" the throne. So it is difficult to visualize.

The "bronze sea" Solomon had cast was for the washing of the priests as II Chronicles 4:6 tells us. It stood near the altar of the temple and was immense. There were also ten other bronze basins on pedestals in which to wash. These pedestals had bronze figures of lions, cherubim and oxen on them.

The word for "sea" is the same both in the Old Testament references and in John's description.<sup>117</sup> Perhaps this "sea of glass" is to convey the idea of cleanliness before God. God and all who inhabit this heavenly scene are pure and holy.

4:6b-4:8a, "... and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind. The first creature *was* like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature *was* like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within;..."

4:6b-4:8a: "center" likely means one directly in front of John at the middle of his scene, while the other three encircle the throne at equidistant intervals. These "four living creatures" clearly correspond to the Seraphim of Isaiah 6:1-3, and to the Cherubim of Ezekiel 10:14, and apparently 1:4-11. These are intimidating and frightening creatures and the Cherubim are especially grotesque.

They appear in the Temple Holy of Holies on each side of the Ark of the Covenant and are massive statues made of olive wood covered with gold plate standing some

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<sup>116</sup> Ezekiel, chapter 1; 3:13; chapter 10.

<sup>117</sup> John, like all the N.T. writers, uses the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint) for his references.

14 feet tall. Small gold replicas of two of these facing each other are on the top of the Ark itself. In total there are four. In John's vision he also sees four. Isaiah's vision appears to be while the prophet is in the temple.

6:1-3 reads,

"In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory."

Ezekiel reads,

"And each one had four faces. The first face *was* the face of a cherub, the second face *was* the face of a man, the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle."

John's description combines these two. In Ezekiel, we have, "the face of a cherub" and this word has no description. However, in Ezekiel 1:10, we read of the "cherub" having the face of an "ox" or "bull". Note the passage from 1:4-11,

4: "As I looked, behold, a storm wind was coming from the north, a great cloud with fire flashing forth continually and a bright light around it, and in its midst something like glowing metal in the midst of the fire. 5: Within it there were figures resembling four living beings. And this was their appearance: they had human form. 6: Each of them had four faces and four wings. 7: Their legs were straight and their feet were like a calf's hoof, and they gleamed like burnished bronze. 8: Under their wings on their four sides *were* human hands. As for the faces and wings of the four of them, 9: their wings touched one another; *their faces* did not turn when they moved, each went straight forward. 10: As for the form of their faces, *each* had the face of a man; all four had the face of a lion on the right and the face of a bull on the left, and all four had the face of an eagle. 11: Such were their faces. Their wings were spread out above; each had two touching another *being*, and two covering their bodies."

These four creatures are found consistently throughout the rest of the book along

with the twenty-four elders.<sup>118</sup> But they also have an occasional role apart from the twenty-four elders. First, in 6:1, "Then I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, 'Come.'" They are also mentioned in 6:6 apart from the twenty-four elders. Then in 15:7, "Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever."

So what are these four living creatures, what is their purpose and what do they represent or convey to the reader?

In combining the attributes of several living creatures depicted for us in the Old Testament, perhaps their appearance and role is also to be understood as a singly combined function as well.

In the Old Testament (Ezekiel) these creatures-Cherubim): 1. Supported and transported a crystal expanse upon which God sat upon a throne. Psalm 80:1 reflects this as it says, "Oh, give ear, Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock; You who are enthroned *above* the cherubim, shine forth!" And Psalm 99:1 agrees saying, "The LORD reigns, let the peoples tremble; He is enthroned *above* the cherubim, let the earth shake!" 2. As Ezekiel was transported in the Spirit to his assigned place, the entourage also followed. 3. In 10:7, we read, "Then the cherub stretched out his hand from between the cherubim to the fire which was between the cherubim, took *some* and put *it* into the hands of the one clothed in linen, who took *it* and went out." (This is similar to John's account in 8:4-5) 4. In Isaiah 6:3-4, the Seraphim were seen above the throne of God, "And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory." And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke." (This is similar to John's account in 4:8)

The cherubim of Ezekiel do not sing or worship God, whereas the Seraphim of Isaiah do. The Seraphim of Isaiah, on the other hand, are above the throne of God while the Cherubim of Ezekiel are beneath it. And the Cherubim of Ezekiel are involved in movement of the scene and in fiery power, while the Seraphim of Isaiah are not. The creatures of John's vision do all these things. Plus, the Cherubim are seen guarding the way back into paradise (Eden) in Genesis 3.

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<sup>118</sup> See: Revelation 4:8-9, 5:6, 5:14, 6:1, 7:11, 14:3, 15:7,19:4.

These creatures are often displayed in massive statues in the mid-east, principally Babylonia, Persia, as well as in Egypt and other venues. Two massive Cherubim (about 14 feet tall) made of Olive Wood overlaid with gold stood on each side of the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies on which were two more made of gold on the Ark itself. And then their images were woven into the great curtain (or veil) separating the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. The function of these images was to remind the priesthood of the power of God and warn them not to enter the Holy of Holies unless they were fully prepared according to God's directions. This was not a matter to be trifled with.

The purpose of these Cherubim was to represent the divine separation of God from sinful man and demonstrate the power and determination of God regarding His holiness, danger, and the exclusiveness of His presence and realm. In other words, "Keep out" or face destruction. In Genesis, chapter 3, we have a similar theme with multiple Cherubs (cherubim is the plural) guarding the way back into Eden, 3:24, "So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way

It would stand to reason that the living creatures in John's vision represent the same idea with the added features of the Seraphim in worship and in communication of the vision to John. The entire vision is reflective of John being in the Holy of Holies in the temple except that what John sees is the living and more majestic grandeur of the heavenly reality while the earthly structures and statues are simply representations and shadows of the heavenly realm.<sup>119</sup>

I suggest that these creatures represent exactly what they are seen doing. 1. They represent God's ability to be everywhere at once. 2. The eyes covering them within and without represent God's ability to see all things at all times and that nothing is hidden from His sight Hebrews 12:13, "...And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." 3. God is unapproachable by anyone without meeting His express conditions (as in the Book of Esther where King Ahasuerus had similar rules). To do so would mean one's life. In other words, the omniscience, omnipresence and holiness of God is seen in the images in the vision.

It is important to mention a few things about these visions before we continue. First, "...flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the

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<sup>119</sup> See: Hebrews 8:5; 9:1-23; 10:1 and Colossians 2:15-17

perishable inherit the imperishable." (I Corinthians 15:50) And, the Lord told Moses, "...no man can see Me and live." (Exodus 33:20) And, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:24) Verses like these help us recognize that the visions are symbols representations of the nature of God and His realm. God does not need animals to carry Him about, let alone a chariot. And physical beings are not possible in God's realm. So the visions of elders, beasts and all are pictures the ancient Jews (and hopefully us) can relate to in terms of all things spiritual and heavenly such as power, omniscience, omnipotence and the like. They symbolize things for us we could not otherwise grasp or understand. Much like the anthropomorphisms we see so regularly. God, being spirit does not have physical features. So descriptions of His hands, face, arms, and so on are language vehicles so we can grasp in our own understanding what God is doing. In other words, God does not need to have hands to accomplish His will seeing that He "spoke" the entire universe and all that is in it into existence.

Yes, he does appear on earth in forms we can grasp and see and His ultimate physical manifestation is in Christ. But that is God accommodating Himself to our limitations just as the visions are His way of doing the same.

Now, the Rabbinic view of these four creatures is that they represent God's sovereignty over the creation, namely, A. Man who was created to rule the earth, B. the Lion which is king of the animals, C. The Ox, the most powerful of the domesticated animal servants and D. The Eagle which rules the air.

In 170 A.D. the first Christian view identifying these four living creatures was by Irenaeus who saw them as the four works of Jesus as presented by the four gospels; 1. His power being the Lion represented by John's gospel, 2. His priestly work being the Ox (or calf) presented by Luke, 3. His incarnation represented by the "Man" presented in Matthew, and, 4. The ministry of the Holy Spirit represented by the Eagle as presented by Mark. Others have seen the creatures as representative of the Gospels in one way or another.

These are all artificial guesses and are not supported by textual material.

But what about the meaning of the faces? This is less clear. The lion, ox, man and eagle faces are not explained to us anywhere in scripture. Plus, these creatures are "full of eyes without and within" (verse 8). This shows focused watchfulness and that God misses nothing. But one can only surmise the meaning of the faces.

It has been suggested they represent, 1. The four major life groups on the earth over which God has sovereignty. Yet there is no sea life, nor are there reptiles, insects and so on. 2. They represent four species having to do with the service to God or the Levitical sacrificial system. Why then the eagle? 3. They represent the four most powerful created living creatures. This has more appeal. Perhaps in their own way they are to "lift up" the glory of God and at the same time carry His glory wherever He wishes it to be displayed.

But we cannot be certain of their symbolic meaning.

8b: "...and day and night they do not cease to say..." This is John's editorial comment recognizing the continuation of this adulation of God as there is no "day or night" in the heavenly realm of God. Nor, for that matter, are there compass points. So the vision represents that which God wishes to convey to John and his readers in terms that all will identify with and be able to understand in this own understanding what the magnitude of the reality actually is.

8c. "...**HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME.**"

This reflects Isaiah 6:2-3, 2: "Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3: And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory."

These are the only two places in scripture where this thrice holy adulation occurs and we can understand this as a chant. The term Seraphim is plural and the translators erred in the phrase "he covered" when it should either be "each covered" or "they covered."

The first thought is that this represents adulation of the Trinity, but the Jews had no understanding of the Godhead in that fashion and in fact reject it to this day. More likely it represents the glory of God as seen in the earth, sea and sky, as the creation displays the glory of God. The end of the phrase (4:11) bears this out. And, we have ample evidence of this in the Scriptures. In Revelation 4:11; 5:13 and especially 10:6 we have that specific foundation for giving glory to God. And in the well known Psalm 19:1 we see, "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands."

The adulation "HOLY" is repeated three times and could be simply a common biblical way of showing emphasis. God stands in contrast to all else in the glory of His separateness.

"...The Almighty..." John hears this addition to Isaiah 6:3 and it is the Hebrew "El Shaddai." John uses "παντοκράτωρ" (pahn-toh-kraw-tor) in the Greek. "El Shaddai" is a frequent title for God and both words indicates His power over all the universe both in its creation and its destiny. Both words mean essentially the same thing.

"...Who was and who is and who is to come." An expansion of the divine name. The words of this addition are also found in 1:4; and 1:8. (See commentary at these verses for a full explanation)

4:9-11, 9: "And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, 10: the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11: "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created."

9-10: This scene of worship initiated by the four living creatures followed by the twenty-four elders is repeated seven times in the book. Though the identification of the twenty-four elders is hard to pin down with certainty, the act of these elders does indeed display the concept that all authority, whether in earth or in heaven either ought to or definitely will bow down to God and give Him glory.<sup>120</sup>

11: "Our Lord and our God." Not just One to be worshipped, but also One to whom one submits himself and recognizes God as one's Lord. The worthiness of God to receive honor is based on His creation and sustaining of "all things." This is a frequent theme in scripture and recognizes that the God of Israel, (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) is the one and only true God. In light of what is coming, there is no question that the massive destruction to follow does not diminish God's

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<sup>120</sup> See: Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10

sovereignty over the creation at all. In fact, as he is telling us before hand about what is to come, His sovereignty is fully supported.

# **THE BOOK OF REVELATION**

## **Chapter Five**

Introduction, the seven sealed scroll (5:1-8:1).

We now turn from the focus on God and His glory to the seven sealed scroll and the only one worthy to open it... The Lamb of God. This begins the actual revelation of what is to come in the time God has given the earth and the people thereon.

The opening of the first six seals takes us to chapter eight, covering only two chapters. When the seventh seal is opened at 8:1, the content of this seal takes more or less some eleven chapters. In the midst are interludes and others scenes that interrupt the flow.

It should be noted that there has been some debate over the translation of the Greek "biblion" in verse one. The NASB translates it "book" and that is one correct translation of the word in the correct context. However, the introduction of a leafed book was not yet accomplished and wouldn't be for another 50 years or so and not many compiled until the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. There have been some primitive first century discoveries of sheets of vellum or papyri placed unbound between two boards as early as the first century, but no books as such.

Translators exercise their own arbitrary judgment in translating "biblion" as "book" or "scroll." For example, in 6:14, the word "scroll" is translated for the same Greek word. In Matthew 19:7, it is translated "certificate". In 4:17, it is translated "book" but has to be "scroll" as the Jews do not use "books" in the synagogue to this day. In Galatians 3:10 Paul refers to the "book of the law" when this has to be a scroll.

In Hebrews 10:7, there is a distinct confusion in the NASB. It reads, "THEN I SAID, 'BEHOLD, I HAVE COME (IN THE SCROLL OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME) TO DO YOUR WILL, O GOD.'" Well, you can't have a "scroll" and a "book." Actually it has to read, according to the Greek, "In the content of the scroll...". There is actually, for some strange reason, no other specific Greek word for "scroll" leading us to believe that "biblion" was used for "scroll" long before it was translated into the modern idea of "book". There was a word used for the roll upon which the scroll was rolled became synonymous with

the scroll itself and was used this way in the LXX<sup>121</sup> and in Hebrews 10:7 above. This is the only place in the new Testament where this word (kephalida – kef-ah-leed-ah) is used to help describe the object.

But "biblion" was used by the N. T. writers because this was the most frequent word used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew word for "scroll". The word for the roll (kephalida) is used 24 times and the word for scroll (biblion) is used 160 times in the LXX. English translations are about equal in translating the word one way or the other. However, based on historical evidence, I believe "scroll" is more accurate.

The form of the scroll in terms of how it was written and sealed is not easy to ascertain. There is evidence of scrolls written on two sides. This was more than simply to conserve expensive papyrus or vellum, as writing on both sides is to disallow any other from writing on the scroll and adding or subtracting from God's word. Often the "Torah" used in the synagogues was written on both sides. It was kept in a box called "The Ark". This practice is still in force today. As a holy and sacred book, indeed the inspired word of God, it was revered when read, and appropriate respect and honor was given as worship to the God who wrote it.

To facilitate the reading of both sides, the scroll is wound upon two rollers. As it is unrolled to read the interior text, it is turned over at the termination of the interior side and read on the outside.

After a powerful introduction, both John's attention and that of the reader is turned to the Lamb and the scroll. Now we will discover why our bond to Christ is so important. It is because while everything else in creation is about to come apart, Christ remains above it and unaffected as do those who are His and ultimately are transformed into their eternal and indestructible new forms.

## **EXCURSUS I**

### **The "Day of The Lord" and "the Great Tribulation"**

An important distinction must once again be made, one that is seldom done in the theology or in the prophetic doctrines that flood the church and that is the distinction between "The Great Tribulation" and "The Day of The Lord" (also

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<sup>121</sup> Septuagint

called the Day of God's Wrath"). Yes, "The Day of the Lord" can be seen as the beginning of the Great and Terrible Day of God's Wrath" upon the earth, but they are practically synonymous.

First, "The Day of The Lord" is mentioned in both testaments. The New Testament, of course, reflects the theme from the Old Testament. Here are the key passages:

Revelation 6:15-17, 15: "Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; 16: and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; 17: for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

For example, Charles Ryrie in His "Ryrie Study Bible"<sup>122</sup> says about Revelation 6:16-17, "When the tribulation comes, men will act as if they believe the end of the world is at hand." This passage clearly does not use the word "tribulation" but "great day of their wrath".

II Peter 3:10-12, 10: "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. 11: Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12: looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!

I Thessalonians 5:2: For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.

II Thessalonians 2:2: "...that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come."

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<sup>122</sup> The Ryrie Study Bible, Moody Press, 1978, Comment at Rev. 6:16.

Acts 2:20: "THE SUN WILL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD, BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD SHALL COME.

Do any of these verses sound like a "rapture?" Or do they use the term "tribulation?" No. It begs the question, "How do prophetic teachers justify combining these passages with those that speak of the great tribulation defined as the worldly attack against the saints and say they are the same event? The word "tribulation" never occurs in the Old Testament nor in the context of this great divine judgment upon the earth.

To continue, Peter's sermon in Acts 2 above is quoting Joel, the most frequently quoted passage telling of this event,

2:28-32, 28: "It will come about after this That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy, Your old men will dream dreams, Your young men will see visions. 29: "Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. 30: "I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, Blood, fire and columns of smoke. 31: "The sun will be turned into darkness And the moon into blood Before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. 32: "And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the LORD Will be delivered; For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem There will be those who escape, As the LORD has said, Even among the survivors whom the LORD calls."

Then we have:

Zephaniah 1:14-18,

14: Near is the great day of the LORD, Near and coming very quickly; Listen, the day of the LORD! In it the warrior cries out bitterly. 15: A day of wrath is that day, A day of trouble and distress, A day of destruction and desolation, A day of darkness and gloom, A day of clouds and thick darkness, 16: A day of trumpet and battle cry Against the fortified cities And the high corner towers. 17: I will bring distress on men So that they will walk like the blind, Because they have sinned against the LORD; And their blood will be poured out like dust And their flesh like dung. 18: Neither their silver nor their gold Will be able to deliver them On the day of the LORD'S wrath; And all the earth will be

devoured In the fire of His jealousy, For He will make a complete end, Indeed a terrifying one, Of all the inhabitants of the earth.

Isaiah 13:6-11,

6: "Wail, for the day of the LORD is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. 7: Therefore all hands will fall limp, And every man's heart will melt. 8: They will be terrified, Pains and anguish will take hold of *them*; They will writhe like a woman in labor, They will look at one another in astonishment, Their faces aflame. 9: Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, Cruel, with fury and burning anger, To make the land a desolation; And He will exterminate its sinners from it. 10: For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not flash forth their light; The sun will be dark when it rises And the moon will not shed its light. 11: Thus I will punish the world for its evil And the wicked for their iniquity; I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud And abase the haughtiness of the ruthless."

Isaiah 34:1-10,

1: Draw near, O nations, to hear; and listen, O peoples! Let the earth and all it contains hear, and the world and all that springs from it. 2: For the LORD'S indignation is against all the nations, And *His* wrath against all their armies; He has utterly destroyed them, He has given them over to slaughter. 3: So their slain will be thrown out, And their corpses will give off their stench, And the mountains will be drenched with their blood. 4: And all the host of heaven will wear away, And the sky will be rolled up like a scroll; All their hosts will also wither away As a leaf withers from the vine, Or as *one* withers from the fig tree. 5: For My sword is satiated in heaven, Behold it shall descend for judgment upon Edom And upon the people whom I have devoted to destruction. 6: The sword of the LORD is filled with blood, It is sated with fat, with the blood of lambs and goats, With the fat of the kidneys of rams. For the LORD has a sacrifice in Bozrah And a great slaughter in the land of Edom. 7: Wild oxen will also fall with them And young bulls with strong ones; Thus their land will be soaked with blood, And their dust become greasy with fat. 8: For the LORD has a day of vengeance, A year of recompense for the cause of Zion. 9: Its streams will be turned into pitch, And its loose earth into brimstone, And its land will become burning pitch. 10: It will not be quenched night or day; Its

smoke will go up forever. From generation to generation it will be desolate; None will pass through it forever and ever."

Malachi 4:1-6,

1: "For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze," says the LORD of hosts, "so that it will leave them neither root nor branch." 2: "But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall. 3: "You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing," says the LORD of hosts. 4: "Remember the law of Moses My servant, *even the* statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel. 5: "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. 6: "He will restore the hearts of the fathers to *their* children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."

Ezekiel 30:1-6,

1: The word of the LORD came again to me saying, 2: "Son of man, prophesy and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Wail, 'Alas for the day!' 3: "For the day is near, Even the day of the LORD is near; It will be a day of clouds, A time *of doom* for the nations. 4: "A sword will come upon Egypt, And anguish will be in Ethiopia; When the slain fall in Egypt, They take away her wealth, And her foundations are torn down. 5: "Ethiopia, Put, Lud, all Arabia, Libya and the people of the land that is in league will fall with them by the sword." 6: "Thus says the LORD, "Indeed, those who support Egypt will fall And the pride of her power will come down; From Migdol *to* Syene They will fall within her by the sword," Declares the Lord GOD."

Amos 5:18-20,

18: "Alas, you who are longing for the day of the LORD, For what purpose *will* the day of the LORD *be* to you? It *will be* darkness and not light; 19: As when a man flees from a lion And a bear meets him, Or goes home, leans his hand

against the wall And a snake bites him. 20: *Will* not the day of the LORD be darkness instead of light, Even gloom with no brightness in it?"

Second, "tribulation" or "the great tribulation" is described in the following terms,

John16:33, "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."

Matthew 24:9, "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name."

Matthew 24:21-22, 21: "For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. 22: "Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short."

Matthew 24:29-31, "But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30: And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. 31: And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other."

Mark 13:19-20, 19: "For those days will be a *time of* tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will. 20: "Unless the Lord had shortened *those* days, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom He chose, He shortened the days.

Mark 13:24: "But in those days, after that tribulation, THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, 25: AND THE STARS WILL BE FALLING from heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken. 26: "Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN CLOUDS with great power and glory. 27: And then He will send

forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven."

Also notable is Luke, chapter 21, too lengthy to reproduce here.

Revelation 7:13-17,

13: Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?" 14: I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15: For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. 16: They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; 17: for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes."

This passage is in answer to the passage in 6:9-11, that reads,

9: When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; 10: and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" 11: And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until *the number of* their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also."

At the end of chapter 6 after the breaking of the sixth seal, we have the statement, "...for the great day of their wrath has come." Then we have an interlude. Then, at the beginning of chapter 8, the seventh seal is broken.

The hope of the Jews has always been that God would take vengeance upon the wicked who have constantly oppressed and persecuted His people. The "Day of the Lord" expresses that hope in the ultimate and final fashion. God Himself has

declared any times that vengeance was His and not that of His people.<sup>123</sup> He has promised to do so and the prophets declare that this will occur.

Third, on the other hand, the term "tribulation" does not reflect God's wrath upon the wicked, but the world's wrath upon the people of God. This theme is reflected not just by the teachings of Jesus but by the apostles as well. Paul taught the believers at Thessalonica,

II Thessalonians 2:1-10, 1: "Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, 2: that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. 3: Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, 4: who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. 5: Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? 6: And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. 7: For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains *will do so* until he is taken out of the way. 8: Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; 9: *that is*, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, 10: and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved."

The subject is found in verse 1. The passage reflects, "...the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him." The term "Day of the Lord" is linked to Jesus' return. But this will not occur until the "apostasy" occurs and not until after "the man of lawlessness is revealed..." This man will be destroyed at Christ's return – the same time "we are gathered to Him." Not only that, but Paul warns them not to be deceived (verse 3). Rather unnecessary if they are not present when the "Anti-Christ" appears.

In his first letter to this body Paul wrote,

5:1-6, 1: "Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of

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<sup>123</sup> See: Deuteronomy 32:35, 43; Psalm 94:1; Isaiah 34:8-10, 35:4, Jeremiah 20:12; Ezekiel 25:12-17; Nahum 1:2; Romans 12:9; Hebrews 10:30 for examples.

anything to be written to you. 2: For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. 3: While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. 4: But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; 5: for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; 6: so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober."

We now have coupled the terms "the day of the Lord" and "thief in the night." In Revelation 16:15, Jesus says, "Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame." Then in Matthew 24:41-43 Jesus compares His return to a thief, in that, as one does not know when the thief will break in so will be His coming. We see the same in Luke 12:35-40, and in II Peter 3:10, "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up." But the most telling verse is I Thessalonians 5:4, "But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief;..."

This simply asserts that Paul's "brethren" will be present when this occurs, does it not?

Now, this man of lawlessness is linked with the so called "antichrist."<sup>124</sup> Charles Ryrie notes that this man of lawlessness in II Thessalonians 2:3ff, is the same person as the beast in Revelation 11. In that passage, the two godly witnesses face "the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcomes them and kills them." This is also the same "beast" (according to Ryrie) in Rev. 13:1-10 of whom it is said, 7: "It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him. 8: All who dwell on the earth will worship him, *everyone* whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain. 9: If anyone has an ear, let him hear. 10: If anyone *is destined* for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints."

Ryrie also references Daniel 7:8 regarding the one horn that rose up making great

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<sup>124</sup> From I John 2:18, 4:3 and II John 1:7. However this term is not specifically given to the end time individual often associated with this title.

boasts. There he equates it with the "Antichrist." It is said, however, in 7:2-22 defining the activity of this "horn", "I kept looking, and that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom." Ryrie has no comment about this passage.

The problem is that Paul is clear that there will be no coming of Christ or gathering to Him until after this man of lawlessness is revealed and exerts his Satanic power. But Ryrie and others who hold to the dispensational interpretation of scripture and the "pre-tribulation rapture" claim that those who are Christ's have already been "raptured" prior to this appearance of the man of lawlessness. In his commentary on Matthew 24: 22 ff. Ryrie comments,<sup>125</sup> "The elect of this age (the church) will have been translated before that time comes." He refers to the tribulation period mentioned in Matthew 24:21-22. However, this is an assumption as there is no such comment by Jesus or any teaching of this sort in the entire Bible.

Fourth, there are two other matters pertaining to the second appearing of Christ. One is the matter of "clouds." Both the day of the Lord and the coming of Christ are linked to clouds. For example, Joel 2:2 says of the day of the Lord,

"A day of darkness and gloom, A day of clouds and thick darkness. As the dawn is spread over the mountains, So there is a great and mighty people; There has never been *anything* like it, Nor will there be again after it To the years of many generations."

And in Zephaniah 1:15,

"A day of wrath is that day, A day of trouble and distress, A day of "destruction and desolation, A day of darkness and gloom, A day of clouds and thick darkness,..."

And Daniel 7:13-14 says,

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<sup>125</sup> The Ryrie Study Bible, Moody Press, Chicago, 1978

13: "I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. 14: "And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed."

The presence of God is often associated with clouds in the scripture. Then , speaking of Christ's return,

Matthew 24:30-31, "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. 31: And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other."

Matthew 26:64, Jesus said to him, "You have said it *yourself*; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN."

Act 1:9-11, 9: "And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10: And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. 11: They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

I Thessalonians 4:17, "Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord."

Rev. 1:7, "BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen."

Luke 21:27, "Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN A CLOUD with power and great glory."

Rev. 14:14-16, "Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud *was* one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand. 15: And another angel came out of the temple, crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, "Put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe. 16: Then He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped."

The second matter is the "Last Trumpet". First, Paul notes,

I Corinthians 15:50-52, 50: "Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51: Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 52: in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed."

To what does he refer when he speaks of the "last trumpet?" He repeats this in I Thessalonians 4:15-17,

15: "For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16: For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17: Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord."

The idea of a trumpet announcing the presence or judgment of God is frequent in the Old Testament. We have it at Sinai, and in excerpts of Isaiah in a prophetic passage beginning in chapter 25 we have imagery reflected in the New Testament and in Revelation,

25:6-9, "The LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; A banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, *And*

refined, aged wine. 7: And on this mountain He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples, Even the veil which is stretched over all nations.

8: He will swallow up death for all time, And the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces, And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth; For the LORD has spoken. 9 And it will be said in that day, "Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation."

26:19-21, "Your dead will live; Their corpses will rise. You who lie in the dust, awake and shout for joy, For your dew *is as* the dew of the dawn, And the earth will give birth to the departed spirits. 20: Come, my people, enter into your rooms And close your doors behind you; Hide for a little while Until indignation runs *its* course. 21: For behold, the LORD is about to come out from His place To punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; And the earth will reveal her bloodshed And will no longer cover her slain."

27:13, "It will come about also in that day that a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were perishing in the land of Assyria and who were scattered in the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD in the holy mountain at Jerusalem."

In Ezekiel 33:2-5 we read,

2: "Son of man, speak to the sons of your people and say to them, 'If I bring a sword upon a land, and the people of the land take one man from among them and make him their watchman, 3: and he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows on the trumpet and warns the people, 4: then he who hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, and a sword comes and takes him away, his blood will be on his *own* head. 5: 'He heard the sound of the trumpet but did not take warning; his blood will be on himself. But had he taken warning, he would have delivered his life."

Joel warns,

2:1, "Blow a trumpet in Zion, And sound an alarm on My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, For the day of the LORD is coming; Surely it is near,..."

Then Jesus said in Matthew 24:31,

"And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other."

For the "great trumpet" He quotes from Isaiah 27:13 but there is the reminiscence of Exodus 19:14-19 as well and also Isaiah 49:18 and 60:4.

But what of the term "last" trumpet? This means that there are no more trumpets to sound as the end has come. The consummation of the age has arrived, Jesus appears in glory and victory, and the end of all things is at hand. It is also linked with a "loud voice" or a "shout" and also signifies the raising of the dead (John 5:25, 28; I Thessalonians 4:16) and in Revelation 11:15, the seventh and last angel sounds his trumpet and we read, "Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become *the kingdom* of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever."<sup>126</sup>

So, now we have all these events occurring at the same time or sequentially, namely (in a brief suggested outline): 1. The appearing of the man of lawlessness ("Anti-Christ), 2. Persecution of the saints who refuse his mark, 3. The heavenly signs, 4. The last trumpet and a great shout, 5. Christ's appearing in the clouds, 6. The dead raised to life to meet Him in the clouds with the gathered living following, and, 7. Christ initiating judgment upon the man of lawlessness, (the beast) and all who have chosen to serve him over the Lord, 8. Plagues upon the earth, and a final opportunity for any to repent, 9: The initiation of the messianic age to come.

Bottom line, The great tribulation is the wrath of the world's powers upon the people of God and the "Day of the Lord" is God's wrath poured out upon the world's evil powers.

End of Excursus

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<sup>126</sup> Adam Clark quotes Rabbi Akiba: "How shall the holy blessed God raise the dead? We are taught that God has a trumpet a thousand ells long, according to the ell of God: this trumpet he shall blow, so that the sound of it shall extend from one extremity of the earth to the other. At the first blast the earth shall be shaken; at the second, the dust shall be separated; at the third, the bones shall be gathered together; at the fourth, the members shall wax warm; at the fifth, the heads shall be covered with skin; at the sixth, the souls shall be rejoined to their bodies; at the seventh, all shall revive and stand clothed." See Wetstein. This tradition shows us what we are to understand by the last trump of the apostle; it is the seventh of Rab. Akiba, when the dead shall be all raised, and, being clothed upon with their eternal vehicles, they shall be ready to appear before the judgment seat of God. Adam Clarke, Commentary on the Bible, 1810-1826, on e-Sword (online).

## COMMENTARY

5:1, "I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book (*scroll*) written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals." (Italics mine – see introduction)

1: Though this doesn't seem complicated at first glance, this is not easy to visualize, especially in how it is sealed. The most logical idea is that the seals would likely be made of wax and fixed to the sides of the scroll so a portion could be opened at sequentially thereby revealing a series of events. And though John describes the scroll as "written" inside and on the back, as each seal is broken and that section opened, the scroll projects a vision John describes.<sup>127</sup>

Seven seals tell us that the scroll contains the entire and complete revelation until the end of time. This also tells us that history has a purpose and a climax. It is going somewhere. Without God being the author and finisher of our faith, human history would be going nowhere. The scroll rests in the right hand of God, clearly symbolizing the total sovereignty God has over the outcome of all human history. The seals are probably His and cannot be opened by just anyone.

As each seal is opened, a new vision is seen. However, as we will see, there are interludes and visions that reveal the not all the visions are in sequence. This style is not uncommon and we will see this as we compare the first six seals and Jesus' Olivet course in Matthew 24.

In Ezekiel's vision, he was handed a scroll written on both sides (2:9-10) which he was to eat so that he could prophesy to the house of Israel (chapter 3). Writing on both sides is to disallow any other from writing on the scroll and adding or subtracting from what God is revealing.

Though there are many views as to the purpose of the content of the scroll, Ezekiel's fits the best. He reports God's command to him in 2:8-10,

8: "Now you, son of man, listen to what I am speaking to you; do not be rebellious like that rebellious house. Open your mouth and eat what I am giving you." 9: Then I looked, and behold, a hand was extended to me; and lo, a scroll

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<sup>127</sup> The first Biblical reference to a sealed document is found in I Kings 21:8 where Jezebel wrote letters in the king's name. Esther 8:8 is worthy of review also.

was in it. 10: When He spread it out before me, it was written on the front and back, and written on it were lamentations, mourning and woe."

This is descriptive of much of the content of Revelation as well especially as we read passages like 8:13, "Then I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in mid-heaven, saying with a loud voice, 'Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!'"

5:2-4, 2: "And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?" 3: And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it. 4: Then I *began* to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it;

2a: "Strong angel" occurs only one more time in the book. In 10:1-3, the strong angel there is also associated with a "book" and he has a loud voice, likely the same angel and the word "strong" is the same in both passages. It could simply suggest John being impressed by this particular angel or that the angel has the appearance and voice of a higher or more important rank than most. Perhaps his voice is characterized as reaching to the entire creation (all of heaven and earth) and thus the adjective "strong."

2b. After the call to all heaven and earth, no one was found worthy to break the seal and open the book.

The breaking of a seal and opening a scroll had to be done by the one having the authority to do so. This is still true today in many areas of our society. Breaking a seal by an unauthorized party can be a violation of law in many cases. So while "...no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it", this is because no created being had the authority to do so and no one could be found. This indicates the extreme authority of the One who was found to finally open the book.

Why did John weep? First because there was no one found "worthy" to open the book. All humanity has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Paul made this crystal clear when he wrote in Romans 3:10-18,

10: as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; 11: THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS

FOR GOD; 12: ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE." 13: "THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING," "THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS"; 14: "WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS"; 15: "THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD, 16: DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS, 17: AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN." 18: "THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES."

The contrast between the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man cannot be overemphasized. Regardless of one's religion, devotion, good works, and so on, until he comes to the place where he recognizes his own unrighteousness, even in the midst of his self righteous efforts, and falls at the feet of Christ pleading for mercy, he has no hope. Only in Christ by faith does one find righteous imputed and the hope of life after death.

Isaiah 29:10-13 has a similar theme,

10: "For the LORD has poured over you a spirit of deep sleep, He has shut your eyes, the prophets; And He has covered your heads, the seers. 11: The entire vision will be to you like the words of a sealed book, which when they give it to the one who is literate, saying, 'Please read this,' he will say, 'I cannot, for it is sealed.' 12: Then the book will be given to the one who is illiterate, saying, 'Please read this.' And he will say, 'I cannot read.' 13: Then the Lord said, 'Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned *by rote*,...'

But then, no one in heaven is worthy either. So John weeps perhaps because he realizes that the scroll cannot be opened or read. Therefore the precious vision of the future things to come and the message to the churches as to what to expect and how to persevere will never be known.

5: "and one of the elders said to me, 'Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.'"

5: Here an elder speaks with John for the first time. His role is to inform John that

his weeping is unnecessary and that there is indeed only one who is worthy to open the scroll. Using messianic metaphors from the Old Testament, he describes Jesus; in terms of the lion from Genesis 49:9-10 and the Root of David from Isaiah 11:1; 10 and Jeremiah 23:5-6. In Revelation 22:16, Jesus identifies Himself as the "Root of David."

The remainder of Isaiah 11 gives us a vivid prophecy of the promised triumphant Messianic king. Verse 4 is especially poignant, "And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked." This is similar to the declarations in Rev. 1:16, 2:16, and 19:15.

This special One has "overcome" as Jesus states in 3:21. Though introduced as, "the Lion from the tribe of Judah," John looks and beholds a Lamb.

6: And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth."

6a: Young's Literal Translation reads, "...and I saw, and lo, in the midst of the throne, and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb..."

This helps us visualize a little better. The Lamb appears on the crystal sea either in the midst of the throne's glory, on the throne itself or just in front of the throne (1:4) which stands in the center between the creatures and the elders. In Revelation 7:17 the Lamb is again "in the midst of the throne" and in 3:21, He is sitting on His Father's throne and has a seat of His own as well. Perhaps the heavenly throne has more than one seat as we see sometimes in the royal thrones of Europe; one seat for the King and one for the Queen.

6b: We would visualize a "Lamb" of unusual description and more of a ram in likeness. And it is seen as if slain. This means it appears in the scene quite alive, but displays bloody wounds and perhaps a slashed throat reminiscent of the sacrifices made at the altar of the temple. We know immediately this is a representation of Christ. And this Lamb has seven horns and seven eyes. The eyes we are told are, "the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth." But they are part of the Lamb, giving the Lamb identity with God.

The term "Lamb" is frequently used of Jesus "Christ" (The Greek rendering of the Hebrew "Messiah"). In John 1:29-30, John the Baptist says to his followers when he saw Jesus,

"Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'"

John was actually born before Jesus, so his declaration acknowledges the pre-existence of Jesus from before creation as the apostolic writer proclaims at the beginning of his gospel. Acts 8:32 has the Ethiopian eunuch reading from Isaiah 53:7, "HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER; AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT, SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH." Phillip interprets this to him stating that it referred to Jesus.

6c: "As if slain"... See 6:b above, and note that there are two fulfillments in this vision. The first is the Passover lamb, the blood of which God mandated to be splashed on the lintels and door posts of the Israelites in Egypt so that they would escape death to the first born.

Exodus 12:5-7, 5: "Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. 6:'You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight. 7: Moreover, they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses in which they eat it."

The second is at the altar of the tabernacle or temple later after the Exodus.

Exodus 29:41-46, 41: "The other lamb you shall offer at twilight, and shall offer with it the same grain offering and the same drink offering as in the morning, for a soothing aroma, an offering by fire to the LORD. 42: It shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the doorway of the tent of meeting before the LORD, where I will meet with you, to speak to you there. 43: I will meet there with the sons of Israel, and it shall be consecrated by My glory. 44: I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar; I will also consecrate Aaron and his sons to minister as priests to Me. 45: I will dwell among the sons of Israel and will be their God. 46: They shall know that I am

the LORD their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt, that I might dwell among them; I am the LORD their God."

First, both sacrifices were to be at twilight. This was near the same time period when Jesus died on the cross, 3:00-4:00 P.M. and was the traditional hour of prayer for the Jews. Second, the Passover lamb was sacrificed and its blood splashed on the lintel and doorposts to save the Israelites from death. Third, the temple offering, the "burnt offering" was a perpetual offering accepted as sin, guilt, trespass and peace offerings.

In the messianic passage of Isaiah 53:7, we read,

"He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth."

So Jesus' sacrifice as the Lamb "slain" covered all the needs of mankind forever, past, present and future.

6d: The seven horns are symbolic of full, total and perfect power and reflect the power of rule. The "horn" is often a symbol for this theme in the Scriptures and often messianic in nature. For example,

"Those who contend with the LORD will be shattered; Against them He will thunder in the heavens, The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; And He will give strength to His king, And will exalt the horn of His anointed."  
I Samuel 2:10

And,

"Blessed *be* the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, ***And has raised up a horn of salvation*** for us In the house of David His servant--As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old-- Salvation FROM OUR ENEMIES, And FROM THE HAND OF ALL WHO HATE US; To show mercy toward our fathers, And to remember His holy covenant,..." Luke 1:68-72

The book of Daniel is the most prominent source of the idea of "horns"

representing political power, kings and kingdoms. Notable are chapters 7:1-28; 8:3-14.

6e. The "seven Spirits" are noted in 1:4, "John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the **seven Spirits** who are before His throne"; 3:1, "To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the **seven Spirits** of God and the seven stars, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead'; in 4:5, "Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And *there were* seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the **seven Spirits** of God; and here in 5:6.<sup>128</sup>

These seven symbols of light and fire also represent God's omniscience. In Zachariah 4:10, the seven burning lamps on the lampstands are defined as, "... the eyes of the LORD which range to and fro throughout the earth." These "seven spirits" have several notable attributes, but none more poignant than the representation of God's ability to see all things at all times.

The Lamb is worthy to take and open the book (scroll) because he has "overcome." this means that he remained faithful to the call He possessed and overcame any temptation to discard it.

5:7, "And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne."

The scroll rested in the right hand or upon the open palm of God. This is the place of power and of giving and taking. It indicates His intent to give the scroll, and the power therein, to another. God holds the destiny of the world in His hand, both of those who believe and of those who don't. He offers it to the Lamb, the only one worthy to receive it and open it and exercise the authority therein. The action described agrees with John's opening verse, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place;...". And the Lamb took it from His hand.

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<sup>128</sup> For more on this, see the commentary at 1:4, page 20.

5:8 "When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

In the first worship of the creatures and the twenty-four elders, the elders cast their crowns before the throne in a symbolic gesture of submitting and authority or power they might have to God. Now they fall in worship each with a harp and a bowl full of incense.

The harp would be a small hand harp, (a lyre) not like our orchestral harps today. It was an ancient instrument used in accompanying the chanting or singing of the assembly. Here the harps are used to accompany the new song about to be sung.

The bowls of incense are shallow saucers filled with a burning powder, the aromatic smoke rising up before the Lord. John sees the smoke of incense as a metaphor for the prayers of the saints. This image is found in Psalm 141:2; Luke 1:10; Revelation 8:3-4 and in many other places. The first actual prayers of the "saints" in Revelation is found in 6:10 where slain martyrs cry out for God to end the suffering of His people and wreak vengeance on those who are committing the slaughter.

The word "saints" is the term John and all the apostles use for God's faithful people whether they be Jew or Gentile. Dispensationalists interpret this word to only apply to converts from Judaism during the great tribulation, and not to those raptured prior to that event. However, this makes no sense Biblically as all the apostles use the word for the body of Christ regardless of their racial or religious origin. (See Galatians 3:26-29; Romans 3:29; 9:24-25 for Paul's understanding about the Gentiles.) In I Corinthians 14:33 Paul includes the Corinthians, a mixed Jewish/Gentile congregation as "saints", the "body of Christ and begins his letter to them calling them all "saints" as well as the "church" at Corinth. In Revelation 18:20 the phrase, "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her." This can only be applicable to the body of Christ, the church, because Judaism did not have apostles.

5:9-10, 9: "And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. 10: 'You

have made them *to be* a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."

This is reflective of Psalm 33:1-3,

1: "Sing for joy in the LORD, O you righteous ones; Praise is becoming to the upright. 2: Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre; Sing praises to Him with a harp of ten strings. 3: Sing to Him a new song; Play skillfully with a shout of joy."

The remainder of the Psalm corresponds with the theme as well.<sup>129</sup>

The song is being sung by the four living creatures and the 24 elders to Jesus, the Lamb of God and is unlike the other songs sung in praise to God. It lauds His worthiness based on His sacrifice on the cross. In so doing, His blood had such infinite value and magnitude that it was sufficient to "purchase" peoples from all the earth<sup>130</sup>

10: This is a repetition of 1:6, "... and He has made us *to be* a kingdom, priests to His God and Father--to Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen." In 20:6, the glorious fulfillment of this takes place, "Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years."

The role described for these saints is 1. A kingdom; 2. Priests 3. Rulers upon the earth. They have already been made a kingdom and priests now, but will reign on the earth with Christ in the future age.<sup>131</sup>

11-12: 11: "Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, 12: saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing."

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<sup>129</sup> See also Psalm 98; 144:9; 149:1 for references to a "new song" being sung to the Lord.

<sup>130</sup> Not just the Jews - as the word "nations" refer to "Gentiles." The idea of "purchase" is that the people, under the curse of the Law due to sin which is death, ultimately belonged to Satan's realm. The price or ransom for their redemption was their own death (the wages of sin being death) but this was paid for by the death of God's Son so that those who came to faith would not die. See: I John 5:19; Luke 4:6; Matthew 4:8-9; Matthew 20:28; Matthew 26:28; Acts 20:28; Romans 3:24-26; I Cor. 6:20, 7:23; I Peter 1:18-19; I John 2:2 Rev. 14:4.

<sup>131</sup> See comment on 1:6 and Daniel 7:18, 27.

11: The angels around the throne are more numerous than can be counted. "Myriads of myriads" is reflective of Daniel 7:10; and the Jews believed that the angels were so numerous to be beyond calculation.<sup>132</sup> They join their voices in proclamation of the Lamb's worthiness to receive the seven fold adulation almost as if the scroll itself was comprised of these seven attributes and in receiving it He receives these seven attributes.

12: In 4:10 the elders fall down and "worship" Him who sits on the throne. John has not noted this specific purpose of the actions of these elders or the myriads of angels toward the "Lamb" as yet. The seven fold attributes come with the scroll only the Lamb is worthy to receive. Some are also found to be attributes of God. In 4:11 we read the elders saying, "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created." So the myriads also proclaim the Lamb's worthiness to receive the same honor as God. And these attributes fit one who is a king, and here, of the ultimate king.

13-14: 13: "And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, *be* blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever. 14: And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped."

13: Now the entire creation joins in with the heavenly assembly in this song of praise to both the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. We needn't assume that trees and fish and mountains somehow are given sentient voice, but that the imagery is reflective of the entire creation showing forth the glory of God and benefitting from the power, wisdom, glory, might, blessing and riches of God and now, the Lamb.

Again, it seems we are seeing through John's eyes a heavenly temple, and when we get to 6:5 we, with John see the altar of sacrifice that stood in front of the temple.

14: Now the elders fall down and worship both the One who sits on the throne and the Lamb while the four living creatures attest to the rightness and truthfulness of what is said and done.

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<sup>132</sup> See also Hebrews 12:22, Jude 1:14.

# THE BOOK OF REVELATION

## Chapter Six

### Introduction

The first five chapters are in actuality an introduction to the opening of the seven sealed scroll. After the reader's attention is fixed upon the glory and sovereignty of both God and the Lamb and on their control of the destiny of humanity and of all things created, the reader can rest in the confidence that no matter his or her circumstances, trust and faith in God and His son will find their faith vindicated in a glorious way.

The repeated emphasis impressed upon those in Christ to persevere and "overcome" cannot be overemphasized. It opens the eyes of the believer to the simple fact that what Jesus said will be the case,

"If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated* you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also." John 15:18-20

But the promises of ultimate life and peace are also quite real,

"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."  
John 16:33

"Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, *there* you may be also. And you know the way where I am going." John 14:1-4

The seven sealed scroll reveals both of these realities in dramatic form. The scroll itself transforms from a written scroll into a visual presentation with action and sound.

George Ladd notes, "The book itself contains two things which complement each other: the establishment of the kingdom of God and the gathering of His saints into His kingdom; and the judgment of God upon the evil demonic powers which have oppressed His people.... However, God will judge these evil powers and finally destroy them. Before the final judgment falls, God will pour out a series of woes upon those who are seduced by these evil powers. These judgments will not only manifest the wrath of god against all evil and rebellion but will also have the merciful purpose of driving the wicked to their knees in repentance before the final judgment falls and it is too late."<sup>133</sup>

As the first four seals are broken, the vision of each is summoned forth by one of the living creatures. As the seals are broken, four horsemen ride forth all on different colored horses. The first is white, the second is red, the third is black and the fourth is an ashen light greenish gray. The vision is similar to that found in Zechariah 1:7-11 and 6:1-8, but the visions and their meaning are both significantly different.

There are many approaches to interpreting the visions revealed by the breaking of each seal and the opening thereof. I have taken the approach that these first six seals are general and common in nature partly because they are so brief. They describe the circumstances humanity experiences in this world. In a similar way, I have noticed that Jesus' teaching to His disciples in Matthew 24 and in other places about what the future holds also gives only a brief outline until He approaches the climax and end of the age and His own return. The similarities are uncanny. Nevertheless we will include other pertinent views as we proceed through the opening of the scroll.

In the first four visions of the opening scroll, each rider sits upon a different colored horse. The horse has always been a symbol of power, conquest, war, or an unstoppable, insurmountable or unavoidable event. Such appears to be the case in Revelation as well.

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<sup>133</sup> George E. Ladd, A Commentary on the Revelation of John, Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1972, Chapter 6, page 1.

## THE VISION OF THE FIRST SEAL

6:1-2, 1: "Then I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, 'Come.' 2: I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer."

1: The scroll is in the possession of the Lamb, who by virtue of His perfect obedience and sacrificial death has been found the only One worthy to break each seal and open the scroll so the contents can be revealed. Now, the living creatures speak for the first time, one for each of the first four seals as they are broken.

The voice John hears is like a clap of thunder in its power and volume. The word spoken is a simple summons, "Come." An older school of thought understood this summons to be spoken to John because of a manuscript difference. The available manuscripts prior to the 17<sup>th</sup> century included the phrase "and see" after the word "come" in the text. This would, of course, been understood as directed to John. However, earlier manuscript evidence discovered after 1800 omit this phrase. So we now understand the summons to be directed to the subject and vision of the first unsealed section of the scroll, the horseman on the white horse.

2: Of the four horsemen to be presented, there is little debate about the interpretation of horsemen two through four. But horseman one is the subject of much discussion. We have a figure on a white horse carrying a bow, given a crown going to conquer. We are not told what he was wearing or who he represents. Immediately we think of Christ, but something is off. The "giving" of the crown does not necessarily mean he is being rewarded for faithfulness as we will see in the next vision.

There appears to be the sense of one going into battle in order to "conquer." But with a bow, not a sword as we often see with Christ Himself. And, other than the white horse we see Christ riding in Revelation 19:11, the riders have nothing in common. A "sword" is representative of great power, judgment and destruction (as we see in the next vision) but a bow, though an instrument of battle is a less brutal symbol of victory. Plus, if this was a spread of the truth, perhaps a sword would fit if understood as "the sword of the Spirit." But John sees a bow. Still, there is something about this horseman that seems to reflect Christ but with less power. There are three possible conclusions commentators have generally agreed upon.

First, the rider represents the apostolic spread of the gospel. Second, he represents the Roman (and pagan) political domination and power and third, he represents the false "christs" whom Jesus predicted would come and infiltrate the church.

Either the spread of the gospel through apostolic work or the false christs fit best for me.

Returning to the thought that Jesus, in Mathew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 spoke of series of events leading to the end of the age and His coming, there is an uncanny similarity to the series of events He spoke of in the "Olivet Discourse" and the structure of the seven sealed scroll.

In the discourse (in all three synoptic gospels) He listed briefly the following events in order. 1. False christs; 2. War; 3. Famine 4. Earthly woes; 5. Tribulation for the saints; 6. Heavenly signs of His coming; 7. His return in power and Judgment.

These are strikingly similar to the seven seals we will explore. If there is indeed a correspondence here, then the identity of the first horseman leans toward the false christs and prophets He spoke of in these passages. There might be the intent to represent deception in the horseman and thus causing some confusion or doubt among those who try to interpret the vision in the first seal.

### **THE VISION OF THE SECOND SEAL**

6:3-4, 3: "When He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, 'Come.' 4: And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that *men* would slay one another; and a great sword was given to him."

3: The next living creature speaks and summons forth a second horseman. His voice had likely the same thunderous boom as the first creature had.

4: The red horse had a rider with a great sword and it "was granted" to take peace from the earth, men slaying one another. Though the "sword" is described as "great" it is actually a short sword used in hand to hand combat. The word "great" may indicate the intensity and extent of the conflict. This is no doubt a picture of

war and bloodshed. In other words he had the nature or characteristics of war and bloodshed, much like the first horseman had the nature and characteristics of conquest and victory. The color of the horse cannot be mistaken for anything else than for blood.

Here, the second horseman fits the second theme in Christ's discourse. One of the reasons this catches my attention is that during this period in history, there was little conflict or war at all. The historic "Pax Romana" was in place and under Roman rule the entire Mediterranean area was at "peace" for several centuries, albeit due to Roman enforcement and power. The world has never had a period like this since. So the vision was not based on John's (or Jesus') present circumstances in terms of the world in general but on a knowledge of what was to come later in human history.

Still, at the same time during the latter half of the first century, there had been persecution and execution of believers under several Roman emperors notably Nero, Trajan and Domitian.

### **THE VISION OF THE THIRD SEAL**

6:5-6, 5: "When He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, 'Come.' I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. 6: And I heard *something* like a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, 'A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine.'"

5: The third living creature now speaks in his thunderous voice and summons the rider on the black horse into the vision. The black horse could easily be taken for distress, mourning, and even death. Jeremiah has a poignant passage that speaks to this,

"That which came as the word of the LORD to Jeremiah in regard to the drought: Judah mourns And her gates languish; They sit on the ground in mourning (literally "in black"), And the cry of Jerusalem has ascended. Their nobles have sent their servants for water; They have come to the cisterns and found no water. They have returned with their vessels empty;

They have been put to shame and humiliated, And they cover their heads."  
14:1-3

The rider had a pair of scales in his hand. These are weighing balances in the style of two chains holding plates at their extent hanging from a balance beam held up at the center by another chain or rod. Plates at the bottom of the two chains held weights on one side and goods on the other.

6: John heard "a voice" and the source is not identified except that it came from the midst of the four living creatures. So it may be that of one of the twenty-four elders. The voice pronounced the terms of great scarcity and the high cost of even a small bit of grain from which to make bread. A denarius was a day's wages for a man and would normally buy enough wheat for eight days or more. Barley, a cheaper grain and often used by the poor is also in short supply as only three quarts are available for a denarius, normally a one month supply. A quart was good for one day's bread.

"...do not hurt the oil or the wine." Again, noting the scarcity and preciousness of oil with which to make the bread and wine as the staple beverage with meals. This suggests that one must use these quite sparingly and only as a necessity because a famine means that the trees and vines are not producing. Normally this occurs as a result of no rainfall for an extended period of time as is seen in the Jeremiah passage above. This was such a common fear that we see a concerted effort by Joseph to build great grain storage silos to offset a coming famine in Genesis 41.

Again, this vision follows the pattern seen in the Olivet Discourse.

### **THE VISION OF THE FOURTH SEAL**

6:7-8, 7: "When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come." 8: I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth."

7: Now the fourth living creature speaks in his thunderous roar and summons the

fourth horseman into the vision.

8: The color of this horse is unusually hard to describe but seems to be the color of flesh when drained of blood, or livid. A sickly pale gray with a light yellowish-green tint perhaps. Sitting on this horse was a rider having the name "Death." Following is "Hades", there to swallow up the corpses of the dead. "Hades" is simply the grave although Greek mythology has "Hades" as the god of the underworld, the Jews rejected this and simply use the word to reflect the grave or at most the mysterious and unknown abode of the dead called Sheol. (See: 20:13)

"Authority" is given "them" over a fourth of the earth to kill..." The phrase "Authority was given to them" leads us to the conclusion that this is somehow a divine assignment when in actuality it is a natural occurrence stemming from the nature of the horseman. Literally the phrase could be, "and to them is granted power to kill..."

The rider "Death" does not represent "death" in general, but the death caused by plague, famine, disease, conflict, persecution, war and nature. Luke's rendering of the Olivet Discourse in chapter 21 of his gospel includes more of this type of affliction than does Mark 13 or Matthew 24. In verses 10-20 Luke gives a more extensive description of Jesus' words and included are the afore mentioned afflictions. Here, a great portion of the earth is affected, indeed a fourth. The "sword" of this horseman is a "broad sword" used in mass attacks against an enemy force.

These four horsemen display general occurrences that seem to intensify those of the previous horsemen reflecting what is happening on the earth affecting the people on the earth including the people of God. There is no specific direction or focus to their activity. But as we move to the next seal we see that there was a terrible time for believers somewhere in these visions.

### **THE VISION OF THE FIFTH SEAL**

6:9-11, 9: "When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; 10: and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging

and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" 11: And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until *the number of* their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also."

9: The fifth seal is broken without any fanfare, introduction or summons. John is presented an expanded heavenly scene where now he is outside of the throne room and in a courtyard where an altar is present. This is, as I noted on page 131, reminiscent of the temple,

"As we move with John through his vision and consider many of the similar visions of Old Testament saints (especially Ezekiel, Isaiah and Daniel) and see what transpires in John's vision, the more one senses that John is viewing an expanded and quite fluid Holy of Holies within a heavenly temple much like the temple on earth. Hebrews 8:5, 9:8-23 and 10:1 speak of the earthly temple (and the Law) as a "shadow" of the heavenly reality. John's experience seems to place him in a realm that is reminiscent of the earthly temple and its holy accouterments."

Nowhere is this more apparent than here, where the altar is now seen in John's vision. This has to be the altar of sacrifice as there is no need to explain it to the reader and the definite article prefaces the noun. There are two altars mentioned in the Revelation, "the golden altar" of incense, (9:13); and the altar of burnt - offerings, mentioned here, and in 8:5; 11:1; 14:18, and 16:7. At this the souls of the martyrs now prostrate themselves. By and by their blood shall be avenged upon Babylon; but not yet.

The opening of this seal and its contents continues to correspond with the Olivet Discourse particularly Matthew 24:9-10. (See the introduction to chapter six and the comment on the first seal.)

In the New Testament we have the idea that when one dies in the service of the Lord, it is a sacrificial death. As he contemplated his own death the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come." And in Philippians 2:17 he wrote, "But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all." Whether in life or death, one offers his or her life as a sacrifice to God.

These slain saints may well reflect those who died under the Roman persecution of Domitian (81-96) and possibly Trajan (98-117). We have records of a more intense persecution because of the imposition of the Roman Emperor Cult claiming deity for the emperor as well as worship and sacrifice when required. Christian leaders often were forced to make a choice and when refusing to sacrifice or bow to Caesar they were punished by exile, imprisonment or execution. There have been repetitions of severe persecutions of both Christians and Jews to this day and will be again as the book reveals.

"Under the altar" would refer to the ledge around the altar under which was a grate to catch the ashes from the burnt sacrifice. The blood of the sacrifice was to be poured out at the base of the altar on the side facing the tabernacle or temple entrance.<sup>134</sup>

"Souls" – lives (the breath of life). These had been slain because of the testimony they held in faithfulness to the word of God. Ryrie notes that these are, "...evidently the martyrs of the first months of the tribulation period."<sup>135</sup> However, there is general tribulation and then the great tribulation even as in Matthew 24:9-10 reflects a general "tribulation" while 24:21ff notes a "great tribulation." These souls who had been slain are in the sure keeping of God, but are not alive in heaven as some would teach. This is pure symbolic language and we even have them crying out to God. This again is picturesque language much like Genesis 4:10 where God tells Cain, "... He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground."

In 20:4-5 we have them coming back to life at the appearing and return of Christ and are called those of "the first resurrection."

10: These souls having been slain now cry out to God (or the Lamb) "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" This is a vision for the benefit of John and his readers. It is the expected question and all God's people await the answer. It is not unlike Isaiah's question in 6:11, "... 'Lord, how long?' And He answered, 'Until cities are devastated *and* without inhabitant, Houses are without people And the land is utterly desolate...'"

God is not unaware of the cry of those of His own slain unjustly. In Genesis 4:10,

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<sup>134</sup> Leviticus 4:7; 5:9; 8:15.

<sup>135</sup> The Ryrie Study Bible, Moody Press, 1978, footnote on Revelation 6:9.

The Lord said to Cain, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground." and Psalm 116:15 declares, "Precious in the sight of the LORD Is the death of His godly ones." Psalm 72:13-14 tells us the God, "...will have compassion on the poor and needy, And the lives of the needy he will save. He will rescue their life from oppression and violence, And their blood will be precious in his sight..."

The cry is to the "Lord" and a different word is used instead of the common "Kurios." "Despotes" is the word and recognizes God (or the Lamb) as the absolute and indisputable ruler over the universe.

11: The cry deserves an answer. It is a difficult one. "And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until *the number of* their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also." This looks ahead at what is to come.

First, a white robe is given to each of them. White robes are mentioned in Revelation here, and in 3:4-5, 7:9, and 7:14 and are associated mostly with martyrdom. These robes signify that these have "overcome" to the fullest extent, remaining faithful until death. Their work is done and now they can rest, trusting God for the future of their brethren who are yet to be killed. In other words, then end is not yet. But the time will not be long. (See Matthew 24:21-22)

One might wonder if God is deliberating about how many saints must be killed before He decides to act. This is not the intent of either the passage or of God's purposes. There is no question God hates the persecution, terror, pain and suffering to death His people must endure, but His purposes have always and always will be the salvation of as many as possible and that the evil deeds those on the earth commit against Him and His people will be ultimately used to bring even more into His kingdom. Those of us who remain must understand this and remain faithful to the end for the sake of those he wishes to save.

### **THE VISION OF THE SIXTH SEAL**

6:12-17, 12: I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth *made* of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; 13: and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig

tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. 14: The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. 15: Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; 16: and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; 17: for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

12-14: This is momentous. The answer to the cry of the martyrs in 6:10 is beginning to appear. John is witnessing the beginning of the prophetic event spoken of by many Old Testament prophets and by Jesus Himself – The Great Day of the Lord...The Day of God's wrath upon the earth in judgment.<sup>136</sup>

The signs in the cosmos and on the earth are precipitated by a "great earthquake." this earthquake affects the entire planet. It is worldwide and brings the population to the brink realizing that the earth itself is disintegrating. Then the skies and the heavenly bodies are effected as well.

In verse 12 John sees events directly from the themes of the prophets Joel (2:1, 10, 30-31, 3:14-15); Isaiah (13:9-10); Ezekiel (32:7) and Jesus who quotes this as well in Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:24-25; and in Luke 21:25-27, He is noted as saying, "There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN A CLOUD with power and great glory."

In each case, these events are seen as coming after the "great tribulation" and they are followed by the appearing of Christ in the clouds in "power and great glory" and sweeping His own into His keeping before His wrath is unleashed upon the earth. There is no mention of a "coming" prior to the great tribulation period.

13-14: John sees events spoken of by Isaiah (34:4) "And all the host of heaven will wear away, And the sky will be rolled up like a scroll; All their hosts will also wither away As a leaf withers from the vine, Or as *one* withers from the fig tree..." as well, as those suggested in the words of Jeremiah and Nahum,

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<sup>136</sup> A full explanation of this is found in Excursus one, pages 151-163.

Jeremiah 4:23-24, 23: "I looked on the earth, and behold, *it was* formless and void; And to the heavens, and they had no light. 24: I looked on the mountains, and behold, they were quaking, And all the hills moved to and fro."

Nahum 1:5-6, 5: "Mountains quake because of Him And the hills dissolve; Indeed the earth is upheaved by His presence, The world and all the inhabitants in it. 6: Who can stand before His indignation? Who can endure the burning of His anger? His wrath is poured out like fire And the rocks are broken up by Him."

The fulfillment of many prophecies is about to come to pass in John's vision. But here, in real time, they have not all yet come to pass and we await the day.

15-17: John hears and sees the responses of men. It fulfills passages like Isaiah 2:19, "*Men* will go into caves of the rocks And into holes of the ground Before the terror of the LORD And the splendor of His majesty, When He arises to make the earth tremble." And Hosea 10:8b says, "Then they will say to the mountains, "Cover us!" And to the hills, "Fall on us!"

But all the caves, manmade bomb shelters, underground defense structures have no security against the coming "great day of the wrath" of God and the Lamb. The term is not an accident but refers to the many prophecies of old.

# **THE BOOK OF REVELATION**

## **Chapter Seven**

### Introduction

It is fascinating to discover the styles and artistic excellence of the writers of Scripture. The Old Testament is filled with imagery and different literary forms that number over a hundred. One of the most interesting styles is found in the New Testament as well. It is the telling of a story and, while doing so, bringing the hearer or the reader to the brink of the conclusion or solution of the mystery and then interjecting more information or an interlude so as to delay the conclusion and keep the suspense at its height.

Jesus did this frequently with His parables forcing His hearers to meditate on the meaning and intended subject of what He had said. Often His disciples simply had to ask Him directly what he meant and to whom His parable referred. Then, in the Olivet Discourse, (using Matthew 24) Jesus begins to explain to His disciples the events that will occur before His return in glory as well as cautioning them about false signs and prophets.

He does this with a series of cycles, each one adding something to the whole before the final conclusion is reached. For example, there is a section from Matthew 24:3-14 where Jesus gives a brief outline of coming events and then says to His disciples in 14, "...then the end will come."

Then he goes back into the events and adds the "abomination of desolation and the great tribulation concluding at verse 27-28 with, "...so will the coming of the Son of Man be." Then he does the same thing again in verses 29-31 speaking of the heavenly signs concluding with the gathering of His elect. Then he adds then illustration of the fig tree in verses 32-33, noting, "...you know that summer is near." Then He adds a new perspective in verses 34-42 again drawing a near conclusion. But then in 43-44 He adds the element of surprise and the unexpected hour of His return. He then concludes with an admonition about those who think His coming is long delayed and warns them not to engage in evil and cruel conduct.

So though He speaks in response to the question of His disciples, He never quite finishes the answer at all. When he is done, all they know is when He is not coming, and what to beware of during the interim.

Such is the style of Revelation also. And here in chapter seven, we have an interruption in the breaking of the seals. Most interpreters note the chapter as the beginning of an interlude. We are brought to the threshold of the great day of the wrath of God and the Lamb with the statement and question, "for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" But then, as we expect the next seal to be opened, we are presented with a new vision and an answer to the question.

Those whom God seals will be safely preserved from the outpouring of the divine wrath. They may suffer martyrdom (and this will be detailed later) but never the wrath of God upon the earth. This interlude contains a vision of two multitudes the nature of which we will examine.

There are those who have interpreted the 144,000 in rather strange ways and are adamant about their interpretation. Apparently the Jehovah's Witnesses feel these are the faithful "elect" to be resurrected and reside forever with God as spirit beings. Others are so insistent on their idea that it begs the question, "Why?" The answer is usually found in the need to manipulate this vision to support their preconceived ideas about the end times. Frankly, the vision does not leave us with a clear and exact understanding of its intent, so we will do the best we can when we get there. Often the simplest answer is the best one.

#### THE SEALING OF THE 144,000

7:1-8, 1: "After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. 2: And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, 3: saying, 'Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.' 4: And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: 5: from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand *were* sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand,

6: from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, 7: from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, 8: from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand *were* sealed."<sup>137</sup>

1: North, East, South and West comprise the entire world in the phrase "the four corners of the earth."<sup>138</sup> The "four winds of the earth" are images of massive planetary destruction that is now being delayed until the upcoming sealing takes place. These could be symbolic of earthly forces. (See: 9:13-16) The four angels mentioned have been given the authority to unleash these winds (verse 2). They are forbidden to let them go by another angel from the east. These winds may have been released in one of two or three possible passages in the book: 9:1-4; 9:13-16, or less likely, 8:7-13.

The winds are held back so as not to harm anything on the earth, sea or any tree. The indication is that such devastation is coming that first it must be revealed that there will be a protection for those who are God's. This sealing protects those who are God's from any wrath he will inflict upon the earth, but not necessarily from the wrath of evil earthly powers upon them.

2: Another angel appears from the east with the seal of the "living God" crying out with a loud voice to the four angels holding back the winds, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads." But in the last phrase of verse 2 the four angels are seen as holding back winds that would only harm the "earth and the sea."

Neither the seal nor the sealing process is described for us, only the content of the seal in 14:1. There it speaks of the 144,000 as "having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads. Generally, a seal could be a signet ring or a stamp and its mark represents that which belongs to God and the Lamb alone. We see this emphasis in II Timothy 2:19, "Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and, 'Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness.'

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<sup>137</sup> A thorough examination of the various interpretations of these 144,000 may be found in David Aune's commentary on Revelation, "Word Biblical Commentary", Thomas Nelson, publisher, 1998, volume 52, pages 429-450. None of the interpretations is fully satisfying, even the one presented by Aune.

<sup>138</sup> See also: Ezekiel 7:2; 37:9; Daniel 7:2; Jeremiah 49:36; Matthew 24:31; Revelation 20:8

And in Ephesians 1:13-14 Paul writes, "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation--having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory.

Also in Ephesians 4:30 he notes, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."

This sealing is a spiritual reality, not a physical one. The sealing indicated to whom the item belonged. No one was to open the seal who did not have the proper authority. In this case, this seal marked those who were God's and no one else could ever take possession of them. The seal also differentiated those who are God's as opposed to those who were another's. In 14:1 they are pictured with both the name of the Lamb and of God on their foreheads.

Apparently, much as in the Passover, destruction and death would know whom to avoid. In Revelation 9:4 we read of the "locust plague" that, "They were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads."

The "...earth or the sea or the trees" is an odd phrase as one would think the "trees" would be included in the things on the earth, as perhaps is intended by the last phrase of verse 2. It is difficult to ascertain if the term "trees" is symbolic of anything else than the obvious. In Judges 9, Jotham uses the metaphor of "trees" as referring to the elders of Shechem and in other places this metaphor is used of leaders in Israel, mostly that they should repent.

In general, trees are almost always mentioned separately from every other vegetation perhaps because they tower over the earth and are majestic and highly valued more than any other vegetation. Perhaps this is why trees are often used of the leaders of the nation. They reign above other forms of life and provide so much to man and beat in the way of shelter and resources to sustain human life.

"Sealing" is not some physical mark as is often misunderstood. In the case of a "seal" on the forehead, this would first bring to mind the phylactery the male Jews wore on their forehead, especially during Passover. In Exodus 13: 6-9 God says,

13:6-9, 6: "For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the LORD. 7: "Unleavened bread shall be eaten throughout the seven days; and nothing leavened shall be seen among you, nor shall any leaven be seen among you in all your borders. 8: "You shall tell your son on that day, saying, 'It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.' 9: "And it shall serve as a sign to you on your hand, and as a reminder on your forehead, that the law of the LORD may be in your mouth; for with a powerful hand the LORD brought you out of Egypt.

And in Exodus 13:16 we read,

"So it shall serve as a sign on your hand and as phylacteries on your forehead, for with a powerful hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt."

Further, Deuteronomy 6:4-9 notes,

4: "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! 5: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6: "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. 7: "You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. 8: "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. 9: "You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

In Revelation, the seal is a recognition of what is in the heart and mind of the person God counts as His own, and is symbolic of their faith in Him and Him alone. The hand (in this case the left hand) represents the heart, and the forehead the mind. In Isaiah 44:5, we read a poignant verse describing the future prosperity and joy God will bring to His people, "This one will say, 'I am the LORD'S'; And that one will call on the name of Jacob; And another will write *on* his hand, 'Belonging to the LORD,' And will name Israel's name with honor." God's people are seen as "sealed" while those of the "antichrist" are "marked". Verses about this "mark" in Revelation are: 13:16-17; 14:9, 11; 16:2; 17:5; 19:20; and 20:4.

The sealing we read of next follows 6:9-17, the breaking of the fifth and sixth seals and the vision of the faithful slain and the statement that that, "...they should rest for a little while longer, until *the number of* their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also. Then we

have the vision of the threshold of the end.

In this context, could these 144,000 and/or the slain martyrs of chapter 7 be these of whom was spoken about in 6:9-11? We will have to look at this possibility. And, they are mentioned twice more in the book, in 14:1 and 14:3. Perhaps this will aid in our understanding.

4-8: Sealed were, "...144,000 from every tribe of the sons of Israel." There we have noted 12,000 from each of twelve tribes. However, the tribes are not all represented and the normal order is askew. Judah is placed before Reuben and Dan is not mentioned at all. Then the half tribe of Manasseh is mentioned but not Ephraim. Yet Joseph, their father, is included.

The traditional order of the tribes is:

Reuben  
Simeon  
Levi  
Judah  
Issachar  
Zebulun  
Dan  
Naphtali  
Gad  
Asher  
Joseph  
Benjamin

Revelation has them as:

Judah  
Reuben  
Gad  
Asher  
Naphtali  
Manasseh  
Simeon  
Levi  
Issachar  
Zebulun  
Joseph  
Benjamin

The list of Revelation 7 leaves us a lot of "Why" questions. Why is Judah listed first? Why is Dan excluded? Why is Manasseh included and Ephraim excluded? They were both sons of Joseph. And of course, what does it all mean?

Speculation has run rampant and this is evidence of a lack of clarity and intent in the text itself for those of us who read it in the present.

Let's look at the key elements:

I. Chapter 14:4 tells us that, "These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb." This would correspond with several thoughts from the scriptures including the point that Jesus and Paul made that their first target in

the preaching of the kingdom of God was the "House of Israel."<sup>139</sup> Then, in Acts chapter 2, over 3000 Jews were saved on one day of first fruits, the Day of Pentecost.

This is the simplest explanation. The 144,000 represents the full complement of Jews as well as the recognition the Jews who came to believe in Christ were the "first fruits" of those he came to "purchase."

II. In 14:1, they stand on Mt. Zion with the "Lamb." There are 12,000 sealed from each of these tribes. There is no question the number twelve thousand plays on the twelve tribes of Israel. We have seen the number 12 several times now. It generally indicates a divinely appointed governing entity, often the initiation of this entity or the source from where the final entity will originate. In 14:1 this is evident that those who rule with Christ are represented by the 144,000.

In addition, we see a combination of two plus ten in Hebrew or three times four in numerology. Each number has its own significance. The number 1,000 brings to the Hebrew mind contentment, security, happiness, peace, perfection, fullness, etc., perhaps because of the Ten Commandments, or the Law which presents the holiness and righteousness of God.

If one has a thousand of anything, the idea is that he has all that he will ever need to be content and secure. And the number 1,000 is often more symbolic than real, much as the number 40 and its combinations indicates the idea of, "as long as it takes to complete a matter."

Three is a number associated with holiness, four that of creation, two is associated with separation and ten with law and rule. So (two plus ten) times a thousand could symbolize a separated number of people designated by God as victors that are holy to God. Three times four times a thousand could represent a holy multitude destined for rule, in peace and contentment. Either way, the number twelve reflects the divine appointment by God of those who are called to rule or have a relationship with Him and the thousand reflects a complete or full number of these.

II. The odd order and inclusion/exclusion of tribes in the list. This is more challenging and we are left to speculate as best we can. Judah being listed first may reflect that the tribe became the largest, with the largest land mass and held

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<sup>139</sup> See: Jeremiah 50:6-7; Ezekiel 34; Matthew 10:5-6; Acts 3:26, 13:46; Romans 15:8; James 1:18.

the capital of Jerusalem in its territory with the temple and so on. Added to that is the fulfillment of the promise to Judah that from this tribe would spring the royalty of Israel and the Messiah (the Lamb of God). Other than these, there is no other clear reason why the tribe of Judah would be listed first. (But see comments below) This suggests to us that the list is the way it is for reasons other than birth order. Dan may well be excluded due to their being a source of idolatry in Israel. At the very beginning of their habitation in the north we read in Judges 18:29-31,

29: They called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father who was born in Israel; however, the name of the city formerly was Laish.

30: The sons of Dan set up for themselves the graven image; and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the captivity of the land. 31: So they set up for themselves Micah's graven image which he had made, all the time that the house of God was at Shiloh.

And in Genesis 49:17, Israel's blessing of his sons we read that he said, "Dan shall be a serpent in the way, A horned snake in the path, That bites the horse's heels, So that his rider falls backward." A prophecy of one that causes another to fall due to evil in the path.<sup>140</sup>

The inclusion of Manasseh and exclusion of Ephraim is rather interesting. Ephraim was the younger son of Joseph but became more prominent than Manasseh.<sup>141</sup> From this tribe came Joshua and Samuel among other great Old Testament figures. Yet he (the tribe) is not in the list of the 144,000. His exclusion is difficult to figure as Manasseh had as many problems as did Ephraim. And one could understand both half tribes being excluded because Joseph is included. Yet we have both Joseph and Manasseh in the list.

The only possible hints we have are, 1. The person who created the idols in Dan came from Ephraim (Judges 17-18). 2. The Psalmists report serious problems with Ephraim. Psalm 78 is an invective against Ephraim particularly. In 78:9-11, 56-58 and 67-68 we read,

9: "The sons of Ephraim were archers equipped with bows, *Yet* they turned back in the day of battle. 10: They did not keep the covenant of God And

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<sup>140</sup> Jeremiah 8:15-17 seems to reflect this theme.

<sup>141</sup> See Genesis 48:1-20 for the reverse blessing.

refused to walk in His law; 11: They forgot His deeds And His miracles that He had shown them."

56: "Yet they tempted and rebelled against the Most High God And did not keep His testimonies, 57: But turned back and acted treacherously like their fathers; They turned aside like a treacherous bow. 58: For they provoked Him with their high places And aroused His jealousy with their graven images."

67: He (the Lord) also rejected the tent of Joseph, And did not choose the tribe of Ephraim, 68: But chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which He loved.

Though we have no direct account of this betrayal and cowardice in scripture, it might refer to the account given in Judges 20, I Samuel 4 or in I Chronicles 7:20-22.

Finally, one could argue that because Joseph is in the list both Manasseh and Ephraim are included. But if that is assumed, then Manasseh is included twice. Very odd situation without a clear explanation.

III. The purpose of the sealing. This is not a list referring to those receiving salvation but more likely of those to be protected from massive destruction or the Day of God's wrath. In 9:3-4 we read, 3: "Then out of the smoke came locusts upon the earth, and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power. 4: They were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads." However, they still seem subject to the persecution and wrath of the world's evil powers. Those to reign with Christ will not be harmed or damaged by any earthly or demonic force or subject to the pain of God's wrath upon the wicked at Christ's appearing.

IV. Who they represent. The main options are:

1. Representative of the first fruits of the House of Israel secured in the redemptive plan of God for salvation and rule with Christ as promised on the scriptures.
2. The full and complete company in the end time of all those that have been and are of true faith from the descendants of Abraham according to the promise and not of the flesh.

3. The full and complete company in the end time of all those that have been and are of true faith from both Israel and Gentile roots. In other words, the true church of God understood as the true Israel of God. (See footnote 138)

3. The representation of Jews from the tribes of Israel who, through the ages, are sealed as God's own, and saved and protected by God.

4. The Dispensational view that these are a saved Jewish remnant who, after the church has been raptured, become witnesses during the great tribulation winning more many Gentiles to Christ and then they all are subsequently martyred, the Jews by a broken treaty with Israel by the Antichrist and the Gentiles as the second multitude presented in chapter 7.

This fourth option is derailed because: A. The company sealed are already called "bond-servants" in verse 3 and are already saved. B. It is not just Jews that are martyred but those of the entire earth who do not worship the image of the Beast (13:15)

None of the other views is totally satisfying, yet all have elements of possibility.<sup>142</sup> View number two has many adherents and the claim is made that the number 144,000 is possibly 12 X 12 X 1000. Each 12 represents the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles. There is some support for this in Revelation 21 that envisions the "heavenly Jerusalem." Each gate of the twelve gates of the city has one of the names of the twelve tribes written on it and each of the twelve foundation stones of the wall had one of the names of the twelve apostles on it.

It seems clear that in this interlude we have the 144,000 sealed (protected or sheltered) from the Day of God's wrath and then a great multitude from all peoples martyred during the "great tribulation."

This would lead us to believe that there will be a time of great persecution and martyrdom of the church, possibly both Jew and Gentile believers as well as a time

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<sup>142</sup> Paul's comments about the true Israel of God are numerous and set this entity apart from any distinction that would compartmentalize either Israel or the "church" into Jewish or Gentile. This causes some interpretive challenges regarding prophecies about "Israel" causing one to wonder to which "Israel" the prophecy could be referring. See: Romans 2:28; 4:16; 9:6-8; Chapters 10-11 (esp. 11:25-26); Galatians 3:7-29; 6:16; Ephesians 2:11-22; Philippians 3:3.

when God pours out His wrath upon the wicked earth but those who remain alive of His own are protected and sheltered much as in the Passover account.

The problem with this is how the timing of The Day of God's Wrath corresponds with the return of Christ in triumphant power and glory gathering His saints to Himself. If this is just after or subsequent to the coming of Christ in glory, then there would be no believers remaining to be sheltered from their wrath unless the sealing also represents His gathering them to Himself – which is unlikely.

However, if the Day of God's wrath is initiated and then Christ comes in the midst of it or afterward, then we have a possible conflict with Jesus' telling of the sequence of events at the time of His coming in the Olivet Discourse.<sup>143</sup> The answer may be that He includes the Day of Wrath in the quotation from Joel about the heavenly signs that precede these final events. Luke seems to add more details, but there is no clear cut solution to the mystery.

But in Revelation, Christ's actual appearing in glory does not take place until after both the great tribulation and the Day of God's Wrath, but His saints are protected from it. The best picture of these things is the Passover, especially since there is a close correspondence with the plagues on Egypt and what is yet to be seen in Revelation.

For me, as I include the entire context of the book and the prophetic portraits, I would surmise that the 144,000 are first, representative of the first fruits of those who believe in Christ or the faithful from all time to the cross and to the end time, and second, those of God's people, both Jew and Gentile who are saved by faith and are faithful, God's true Israel, both those He calls His bride and His children who remain alive on the earth when all these things begin to take place. 9:1-4 seems to support this conclusion.

In any case, the two groups are pictured before the seventh seal is opened. And, regardless of the actual timing, the real message is that those who are God's can take hope whether they face martyrdom or live through the great woes of the end times.

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<sup>143</sup> Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21.

## THE GREAT MULTITUDE

Rev 7:9-12, 9: After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and *all* tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches *were* in their hands; . 10: and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." 11: And all the angels were standing around the throne and *around* the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12: saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, *be* to our God forever and ever. Amen."

9: Both the view that this multitude includes the 144,000 and that it does not are proposed. But this new scene itself is completely separate from the vision of the sealing of the 144,000. In that scene, the 144,000 are sealed as God's and for protection against the destruction pictured by the winds and the upcoming vision of destructive locusts in 9:4. Here, the multitude is seen as standing before the throne in the heavenly vision already martyred and dressed in the white robes indicating their martyrdom. So either view is possible as each vision is of an entirely different setting.

The multitude is innumerable. This is reminiscent of the promises of God to Abraham regarding his descendants, "I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered." (Genesis 13:16) The illustrations of the stars of the sky and sand of the seashore are also used.<sup>144</sup>

The palm branches have a double significance. First, any Jew would think immediately of the Feast of Tabernacles or Succoth. Celebrated five days after the Day of Atonement, it lasted seven days and was a time of thanksgiving for God's deliverance and provision during the Exodus. The autumn harvest was gathered, and then small booths were built for the native born Israelite males to reside in during the feast. Palm branches were part of special foliage bundled together and waved before the Lord in remembrance, celebration and thanksgiving. The details are noted in Leviticus 23:39-44. So the first thought is that of thanksgiving and remembrance of God's deliverance.

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<sup>144</sup> Genesis 15:5; 22:17.

Second is that the waving or laying down of palm branches was symbolic of salvation or victory. We see this in the New Testament celebration of Christ's entrance into Jerusalem on a donkey. Palm Sunday is celebrated in the church each year.

10-12: Both ideas are summarized in the idea of deliverance and we see that presented in the phrase, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." That is Salvation belongs to and is the work of God and the Lamb. Verses 11-12 are very similar to 5:11-14 except that the adulation includes "thanksgiving" and "power." The entire litany speaks of God's mercy, on the one hand, in providing salvation, and His eternal sovereignty and might on the other."

9-13, 13: Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?" 14: I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15: "For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. 16: "They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; 17: for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes."

13: The flow is interrupted by a question from one of the elders to John. "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?" The question must be important as it seems there is a concerted attempt to focus on this multitude and not misunderstand this vision and who this countless multitude is.

14: I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

Though the suffering of God's people is a constant reality, these John sees are specific to a time of intense wrath against God's people initiated by demonic forces yet to be described. We will discuss this more fully when we arrive there. However, we do not have a full description of the great tribulation so far in the book. But we will see it in due time. These martyrs are identified in as those, "who

come out of the great tribulation,...". The images here and there are not of those having escaped it but of those who have been slaughtered during it.

The purpose is that these have remained steadfast in their faith to the end and have not wavered in their trust in God and the Lamb. They are an example to be emulated. The phrase "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" demonstrates this fact. Rather than have been given white robes, these have their own "robes" and rather than trust in their own righteousness, they have trusted in Christ's alone.

15-17: In these three verses, set in poetic form in the Greek with poignant imagery, we see a glimpse or preview of Revelation 21:3-4, and 23. The faithfulness, to the end of their lives, of this great multitude qualifies them for basking in the eternal presence of God. Though the phrase "day and night" is used, it is simply a metaphor for "eternal". There is no day or night either in the heavenly realm (21:3).<sup>145</sup>

As far as the "temple" being spoken of here, first it supports the view that John's vision takes place in an expanded and heavenly reality of which the earthly is just a copy or shadow as explained in Hebrews 8:5 and 9:24.<sup>146</sup> Second, Revelation 21 makes it clear that the heavenly Jerusalem coming down to earth, the restoration of paradise, will have no temple because, "I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp *is* the Lamb." (21:22-23) The entire poem is imagery to convey the security and blessed state of those who remain faithful to the Lord.

God will "tent" them, i.e. they will be sheltered. There will be no more hunger or thirst and they will be unscathed by sun or heat as neither will exist for them anymore. This latter note may reflect 16:5-9, the fourth bowl of God's wrath poured out by the angel. In 21:23, we read, "And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp *is* the Lamb."

In 21:3 we read, "And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them..."

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<sup>145</sup> See comment on 8b, page 146.

<sup>146</sup> See commentary on 3:12a, page 105

The Lamb is their "shepherd" and will guide them to the "springs of the water of life" brings to mind Psalm 23:1-2, " The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters."

In 21:6 we read, "I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost."

Then, "... God will wipe every tear from their eyes." Again reminiscent of 21:4, "...and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

This imagery is not unique. Isaiah 25:6-9 prophesies this and other familiar images as well,

6: The LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; A banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, *And* refined, aged wine. 7: And on this mountain He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples, Even the veil which is stretched over all nations. 8: He will swallow up death for all time, And the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces, And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth; For the LORD has spoken. 9: And it will be said in that day, "Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation."

So John, and we through his eyes, see a glimpse of the final provision for the faithful long envisioned by prophets of old. We also notice the tenderness and love of God for those who have overcome and persevered to the end even at the cost of their own lives or those of their loved ones.

But we will also see what being "faithful" could entail. This view ahead also serves to let us know that we do not necessarily have a sequential order to events as we saw when looking at Matthew 24. We will need to be aware of this as we will find presentations and then visions that take place both before and after the period revealed in the book.

# THE BOOK OF REVELATION

VOLUME TWO

A Bible Student's Commentary

By

Bob Stewart

In concert with dedicated Bible students  
choosing to be a part of this work  
and to whom it is dedicated  
September, 2012

This study, as in all our work, is subject to revision as more is learned

# **THE BOOK OF REVELATION**

## **Chapter Eight**

### Introduction

We have seen in the opening of the first six seals the transpiring of events that might appear to signify the end, but in actuality, the end events are postponed until more visions are revealed. The seventh seal is opened, and included in it are the seven trumpet plagues with the seventh plague comprised of the seven bowls of God's wrath.

The first six seals corresponded with Christ's warnings in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 about what events would occur prior to His return in glory. They were spoken so His followers would not be confused or misled as to the timing of His return and the events leading up to that time. In doing so He did not reveal when He would return, but noted quite often when he would not return.

Then with the fifth and sixth seal we discovered a great martyrdom of the saints and then the heavenly signs as prophesied by the prophets Joel (2:1, 10, 30-31, 3:14-15); Isaiah (13:9-10) and Ezekiel (32:7) that would indicate the end of the age.

But then the fulfillment or continuation of this is halted and we have in chapter seven an interlude where two multitudes; the 144,000 who are "sealed" as God's own people and for protection against the destruction pictured by the winds and the upcoming vision of destructive locusts in 9:4, and the "great multitude" who, having been martyred, now rest in the presence of God perhaps the same as those of 6:9-10.

But now we have an insertion of events occurring before the end of the age and Christ's return in victory revealed by the opening of the seventh seal. Chronologically, this would seem to fit in between the events of the fifth and sixth seal. Again, there is no need to press an apocalyptic presentation into a strict chronological order. The message is one that aims at the spiritual life of the reader not the historical interest. In fact, in apocalyptic literature there is little if any "history" at all, and that is often the intent of the literature so that the reader will be

impacted by God's message and not stuck in historical or doctrinal analysis. the heart, mind and spirit is the target, not the intellect alone.

So to stop and reinsert themes in the midst of what seems to be a completed vision is not unusual anymore than it is unusual for Jesus to do the same in the Olivet Discourse. While explaining the events leading to the time of His coming, He brings the narrative to that point several times going back to add more information again bringing the narrative to the time of His return until He completes His discourse. So, in Revelation, as we go along, we see different visions of the end at several places in the narrative. But then the actual end is postponed due to an interlude or additional vision. For example, at the conclusion of the sixth seal, the end is imminent and begins to take place. But it is interrupted by the vision of the sealing of the 144,000 and that of the great multitude. Then at the end of the sixth and after the seventh trumpet is sounded, the reign of the Lord is announced, and so on.

We are struck also by the question as we read, "Is this a hint that the seven trumpet plagues are in some way a recapitulation of the events of the six seals? Not quite, but there are similarities and differences. For example, the six seals are general events occurring leading to the end times without the specific mention of them be a judgment, while the seven trumpet plagues (and the seven bowls of God's wrath - the contents of the seventh seal) initiate events of the end itself and are seen as poured out from heaven.

Poignantly, the seven trumpet plagues and the subsequent narrative is quite reminiscent of the encounter of Moses and Aaron with Pharaoh in Egypt. In fact, the parallels with the entire story, including the Passover and escape from Egypt cannot be disregarded. They will be pointed out as we continue.

There are, during the trumpet plagues, the notation of the destruction of a "third" of various earthly and heavenly entities. This notation does not have to be taken literally if we consider the number three as the divine number here indicating divine judgment not natural disaster. Remember this is apocalyptic literature and we must understand that not all is to be understood literally. Especially numerology.

Though appearing as "natural disasters" from an earthly point of view, the unusual nature of the disaster is designed to point to the divine origin and bring mankind to a recognition of what is actually happening and thus to repentance. But there is

also a limitation on the range of the destruction perhaps to protect those who have not turned their hearts and faith to the powers of evil now controlling much of the world. Finally, we will see that repentance is negligible if not non-existent. Like Pharaoh, men's hearts are hardened rather than softened at the end.<sup>147</sup>

After the breaking of the seventh seal, the scroll is no longer mentioned or seen in the narrative leading us to conclude that the contents of the seventh seal is the remainder of the book.

### **VISION OF THE SEVENTH SEAL** **THE PRELUDE TO THE SEVEN TRUMPET PLAGUES**

8:1-5:

1: When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. 2: And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. 3: Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. 4: And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand. 5: Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

1: When the Lamb breaks the seventh seal, there is a dramatic pause in heaven. Prior to this there were loud sounds including thunder, lightning, voices, praises and chants from the twenty-four elders, the four living creatures, and the myriads of angels. Now all is silent. No sound, no movement.

Many have speculated what this might mean, but the simplest understanding is that this underscores the seriousness of the momentous events to follow, and set the tone as solemn and grave. The time of the end has come! The silence is the calm before the storm, the eye of the hurricane so to speak. The Psalmist speaks like this in Psalm 62:1-2,

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<sup>147</sup> The hardening of Pharaoh's heart was not a direct act of God in Pharaoh's life, but Pharaoh's response in the encounter with God through the presence of Aaron and Moses and their bringing of the plagues upon Egypt. I like the illustration of the Sun. The same sun that melts butter hardens concrete. God's presence revealed the nature of Pharaoh's heart and it hardened. Such it is with men everywhere.

1: My soul *waits* in silence for God only; From Him is my salvation. 2: He only is my rock and my salvation, My stronghold; I shall not be greatly shaken.

The half hour period is just long enough to realize the impact of what is to come but seems to have no other significance other than a time of contemplation. This is the only place in the Bible where this phrase is used.

2: These seven angels enter the vision but have not been mentioned before. Some speculate that they are to be understood as the "seven spirits before God" noted in 1:4, 3:1; 4:5 and 5:6. But this seem unlikely. These seven angels [and perhaps a second set of seven angels (15:1ff)] are also mentioned in 8:6; 15:1; 15:6-8; 16:1; 17:1 and 21:9 and are consistently linked with the destructive forces God has assigned to them.

Seven trumpets are given to them, by whom we do not know. The only other place seven trumpets are sounded is in Joshua 6 where with the sound of the trumpets on the seventh day and a mighty shout, the walls of Jericho came tumbling down.<sup>148</sup> Trumpets are regularly associated with battle but also with the Day of the Lord and the Lord's coming in judgment. Here is no exception.

There are those who interpret the entire series events to follow as symbolic of the destruction and fall of the Roman empire with the various plagues being hoards of armies such as the Goths, Vandals or Huns invading empire and the earth, sea and so on being symbolic of the empire under their attack. However, this view is highly contrived and manipulated as much as is the view that the seven letters describe the church of seven different ages or dispensations.

3-5: This eighth angel performs a symbolic act in what he does. The vision recalls 5:8 where we read, "When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints." Here, the angel steps forward holding a golden censer<sup>149</sup> filled with burning coals and receives much incense to add to the prayers of the saints. The smoke of the incense blends with the prayers of the saints and rises to God. Now, the only statement we have of prayers of the saints seems to be in 6:9-10 which reads, 9: "When the Lamb broke

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<sup>148</sup> See Joshua 6:1-21

<sup>149</sup> Censer: A shallow metal bowl or pan in which burning coals are placed and incense burned in it.

the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; 10: and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

The answer seems to come from this angel as he fills his censer with fiery coals from the altar<sup>150</sup> and flings the entire fiery contents to the earth. This is symbolic of the judgments to come upon the wicked of the earth, and anticipates what is about to occur. We have already glimpsed at the fact that God's faithful ones will not be impacted by the upcoming judgment of plagues upon the wicked and we will see more of this truth as we progress. One of the key patterns for understanding how God judges the wicked on the earth while His people are still there is found in the Passover story. This is but one of several consistent models we will review, but the most important.

"...and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake." Reminiscent of the encounter Israel had at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16-19)<sup>151</sup>

8:6-13:

6: And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them. 7: The first sounded, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. 8: The second angel sounded, and *something* like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea; and a third of the sea became blood, 9: and a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life, died; and a third of the ships were destroyed. 10: The third angel sounded, and a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on

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<sup>150</sup> The altar mentioned here is probably the altar of incense but could be the altar of sacrifice (the brazen altar) already introduced and explained in the commentary on the breaking of the fifth seal. See that commentary at pages 180-182.

<sup>151</sup> "So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who *were* in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai *was* all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder."

a third of the rivers and on the springs of waters. 11: The name of the star is called Wormwood; and a third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the waters, because they were made bitter. 12: The fourth angel sounded, and a third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were struck, so that a third of them would be darkened and the day would not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way. 13: Then I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in mid-heaven, saying with a loud voice, "Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!"

6: Each angel, when it should come to his turn, might sound without delay.

### **THE FIRST ANGELIC TRUMPET PLAGUE**

7: "The first sounded, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up." At the breaking of the sixth seal in 6:12-17, we read,

12: "I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth *made* of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; 13: and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. 14: The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. 15: Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; 16: and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; 17: for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

The interesting thing is after that we then have an interlude and then this vision of the seven angels and the trumpet plagues. Jesus does not yet come, but the text prefaces His coming with the terror of the heavenly signs and impending judgment. In the Olivet Discourse Jesus says,

"But immediately after the tribulation of those days **THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL** from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be

shaken. "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory."  
Matthew 24:29-30

Both Rev. 6:12-15 and Matthew 24:29-30 correspond to each other, but now, here in 8:7ff. we have an expanded picture of the effect of the judgment on the earth now revealed to John. In other words, the sixth seal brought us to the brink of the end and now, before Christ finally returns, a short but terrible time is poured out upon the earth as represented by these seven angelic trumpet plagues.

These plagues express the final wrath of a holy God upon those who have chosen to give their allegiance to the powers of evil and the "Antichrist" (to be described later) rather than to God and His messianic Lamb, Jesus. Those of God's faithful are sealed and sheltered from this time of outpouring on those who "have not the seal of God upon their foreheads" but the "mark of the Beast." (See: 16:2) The seventh trumpet releases three woes and the third woe is seven bowls of God's wrath, the final outpouring. This is noted in 15:1.

Every person who reads this book must declare himself either for Christ or for Antichrist, even now. The term "antichrist" was known in the first century (although more as a movement<sup>152</sup> – I John 2:18; 2:22; 4:3 and II John 1:7 and not necessarily as the individual we associate in the end time by this title) and this decision must be made by all peoples of all ages since. Yet this end time judgment is not simply to punish. It is also a clarion call to repentance as 9:20 and 16:10 suggest. The hardness of man's heart will hopefully be broken, if not by truth mercy and grace, then by the plagues of the trumpets and bowls.

As in the Egyptian experience, plagues are poured out upon Pharaoh's kingdom with the intent to move Pharaoh to release God's people in bondage. Though in differing order and content, there is a similarity that is striking. Here, the hail and fire (possibly a massive lightning storm), mixed with blood (possibly a red rain-not unknown in history<sup>153</sup>) causes the burning of a third of the world's vegetation. Exodus 9:23-25 is similar,

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<sup>152</sup> Principally those who introduced the Gnostic heresy into the churches.

<sup>153</sup> Sites on the internet searching "red rain" will verify several occurrences of this phenomenon in history, some relatively recently.

23: Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt. 24: So there was hail, and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very severe, such as had not been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. 25: The hail struck all that was in the field through all the land of Egypt, both man and beast; the hail also struck every plant of the field and shattered every tree of the field."

### **THE SECOND ANGELIC TRUMPET PLAGUE**

8-9: 8: "The second angel sounded, and *something* like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea; and a third of the sea became blood, 9: and a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life, died; and a third of the ships were destroyed." Here we have a similar occurrence in Egypt when the Nile River was struck by the rod of Aaron and the water turned to blood and everything in it died (Exodus 7:19-25). The Nile is fresh water, of course while the salt seas are what is affected here.

Some have conjectured that this could be a description of massive volcanic eruptions. Sinai was apparently a volcano and certainly could be a basis for this image. But even more so, the historic explosion of Mount Vesuvius in Italy around twenty years prior to John's vision may bring a reminder to his readers of the devastation of such an occurrence. The Bay of Naples was so affected by ash and debris that ships could not enter, anchor or dock. Fish, birds, livestock, and around 15,000 people died in the sudden eruption. Whatever this is in verse 8 causes enough wave action to destroy ships. But also interesting is the account in Ezekiel 5:1-2 where God told Ezekiel,

1: "As for you, son of man, take a sharp sword; take and use it *as* a barber's razor on your head and beard. Then take scales for weighing and divide the hair. 2: "One third you shall burn in the fire at the center of the city, when the days of the siege are completed. Then you shall take one third and strike *it* with the sword all around the city, and one third you shall scatter to the wind; and I will unsheathe a sword behind them.

This act was symbolic of the judgment God would bring on Jerusalem for its idolatry, ungodliness and corruption unless repentance took place.

## **THE THIRD ANGELIC TRUMPET PLAGUE**

10-11, 10: "The third angel sounded, and a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of waters. 11: The name of the star is called Wormwood; and a third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the waters, because they were made bitter."

Here we have a poisoning of fresh water. This "great star" could easily be a meteor that is sent to cause this poisoning. Again a similarity to the Egyptian plague. In Matthew 24, Jesus noted, "AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken." Revelation 6:12-13 repeats this theme.

The word "wormwood" occurs only in this verse in the New Testament. The Greek is "aps-in-thos" and its Greek root is unknown, but the Latin is well known and well may be derived from the Latin "absinthium." This plant is well known and has subspecies worldwide. It is related to the Daisy and sage family. In ancient times, a small amount of this very bitter plant would be used for external medicinal purposes only as ingesting even a small amount can cause headaches, stomach disorders, but is effective in treating intestinal worm infestations. And, it was used to flavor wine. It was known in the Old Testament with the Hebrew name "lah-nah" denoting an extremely bitter and possibly poisonous herb like Hemlock. In Jeremiah 9:15 and 23:15 God says to the prophet that due to the idolatry and following of false prophets by Israel He will, "...feed them wormwood And make them drink poisonous water..."

We also see the imagery of apocalyptic here when literally it would not be possible for a single meteor to "fall" upon a third of the fresh water rivers and springs. so the intent is the effect, not the physical description.

## **THE FOURTH ANGELIC TRUMPET PLAGUE**

12: The fourth angel sounded, and a third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were struck, so that a third of them would be darkened and the day would not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> See comment on the "third" element in the introduction to this chapter, page 201.

This is similar to the ninth plague in Egypt spoken of in Exodus 10:21-23,

21: "Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even a darkness which may be felt. 22: So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days. 23: They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the sons of Israel had light in their dwellings."

There have been historical accounts of this type of heavenly event where the Sun dimmed and the Moon looked red as a meteor shower took place. It shook observers, especially those familiar with these texts. This type of heavenly anomaly is spoken about by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse, the prophets and in Revelation.<sup>155</sup> The shelter of God's people will similarly be seen in Revelation.

### **THE FIFTH, SIXTH AND SEVENTH TRUMPET PLAGUE AND THE THREE WOES AND THE THIRD WOE BEING THE SEVEN BOWLS OF GOD'S WRATH**

13: Then I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in mid-heaven, saying with a loud voice, "Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!"

13: "Then" indicate a new scene unfolding as a part of or addition to the sequence of the present one – namely the fifth angel blowing his trumpet and the unfolding of a more complex set of scenes.

The "eagle" speaks and announces what is to occur. Three "woes" will be forthcoming with the blowing of the trumpets by angels five, six and seven. The word "woe" is the English transliteration of the Greek "oo-ah-ee" or "oo-ee." It means "alas" or an exclamation of grief as in "woe is me." It is flying in mid-heaven, or in the "meridian" (middle) of the sky so all on the earth can hear the proclamation.

The term "eagle" indicates a bird of prey, not necessarily an actual eagle itself as we envision it. The word for "eagle" here is translated as "vulture" in Matthew 24:28 and Luke 17:37. It is an unclean bird in the Old Testament according to the

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<sup>155</sup> See: Isaiah 13:10, 24:23; Jeremiah 4:23; Ezekiel 32:7-8; Joel 2:10, 2:31; Amos 8:9; Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:24; Luke 21:25; Acts 2:20.

Law because it eats carrion, and is grouped with the vulture, the hawk , the buzzard and so on.<sup>156</sup> Thus it is unlikely an eagle as we know it, since eagles are not primarily carrion eaters. And, around the globe, the designation "eagle" often applies to birds quite unlike we envision, and include the raptor or bird of prey as well. It is used in the Old Testament as a symbol for vengeance at times (Deuteronomy 28:49; Hosea 8:1; Habakkuk 1:8). Some commentators try to press the eagle image into a symbol for Rome because the eagle was its symbol. However, it is also the symbol for the United States and was for Nazi Germany as well. And again, not necessarily an eagle at all.

The "woes" are to fall upon those who "dwell on the earth", a phrase frequently used to designate those who are opposed to and hostile to God and His people. This does not necessitate the idea that God's faithful are now "raptured" and not present. We will see evidence to the contrary as we continue. However, we do know that they are spared these torments (note 9:4). In this regard we have the idea of a "mid-tribulation" rapture for those who think that the great tribulation and the day of God's wrath are one and the same. This idea is discounted by this author.

A final note. When reading Ezekiel 38-39, one gets the sense of the corresponding themes between Revelation and those chapters. Then in 40 ff. we have the measuring of the temple corresponding to Revelation 21. So there is much to see as we confirm both in the Old and New Testaments not only times of trouble for God's people but also the promise of restoration and peace.

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<sup>156</sup> A lengthy list of unclean birds may be found in Leviticus 11. Also, some late manuscripts including the Textus Receptus, have the Greek word for "angel" instead of "eagle". However the earlier manuscripts leave no doubt that it is "eagle". "Bird of prey" would be a more accurate translation.

# **THE BOOK OF REVELATION**

## **Chapter Nine**

### **The fifth angel sounds and the first woe comes on the earth.**

Introductory note: We come to the intensification of God's "pressure" on those who refuse to believe the truth and place their faith in Christ alone. It seems that when truth, grace, mercy and opportunity are given for evil men to repent (as in the gospel and in the seven letters to the seven churches) that God then finally gives back to men the dedication to evil they are immersed in. Perhaps this might change hearts and minds. Perhaps not. But when faced with something over which one has no control or escape, the fear one is driven to may cause repentance. We see this exemplified at the end of chapter 6 with the events of the sixth seal. Regardless, often it takes a coming to the end of oneself, to the bottom of life for one to finally call out to God in sorrow and beg for mercy and forgiveness and turn to Christ. This is unfortunate, but God is not willing that any should perish and the momentary affliction is not to be considered when measured to the eternal glory awaiting those who are His.

The apostle Paul also went to these depths before God could use him. His statement was simply, "...for when I am weak, then I am strong." His point was that at his weakest he must be totally dependent upon Christ for strength and that is when he is actually the strongest.

The Book of Revelation, though seen as a cosmic account of the transition between this age and the age to come, can also be seen as an individual or personal story. As it is read by individuals, the message can enter the heart and mind and, with the reader's willing, open and broken spirit, make an impact and motivate change.<sup>157</sup>

In the fifth trumpet plague we have a description of locust like creatures that bring five months of torment upon those who do not have the seal of God upon their foreheads. It is nearly impossible, all things considered to figure out the actual form this plague will take. Apocalyptic imagery must be carefully viewed. But it seems that those so afflicted end up suffering a torment that brings them to a place where they have no resource or hope within themselves as discussed above. they

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<sup>157</sup> This excellent observation was made by Carl Ulbrich, a member of the study group.

come to such a hopeless and depressed state that they wish to die rather than continue on. Such torment is not unknown. The spirit, mind and emotions are disintegrated and the physical body can barely respond. So this could be a spiritual/psychological torment that is designed to bring people to the place where they finally cry out to God.

Personally, I went through such a time. And though it was a horrible and frightening time in my life, it was used by God to bring me to the place He wanted me to be. Like those at the end of chapter six, I wanted to die. Now I look back thankfully at how the Lord used that time to benefit my life and service.

9:1-6:

9:1: Then the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him. 2: He opened the bottomless pit, and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit. 3: Then out of the smoke came locusts upon the earth, and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power. 4: They were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. 5: And they were not permitted to kill anyone, but to torment for five months; and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man. 6: And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death flees from them.

1: The sound of the trumpet of the fifth angel is also the first "woe"(9:12). This plague or event is lengthy and in more detail than previous plagues. The view is now of earth (8:13) and the sky. John reports on seeing a star that "had fallen" from heaven (or out of the sky) and we find it to be a bright shining angelic personage who had landed on the earth. John didn't see it fall but the idea is that he saw this bright image after it had alighted, a proper translation itself. (See:20:1)

The "key" is the symbol of authority. The "bottomless pit" is from the Greek words for "abyss" and "well" (as in water well) and this phrase only appears here in Revelation 9:1-2. Some add the idea of a "shaft" to the bottomless pit, but this is not in the original. The "abyss" is mentioned in Luke 8:31; Romans 10:7 (where Paul apparently quotes Deuteronomy 30:14 but replaces the word "sea" with the word "abyss"); Revelation 9:11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1 and 20:3.

The imagery of this "bottomless pit" conveys the idea of an eternal place or abode where demonic beings are imprisoned until released by God. It is seen as outside of heaven and is pictured as an earthly pit or shaft. Of course, this is imagery and symbolism as no such physical pit is necessary to convey the idea.

This concept is quite Jewish and, for example, the Psalmist of 71:20 says in a prayer to God, "You who have shown me many troubles and distresses Will revive me again, And will bring me up again from the depths of the earth." The Psalmist is revealing the place of his spiritual, psychological and emotional life.

The phrase "depths of the earth" uses for "depths" the Hebrew "tehom" and is translated in the LXX as "abyss." The word itself means a deep place either in the sea (most commonly used this way) or in the earth. Most often it brings to mind the depths of the sea, the most mysterious area to most civilizations even to this day. That may be why the term bottomless "pit" is used as the word "pit" relates to a well or cistern of water not necessarily an ocean. But in this instance, the opening is not as vast as the sea and seems more of a volcano like place and thus the frequent translation of "shaft."

Jude 1:6-7 has an image similar to this, "And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day, just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire."

This abyss is not Hell, nor place of the dead such as Sheol or Hades, nor the place of eternal punishment described as Gehenna or the Lake of fire. But it is a specifically named place where "Abaddon" or "Apollyon"(verse 12) rules these hoards (not the same as Satan); and from where the "beast of the earth" emerges (chapter 11:8 and 17:6); and where Satan is temporarily imprisoned for a thousand years (20:1-3).

Taking other references in Revelation into consideration, this "abyss" or "bottomless pit" seems to be placed within the sea depths, but not a part of the sea itself.

2. So with the key (authority) given to him, the angel opened up the pit and smoke poured out. Not the fires of Hell as some suppose, but displaying the atmosphere

from which the next plague is to come. "...the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit... a very common sight of those in proximity of a volcanic eruption.

3. Locusts. The portrait of this hideous insect is symbolic of a destructive and dreaded force seen in the middle east and Egypt enough times to convey fright and despair. The United States Midwest suffered this plague in the 1870's and it covered ten states. Every speck of vegetation was stripped from the land. My mother reported a locust invasion in Kansas when she was a child that shut down the railroads because the tracks were so coated with locusts that the drive wheels of the locomotives would just slip on the locust encrusted tracks.

This plague of "locusts" reminds us again of the locust plague in Egypt seen in Exodus, chapter 10. We also have the prophecy of Joel 1:1-11 noting the devastation of four species of locusts in the land. These "locusts" could be symbolic of nations or powers, but more likely symbolic of some sort of demonically controlled force as we shall see. They are given a stinging "power" to inflict torment upon certain men. In other words these people would be afflicted with stings like a scorpion but may not know where they came from in spite of John's description in verses 7-10. The torment may not be actually physical. That would be the first option, but there is nothing to prevent this from being a spiritual or psychological phenomenon as noted in the introduction.

Those in Christ would not be afflicted as the scripture is clear, "We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him." I John 5:18 This "plague" comes from the "abyss" where "evil" spirits dwell and Satan will be imprisoned. Yet it is sent by God. So it makes sense that His people will not be affected.

It is important to note here that when the literature presents a distorted view of a reality we are familiar with, we need to be cautious about interpreting it literally. The distortion itself is the major clue. Often the Hebrew author in either testament will use imagery that in itself will not convey the truth or message, but is simply the vehicle of the truth or message, the truth found within the imagery and not the imagery itself. Such familiar forms are parables which present a story but the message is not the story but found within the dynamic of the story.

We are told in Proverbs 1:5-6, "A wise man will hear and increase in learning, And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel, To understand a proverb and a

figure, The words of the wise and their riddles."

An example is Jotham's speech to the elders of Shechem in Judges nine, and still another is the incredible beauty of Ecclesiastes twelve. Then we have Daniel interpreting dreams for kings of Babylon proving that the dreams themselves are not to be taken literally. There are hundreds of examples in the Bible of fascinating artistic literary forms and devices. Add to that the fact that we are dealing with apocalyptic literature, and we must be cautious in how we grasp the imagery. In addition, we must not apply our western habit of expecting a strict chronology and literal interpretation to the text. For example, John's gospel is quite different chronologically from the other three gospels. This is due to the Hebrew author focusing on themes and messages to his intended audience and that mandate may cause a shuffling in the chronologically we would normally expect.

All this to say that we need to be flexible in understanding what we will see in the upcoming visions. The "locusts" are not what they at first seem to be.

4. In a reversal of nature, these "locusts" are not allowed to harm any vegetation at all, "but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads." First this suggests that those who have the seal of God on their foreheads are still present during this time but unaffected. Those not sealed are tormented however. Those "sealed" refer to the 144,000 of chapter seven.<sup>158</sup> Second, this displays God's sovereignty over what some might call "evil" (God's judgments) as well as man's free will to resist and harden his heart. In addition, it shows God's ability to control or use evil for His own purposes and those purposes are grounded in love and grace. This is expressed by Joseph in Genesis 45:4-5; 50:20,

Genesis 45:4-5, "Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come closer to me." And they came closer. And he said, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. 5: Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life."

Genesis 50:20, "As for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive."

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<sup>158</sup> This, again, is not a physical "seal" anymore than is the "mark of the beast" a physical mark. The location of the mark or seal means simply where the allegiance of the heart and mind of the individual is focused. Looking at a person, one cannot tell. Paul, in II Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13 and 4:30 speaks of the spiritual sealing of the believer.

5. Whatever form this plague takes, it is not fatal. This judgment is specifically designed to cause people who oppose God to reconsider their mindset. Fatalities would not allow for this possibility. Scorpion stings are not usually fatal, but can cause extreme pain and physical symptoms such as nausea, rapid heart- beat, high blood pressure, and muscular twitching to name a few. In some areas of the middle east, Africa and India, some scorpion stings could be fatal, especially for children. However, this plague is commanded not to cause death. Though the image of a scorpion sting is used, it could symbolize the painful result of this "torment" and again, be even mental or spiritual.

Five months. An unusual number having little symbolic meaning on its own even in Hebrew thought. There is the idea that the number five could represent both divine power and divine grace at the same time and would fit comfortably here. Another idea is that the number simply symbolizes a "few". The fifth Hebrew letter ה ("Hay") without other corresponding letters only indicates a window out of which someone is watching. Five months is the relative life span of a locust as well as the length of time or season when they would swarm. But there is no definitive meaning to the five months I can discover. The period of time is relatively short except of course, for those being afflicted.

6. The pain is such that after a lengthy period of suffering men would rather die than continue in such agony. Rather die than repent. No doubt the message about what is happening is now being proclaimed throughout the earth. But people are hardening their hearts much as Pharaoh did.

9:7-12:

7: The appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle; and on their heads appeared to be crowns like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. 8: They had hair like the hair of women, and their teeth were like *the teeth* of lions. 9: They had breastplates like breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle. 10: They have tails like scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men for five months. 11: They have as king over them, the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon. 12: The first woe is past; behold, two woes are still coming after these things.

7-10. The description about to be given leaves no doubt that literal locusts are not intended but that they are symbolic of something else. The "locust" theme carries the concept of swarms, devouring, destruction, and with scorpion like tails the infliction of pain over a vast territory. ON the one hand, some would see an earthly force, such as an army in the vision. But a plague or torment might fit best it would seem, as a military force would not injure and not kill and God has no need of an earthly military force for such a purpose any more than He did in Egypt.

On the other hand, Joel, in describing the great "Day of the Lord" chapters one and two, picture the destruction of locusts in chapter 1:1-5 and calls for repentance and then turns the picture into, "... a nation has invaded my land, mighty and without number; Its teeth are the teeth of a lion, And it has the fangs of a lioness." In chapter two, Joel says,

2: "Blow a trumpet in Zion, And sound an alarm on My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, For the day of the LORD is coming; Surely it is near, 2: A day of darkness and gloom, A day of clouds and thick darkness. As the dawn is spread over the mountains, *So* there is a great and mighty people; There has never been *anything* like it, Nor will there be again after it To the years of many generations. 3: A fire consumes before them And behind them a flame burns. The land is like the garden of Eden before them But a desolate wilderness behind them, And nothing at all escapes them. 4: Their appearance is like the appearance of horses; And like war horses, so they run. 5: With a noise as of chariots They leap on the tops of the mountains, Like the crackling of a flame of fire consuming the stubble, Like a mighty people arranged for battle. 6: Before them the people are in anguish; All faces turn pale. 7: They run like mighty men, They climb the wall like soldiers; And they each march in line, Nor do they deviate from their paths. 8: They do not crowd each other, They march everyone in his path; When they burst through the defenses, They do not break ranks. 9: They rush on the city, They run on the wall; They climb into the houses, They enter through the windows like a thief. 10: Before them the earth quakes, The heavens tremble, The sun and the moon grow dark And the stars lose their brightness. 11: The LORD utters His voice before His army; Surely His camp is very great, For strong is he who carries out His word. The day of the LORD is indeed great and very awesome, And who can endure it? 12: "Yet even now," declares the LORD, "Return to Me with all your heart, And with fasting, weeping and mourning; 13: And rend your heart and not your garments." Now return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious

and compassionate, Slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness And relenting of evil."

And though John's description bears a resemblance here, he adds a great deal more detail about the creatures. Though not horses, these creatures are armored for battle like war horses and are hideous looking with unclear attributes described in similes; "something like gold crowns;" "faces like men's faces;" "hair like women;" "teeth like lions;" "breastplates like iron;" "Wings sounding like chariots and horses rushing to battle;"and "tails like scorpions." Sounds almost like today's military aircraft, drones or missiles. Who's to say? The meaning of the names given to the leader in verse 11 tells us more.

11: Abaddon, Apollyon. Abaddon is the Hebrew word to describe that which is lost, broken, waste, perishing, destroyed, wandering in darkness, failed, useless, ruined and corrupt. this word is found also in Job 26:6; 28:22; 31:12; Psalm 88:11; Proverbs 15:11 and 27:20. But here they have a "king" over them and come from the abyss, the prison of evil beings, and, in addition, are not to harm the vegetation but only those who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads, suggesting that we are not to seek a literal interpretation here. Apollyon is the Greek word for the same thing.

The nature of the leader may lead us to the nature of the effect of the plague. People afflicted with an overwhelming sense of darkness, failure, purposelessness, hopelessness, lostness, and their life seen as a waste. Hopefully, if this is the case, they will be driven to seek God. In seeing people come to Christ, I have often heard them exclaim that up to that point, their entire life is seen as a waste and they regret not coming to Christ earlier. Bottom line, we cannot be definitive as to what exact form this first woe, the fifth trumpet plague, actually takes.

12: The first woe is past; behold, two woes are still coming after these things.

### **The sixth angel sounds and the second woe comes on the earth.**

13: "Then the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, 14: one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." 15: And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they would kill a third of mankind. 16: The number of the armies of the horsemen was two

hundred million; I heard the number of them. 17: And this is how I saw in the vision the horses and those who sat on them: *the riders* had breastplates *the color* of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone."

13-17: The sixth trumpet plague pictures the altar of incense<sup>159</sup> and a voice coming from it. In 16:7 the altar itself speaks. Here the command is given from the altar to the angel sounding the sixth trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates!" The Euphrates was known to be the border or limit of civilization as well as the limit of Israel's greatest rule under Solomon. Beyond it lay enemies and heathen, particularly Babylon.. It says in Genesis 15:18, as God spoke with Abraham, "On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates:..."

The angels there have been apparently bound up in some way until the time of their release to do what they were created to do and that is initiate the march of a massive demonic army numbering two-hundred million.(See footnote at verse 4) prepared to kill 1/3 of mankind...of those who do not have a the seal of God on their foreheads.

There is a speculation that the four angels mentioned in 7:1-3 could be these angels as well despite the differences in function. There, four angels hold back the four winds. They are told, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads." We now are past that "sealing." In chapter 9:4 we read, "They (the "locusts") were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads." The command is nearly the same. But the four angels of chapter 7 do not appear again in the book. So it is difficult to conclude that these four correspond with these in chapter nine.

Now, we have these four angels releasing a devastation designed to kill 1/3 of those who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads (understood). So there is a similarity to the fifth trumpet plague here with the difference being that this army is designed to kill where the other was prohibited from doing so.

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<sup>159</sup> Most likely because, 1. It is "before God" that is in the Holy Place with the prayers rising to Him.

One is given pause to wonder at the hardness of men's heart. It seems that while those that suffer are not God's people, those that are His are unharmed, and even, perhaps, sharing the Word of Truth with the wicked. Yet seeing this reality, the wicked still do not respond and repent and turn to the Lord.

John struggles to find words to describe the vision saying, "And this is how I saw (or describe) in the vision..." Now, what is the nature of this army? Some teach that it is literally a massive army of men from the east prepared by God to inflict judgment on those who are of the beast. But this is: 1. contrary to the purpose of God for His people and 2: Not the role of the "sealed" who remain on earth during this time as far as we can tell from the texts. The account itself speaks of a cavalry wherein it is the "horses" not their riders that are deadly. These "horses" (for lack of a better descriptive word I'm sure) have lion like heads with mouths issuing forth fire, smoke and brimstone (Sulphur). Plus they have tails like snakes with the head at the end of the tail, and the riders have breastplates of fire, sapphire and Sulphur. This smacks of the use of some demonic force as we have seen before.

But some have speculated that this is John's only way to describe a modern military machine and weaponry seen in the vision. But it is unlikely God would need such support. More likely we are dealing with another plague similar to the "locusts" brought forth at the fifth angelic sounding only with the result of death this time. Pain did not do the trick. Now, people are seen as dying in agony and a third are affected. There is precedent in extra-biblical literature for this demonic or angelic massive army as well as in II Kings 6:14-17. God has often sent a demonic or evil spirit to do his bidding in order to motivate a person to do His will.<sup>160</sup>

The correspondence with the account of the sixth bowl of God's wrath poured out and this account in 16:12 can't be ignored. There, the Euphrates River is dried up to make way for the armies of the kings of the earth who join the beast in making war upon the Lamb. Though this hoard is destined to kill 1/3 of mankind, it cannot touch those with the seal of God on their foreheads. And a difference is seen in that while much of mankind is killed by the horsemen in an effort to bring about repentance, the hoards in 16 are gathered together to make war against the Lamb. Still, it is possible that there is some relationship between the two visions.

9:18-21:

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<sup>160</sup> See: Judges 9:23; I Samuel 16:14-23; 18:10; 19:9; I Kings 22:21-23; Luke 4:33-37; Acts 19:15-16; etc.

18: A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which proceeded out of their mouths. 19: For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents and have heads, and with them they do harm. 20: The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; 21: and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts."

18-19: Apparently the mouths spewing fire, smoke and Sulphur (the three plagues) as well as serpent tails with heads are the means by which this 1/3 of the wicked people are struck down in some manner and killed. How we are to understand this is difficult. But rather than a swarm (like locusts), we have a cavalry march described, more deliberate, focused and deadly. Some would see these plagues from the east perhaps akin to the West Nile Virus, or the poultry viruses, or other deadly plagues of recent decades. We again caution against trying to press some specific form to this plague.

20: The purpose of these plagues is made clear. To bring the lost to repentance. As Jesus said, "...it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire. If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell." Matthew 18:8-9 In other words, better to suffer to repentance and gain the Kingdom of God than to not suffer and enter into Hell.

The major wickedness of mankind is "idolatry." This has always been the core of wickedness, not behavior or acts of ungodliness. The root is and always has been idolatry, that is where man places his worship, adoration, attention, love and devotion. Remember it is not money that is the root of evil, but the love of money. Anything that replaces God as the center of a man's heart and motive for living is idolatry. The idol may be represented by some image made of stone, wood, or metal but also by a portfolio, pill, portrait or photo...any image whatsoever.

21: Again, the hardness of man's heart is the issue. For John's readers, now is the time to consider one's own place in the message. What is taking precedent over God being first in one's life? Frankly, normally it is self-centeredness, wanting one's own way and failing to be humble, understanding and loving, putting others

first before oneself. This was the problem first brought up in the first letter to the first church, Ephesus who had lost its first love, caring for the lost as Jesus did.

Here, specific things are mentioned stemming out of man's idolatry namely: murder, sorcery, immorality and theft. Murder is the intentional taking of another life, though military or police action is exempted. Sorcery is witchcraft, creation of spells and the use of drugs as a hallucinogenic. The Greek word for this is familiar, "pharmakea." Immorality is sexual in nature, especially unfaithfulness to one's spouse or sex with another whether married or unmarried. The Greek word for this is "Porneia." Theft is simply as it sounds and the Greek is "klepto."

All of these are contemporary problems and all stem from a self-centered core, one considering him or herself as the center of their own existence. I have been criticized for saying that man's problem is not a poor self image but an exalted one. But this position is quite Biblical and it is pride, not humility that God puts on the table as man's problem. The second "woe" has not been completed, and we will not see its conclusion until 11: 14 as we await the sound from the seventh angel and the third "woe". And quite a wait it will be.

# THE BOOK OF REVELATION

## Chapter Ten

10:1-7,

1: I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, clothed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire; 2: and he had in his hand a little book which was open. He placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land; 3: and he cried out with a loud voice, as when a lion roars; and when he had cried out, the seven peals of thunder uttered their voices. 4: When the seven peals of thunder had spoken, I was about to write; and I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up the things which the seven peals of thunder have spoken and do not write them. 5: Then the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his right hand to heaven, 6: and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, WHO CREATED HEAVEN AND THE THINGS IN IT, AND THE EARTH AND THE THINGS IN IT, AND THE SEA AND THE THINGS IN IT, that there will be delay no longer, 7: but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets.

Comment: John has presented the events of six of seven angelic trumpet plagues. One would expect the seventh angelic trumpet plague to be next. But, as is his style (or the style of the vision) has progressed, we have instead another interlude. As the opening of the seventh seal was postponed by an interlude, so the blowing of the seventh trumpet is postponed by an interlude. The sounding of the seventh trumpet will not occur until chapter 11:14-15. John's viewpoint now includes the earth.

1: "Strong angel." In 5:2 we have the same designation, but this is another, apparently different, "strong angel." Like the angel in 5:2, this one also is quite large and has a very loud tumultuous voice.<sup>161</sup> He descends out of the heavens to the earth, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, face shining like the Sun and having legs of fire, landing upon the earth with his right foot on the sea and the left on the land.

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<sup>161</sup> Another similar angel is presented in 18:1-2.

This impressive angel bears attributes of God's glory and promises to be fulfilled. We see similar descriptions in Ezekiel 1:27-28 and 8:2. (In 8:3-4 we also have a similar vision of Ezekiel being transported into a vision).

2-4: A mysterious occurrence. First, this angel has a small open scroll in one of his hands. He shouts something with a loud voice, as a lion roaring. In Amos 3:8 the Lord speaks as a roaring lion. Then, the seven thunders speak out and John is told not to write down what they have said. Their utterance is not revealed in the remainder of the book nor do we know what the strong angel shouted. Also, the reason for this prohibition is not given.

Okay, then. Let's move on.

5-7: The lifting of the right hand in taking an oath is as old as human history. It signifies that one appeals to God rather than to self for the veracity of what is sworn. Indeed that is exactly what the angel does. Here he lifts his hand to heaven while one foot is on the land and the other on the sea and as he does so, he swears by the One who made all three. This oath is based on Exodus 20:3,

"For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them..."

But the vision is like Daniel 12:5-9,

5: "Then I, Daniel, looked and behold, two others were standing, one on this bank of the river and the other on that bank of the river. 6: And one said to the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, 'How long *will it be* until the end of *these* wonders?'<sup>162</sup> 7: I heard the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, as he raised his right hand and his left toward heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever that it would be for a time, times, and half *a time*; and as soon as they finish shattering the power of the holy people, all these *events* will be completed. 8: As for me, I heard but could not understand; so I said, "My lord, what *will be* the outcome of these *events*?" 9: He said, "Go *your way*, Daniel, for *these* words are concealed and sealed up until the end time."

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<sup>162</sup> Very similar to the prayer of the martyrs in Rev. 6:10.

The oath here is that there will be no more delay as the sounding of the seventh angelic plague will be the last and final act of God after which He will bring this present age to a close. This may again be an answer to the prayer of the sacrificed saints of chapter six (verse 10). The phrase is correctly translated "in the days of the voice of the seventh angel" suggesting a period of time will elapse following the trumpet sound before the end comes. Indeed that is what transpires.

The "sealing" up of the words of "these events" parallels 10:3-4. In Daniel, however, we have this comment following the prohibition,

10: "Many will be purged, purified and refined, but the wicked will act wickedly; and none of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand. 11: From the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished and the abomination of desolation is set up, *there will be* 1,290 days. 12: How blessed is he who keeps waiting and attains to the 1,335 days! 13: But as for you, go *your way* to the end; then you will enter into rest and rise *again* for your allotted portion at the end of the age."

### **BRIEF EXCURSUS ON "THE MYSTERY OF GOD"**

The "mystery of God." Often overlooked and seldom understood by preachers and teachers alike. Also controversial when discussed due to popular theological prophetic views clashing with scripture. There are two aspects to this mystery, both coming from the apostle Paul.

I. The general "mystery" as noted by Paul in I Corinthians 2:6-16,

6: "Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; 7: but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God predestined before the ages to our glory; 8: *the wisdom* which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; 9: but just as it is written, "THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND *which* HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM." 10: For to us God revealed *them* through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. 11: For who among men knows the *thoughts* of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even

so the *thoughts* of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. 12: Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, 13: which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*. 14: But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. 15: But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. 16: For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ."

This reference to the "mystery" here is, "...the hidden *wisdom* which God predestined before the ages to our glory..." Paul goes on to define this as a spiritual reality based in the crucifixion of Christ, foolishness to the world which the world cannot grasp, but in actuality the wisdom of God (chapter 1). The focus is not a earthly messianic kingdom or theocracy, but a spiritually based kingdom grounded in faith and the sacrifice Christ made for all mankind.

In essence, it is Christ by the Spirit of God who builds His kingdom and without the cross, it would not have been possible because as men look to an earthly basis for the fulfillment of the Messianic promise, God looks to a spiritual basis for the fulfillment of His Messianic kingdom. While men seek human leaders (chapter 3), Paul instructs them that their focus must be on Christ alone.

Paul continues with this emphasis in Colossians 1:25-28,

25: "Of *this church* I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the *preaching of the word of God*, 26: *that is*, the mystery which has been hidden from the *past* ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, 27: to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28: We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ."

This "mystery" was not totally hidden from the Jews, but was too easily set aside in favor of an earthly and fleshly "only" perspective.

The Hebrew word for "mystery" (rahz) in the English Bible only occurs in Daniel in the Old Testament. In the New, the word for "mystery" (Moos-tay-ree-on) occurs twenty two times. The word means "secret." It derives from the idea of keeping one's mouth shut about a confidential matter. Included in this is the idea of an inner circle who exclusively know the "secrets" therein. But it also conveys a core thought that though unrecognized at the moment, it was well known at one time and lost. In this case, it is part of the divine plan that had been relegated to obscurity by the Jews for over a thousand years. In the New Testament this word indicates a divine purpose only now revealed to some. For example,

Jesus said to His disciples, "And He was saying to them, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables, so that WHILE SEEING, THEY MAY SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE, AND WHILE HEARING, THEY MAY HEAR AND NOT UNDERSTAND, OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT RETURN AND BE FORGIVEN." Mark 4:11-12  
This quote is from Isaiah 6:9-10.

## II. The Gentiles as fellow citizens of the kingdom of God – by faith.

The divine purpose is revealed through parables in this instance. Though this sounds like a mystery itself, it is not. It is Jesus' way of expressing facts and truths that if spoken outright would cause a terrible uproar and turmoil. He did this a few times and got this kind of a response. For example, in marveling at the faith of the Gentile Roman Centurion, Jesus said to the crowds, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline *at the table* with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."  
Matthew :10-12

Well, statements like this did not set well with the Jews. The fact is, however, that early on the Jews abandoned God's intended plan for them which is expressed throughout the scriptures, namely that 1. Faith was the foundation of a relationship with God not deeds of the flesh without spiritual moorings, and 2. They would be the instruments for taking the truth of the true God to the nations (Gentiles) so that the whole world could have an opportunity to come to the Lord.<sup>163</sup> They failed in

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<sup>163</sup> Some of the scriptures underscoring this are: Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 28:14; Isaiah 9:1-2; 42:6; 49:6; 60:1-3etc.

this and made Judaism an exclusive, rather than an inclusive fellowship in the Lord. At Jesus birth part of Simeon's prophecy over the child was, "For my eyes have seen Your salvation, Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, And the glory of Your people Israel." Luke 2:30-33

Verse 33 is typical of the Jewish response to this thought, "And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him.

At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, Matthew reported in 4:14-16, "*This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: "THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI, BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND THE JORDAN, GALILEE OF THE GENTILES-- THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A GREAT LIGHT, AND THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF DEATH, UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED."* (Isaiah 9:2; 60:1-3)

Many of the parables Jesus told hinted at this reality, but one has to look closely and have understanding to see this truth. Though clearly stated in the beginning, this plan of God was discarded in the teaching of the Jews, and the Gentiles became an unclean entity to be avoided even though there is no such prohibition in Scripture. So it was indeed a mystery to most Jews that the Gentiles were the focus of God's ministry and that it was the Jews who were to be the instrument of displaying the glory of God to them and bringing them from darkness into the Kingdom of God through faith.

Parallel to this, the entity called "Israel" needs clear definition since the term applies in many ways to different entities and it is "Israel" that is to be the saved. But to whom or what does refer? For example, "Israel" became Jacob's name when God changed it after the struggle with a mysterious man in Genesis 32. "Israel" also applies to the descendants of the twelve sons of "Israel" and they become the nation of "Israel". The name "Israel" also pertains also to the land mass itself. Then, when the kingdom was divided after Solomon, there was the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. All these are physical entities.

Now, there must be a distinction made between the "Israel" of "promise" and the "Israel" according to the flesh, one of faith presented in the person of Isaac, and the other of flesh presented in the person of Ishmael. Then there is the true "Israel" of God, those both from Jewish and from Gentile heritage that are one in faith and

corporately called "Israel." When the prophets speak of "Israel" one must try and distinguish which "Israel" is being referred to. Then, the terms Jew and Israelite need to be defined as too often they are used interchangeably when distinctions ought to be made.

The reason I bring this up is that the scripture makes these distinctions and Paul particularly singles out the differences when it comes to God's true "Israel," the one of promise and faith which includes both "Jewish" and "Gentile" believers and it is this entity called "Israel" that is saved. There are objections to this position but I believe the scripture is clear. This designation is spoken of in several epistles.

First, Paul makes the case for a single true Israel in Romans, Ephesians and Galatians. For example, in Romans 9,

1: I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, 2: that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. 3: For I could wish that I myself were accursed, *separated* from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, 4: who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises, 5: whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. 6: But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel; 7: nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: **'THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED.'**\* 8: That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants." \* Based on Genesis 17:19, 21.

This seems clear. It is those of faith likened to those who trust in God's promise who are Israel, whether their lineage is from Abraham or not. If they believe in God's promise and in the fulfillment thereof - Christ – then they are considered by God as Abraham's seed according to the promise. Paul states this exact matter in Galatians. Here are a few pertinent passages,

"Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, **'ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE**

BLESSED IN YOU.' So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer." Galatians 3:7-9

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, (*Gentile*) there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise." Galatians 3:26-29 (Italics mine)

"For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. This is allegorically speaking, for these *women* are two covenants: one *proceeding* from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. For it is written, 'REJOICE, BARREN WOMAN WHO DOES NOT BEAR; BREAK FORTH AND SHOUT, YOU WHO ARE NOT IN LABOR; FOR MORE NUMEROUS ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE DESOLATE THAN OF THE ONE WHO HAS A HUSBAND.' And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him *who was born* according to the Spirit, so it is now also. But what does the Scripture say? 'CAST OUT THE BONDWOMAN AND HER SON, FOR THE SON OF THE BONDWOMAN SHALL NOT BE AN HEIR WITH THE SON OF THE FREE WOMAN.' So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman." Galatians 4:22-31

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love." Galatians 5:6

Then in Ephesians 2:11-16,

11: "Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," *which is* performed in the flesh by human hands—12: *remember* that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13: But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by

the blood of Christ. 14: For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, 15: by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is* the Law of commandments *contained in* ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, *thus* establishing peace, 16: and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity."

In Colossians 1:25-27,

25: Of *this church* I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the *preaching of* the word of God, 26: *that is*, the mystery which has been hidden from the *past* ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, 27: to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

In Romans 9 Paul makes the argument that God will have mercy on whomever He desires and that includes those of the gentiles who sought God by faith. He will declare them to be His people fulfilling the words of the prophet Hosea (2:23). God also will have no mercy on those who think they are His people but have no faith as Romans 9:27 says, "Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, 'THOUGH THE NUMBER OF THE SONS OF ISRAEL BE LIKE THE SAND OF THE SEA, IT IS THE REMNANT THAT WILL BE SAVED;...' " He closes the chapter with,

9:30-33, 30: "What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; 31: but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at *that* law. 32: Why? Because *they did not pursue it* by faith, but as though *it were* by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, 33: just as it is written, 'BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.' "

Note the differentiation between "Israel" in the promise to Abraham concerning the number of his descendants and the "remnant of Israel that will be saved. Two different "Israels."

In 9:23-25, Paul wrote a revealing sentence:

23: "And *He did so* to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, 24: *even us*, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles. 25: As He says also in Hosea, 'I WILL CALL THOSE WHO WERE NOT MY PEOPLE, 'MY PEOPLE,' AND HER WHO WAS NOT BELOVED, 'BELOVED.'"

Note there the use of the personal pronoun "us" in verse 24 referring to "the vessels of mercy" which include both Jew and Gentile.

Then in Romans 11, Paul describes the famous Olive Tree (lineage of Abraham) of which he notes that many natural branches are broken off and wild branches grafted in so that the entire tree (called Israel) will be of those who are by faith, is saved.

Now, this brings us to understanding the mystery.

In Romans 16:25-27 Paul explains,

25: Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, 26: but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations (*gentiles*), *leading* to obedience of faith; 27: to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen." (Italics mine)

And in Romans 11:25,

"For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery--so that you will not be wise in your own estimation--that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in..."

Romans 15:8-12,

8: "For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises *given* to the fathers, 9: and for the

Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, 'THEREFORE I WILL GIVE PRAISE TO YOU AMONG THE GENTILES, AND I WILL SING TO YOUR NAME.' 10: Again he says, 'REJOICE, O GENTILES, WITH HIS PEOPLE.' 11: And again, 'PRAISE THE LORD ALL YOU GENTILES, AND LET ALL THE PEOPLES PRAISE HIM.' 12: Again Isaiah says, 'THERE SHALL COME THE ROOT OF JESSE, AND HE WHO ARISES TO RULE OVER THE GENTILES, IN HIM SHALL THE GENTILES HOPE.'

Then in Ephesians 3:3-6,

3: "...that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. 4: By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5: which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; 6: *to be specific*, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,..."

What is interesting is that the "Jews" trace their lineage back to Abraham, but conveniently forget that Abraham was a Chaldean, a Babylonian, and an Aramean, and one can be no more "Gentile" than that. To think that God would call Abraham from such a place and instill in him the purpose of being a blessing to the people from where he was called and read that Isaac and Jacob were commissioned with the same purpose and then watch as their descendants dismissed that purpose out of hand and made the "nations" an unclean, hated, and despised people and then turned Judaism into an exclusive "club" for them and God alone is amazing indeed. God would have none of it.

The entire matter distills down to the central theme of the kingdom of God. What I mean by this is that the establishment of the kingdom of God has been an integral part of the hope of the Jews since the conquest of Canaan under Joshua and is ultimately the central thrust of the Book of Revelation. Though the Jews distorted the teachings of the patriarchs and prophets about this, it was clarified by Jesus and the apostles and that clarification was rejected by the Jews but received happily by the poor and the Gentiles.

The majority of Jesus' parables were about the kingdom of God. The principle

issues are, 1. The nature of the kingdom and 2. The citizens of the kingdom. Addressing the matter of the nature of the kingdom, the contrast between what the Jews commonly believe and what the scriptures, Jesus and the apostles teach is that the Jews look for a Messianic King to establish a power center in Jerusalem vanquishing the enemies of the Jews and elevating the Jews to a position of power, prominence and prosperity ruling over the world (the Gentiles).

The scriptural view is that the kingdom is first a spiritual reality, God ruling in the hearts and lives of people. Then, the age to come, it becomes a corporal reality and all who have been faithful with a believing heart will constitute the citizenry of the kingdom with God's Messiah (Jesus) as the king.

The matter of the citizens of the kingdom is seen by the Jews as a strictly physical entity, that is that the Jews, and only the physical descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob - regardless of the matter of faith - will be the citizens of the kingdom. But scripturally and as taught through the prophets, Jesus and the apostles, the citizens of the kingdom are all those who have been of faith whether Jew or Gentile. As quoted above Jesus said, "... I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline *at the table* with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Matthew :10-12

## END OF EXCURSUS

10:8-11

8: Then the voice which I heard from heaven, *I heard* again speaking with me, and saying, "Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land." 9: So I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. And he said to me, "Take it and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey." 10: I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and in my mouth it was sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter. 11: And they said to me, "You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings."

8-10: The "voice" is that which John heard in verse 4. The "book" is a small scroll. This is quite similar to the experience of Ezekiel in 2:6-3:3, where the Lord says to him,

2: 6: "And you, son of man, neither fear them nor fear their words, though thistles and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpions; neither fear their words nor be dismayed at their presence, for they are a rebellious house. 7: But you shall speak My words to them whether they listen or not, for they are rebellious. 8: Now you, son of man, listen to what I am speaking to you; do not be rebellious like that rebellious house. Open your mouth and eat what I am giving you." 9: Then I looked, and behold, a hand was extended to me; and lo, a scroll *was* in it. 10: When He spread it out before me, it was written on the front and back, and written on it were lamentations, mourning and woe."

3:1, "Then He said to me, 'Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.' 2: So I opened my mouth, and He fed me this scroll. 3: He said to me, 'Son of man, feed your stomach and fill your body with this scroll which I am giving you.' Then I ate it, and it was sweet as honey in my mouth."

The differences are minor: 1: John takes the scroll and eats it rather than be fed, 2: Though sweet to the taste, it turns his stomach bitter. The similarities are major: 1. Both eat the scrolls. 2. The scroll is sweet to the taste. 3. Both men are commanded to speak. 4. Ezekiel sees "lamentations, mourning and woe" written on the scroll but John experiences bitterness in his stomach. 5. Both are commissioned to speak God's words.

For John, the word of God is sweet, like the Psalmist expressed,

"How sweet are Your words to my taste! *Yes, sweeter* than honey to my mouth!" Psalm 119:103

But the message itself is not, and as Isaiah said,

"Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" Isaiah 5:20

The message is of worldwide importance. John is to, "...prophecy again

concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings." John has already prophesied through his recording of the letters and visions thus far. Here it could be translated that he had to prophesy "against" or "upon" many peoples, nations, tongues and kings." This fits in well with Jesus words to His disciples in Matthew 10:16-20,

16: "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. 17: But beware of men, for they will hand you over to *the* courts and scourge you in their synagogues; 18: and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. 19: But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say. 20: For it is not you who speak, but *it is* the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you."

# THE BOOK OF REVELATION

## Chapter Eleven

Introduction:

Following John's eating of the small scroll and the command to basically preach the contents thereof, we now have another interlude prior to the seventh angel sounding his trumpet. This interlude presents two visions to the reader: 1) John given a measuring rod and told to measure the inner temple area; and 2) The vision of the two witnesses. It seems awkward at first to place the measuring of the temple into the context of the "second woe" of the 6<sup>th</sup> angelic plague, but easier for the two witnesses. What I would call it is an "insertion of additional information." The command for John to, "...prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings" is done through these visions ( verse 9).

So what do we make of a measurement of the temple in the vision considering it has been destroyed by the Romans some twenty years before this book was written? Well, that's an indicator that we are once again dealing with a symbolic matter and now we need to interpret as best we can. I am not going to deal with the varied and confusing attempts to press this vision into a theological mold. These can be sought out by the reader if desired.<sup>164</sup> However, we once again return to a prophetic time prior to the Day of God's wrath (before the revealed events of chapter 8) and events and assurances to be consider before proceeding.

We have just seen that God intended for His glory and truth to shine as a light to the Gentiles. Here, we have a focus on the true spiritual Jews (spiritual Israel). We already are well aware that neither all the Gentiles of history nor all the Jews of history will be saved. But there is no question that a measure of both will comprise the fullness of what God calls His "spiritual" Israel the completeness of which will be saved. These are those of faith from both origins. We have seen both quantified in several different ways so far. We see this again in chapter eleven.

Here in chapter eleven, the focus is on hope for those who are believing Jews. Historically, disasters had hit Jerusalem again and again from foreign empires and tyrannical despots. We see that it is not over and that Jerusalem is the historical

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<sup>164</sup> I would recommend George Ladd's "Commentary on the Revelation of John," Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1981, chapter eleven, pages 149-151 for a summary of the most prevalent views.

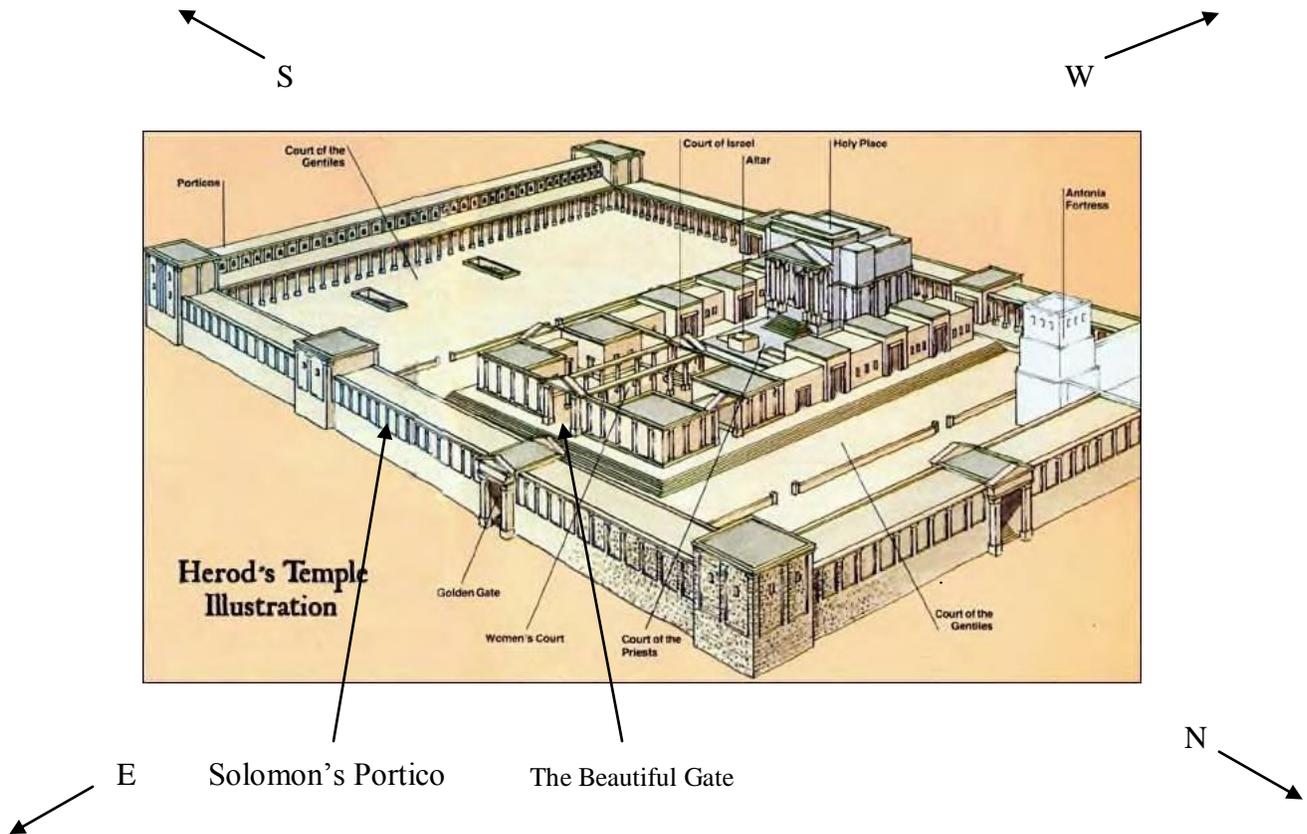
target and focus for most non Jewish/Christian rulers and nations. Past, present and future history will record these attacks until the end. As a believing Jew one must wonder if the judgments of God are coming upon them again just because they are inextricably linked to a rebellious and disbelieving people. It is a fair question but the answer in the next two chapters is "no!"

We are transported with John to an earthly setting in his vision, and the vision is a message. We also move from a spiritual context to a historical one and back and forth even within a paragraph as we will see.

11:1-2

11:1-2: 1: Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, "Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it. 2: "Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations (*Gentiles*); and they will tread underfoot the holy city for forty-two months. (*Italics mine*)

Diagram of the Temple



1: John was given a "measuring rod like a staff" by an unknown person or persons. This object was possibly like a reed (similar to bamboo) that grew along the banks of the Jordan River and could be marked for measuring purposes. These were normally about 8-9 feet long. But it was also a "staff" or "rod", an instrument used to control sheep or even used as a tool of punishment (Rev. 2:27). What is the intent and meaning of this instrument?

The idea of measuring has three connotations: (1) Actual dimensions from which to construct something (Genesis 6:15; Exodus 25; I Kings 7:9-11, (2) A symbolic portrait of pending preservation and, (3) A symbolic portrait of pending destruction.

Regarding (2), one is drawn first to Ezekiel 40-43 where Ezekiel was told to declare what he saw. What he saw was a man measuring the entire temple and its courts with the purpose of assuring God's people that one day there would be a restored place for them to gather and that God's would be present with them but that those who defile had been consumed. In Ezekiel 43, the measurements of the courtyard, temple and so on and the spiritual lives of the people are seen in correspondence.

Zechariah 2:1-5 also reads,

1: "Then I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, *there was* a man with a measuring line in his hand. 2: So I said, "Where are you going?" And he said to me, "To measure Jerusalem, to see how wide it is and how long it is." 3: And behold, the angel who was speaking with me was going out, and another angel was coming out to meet him, 4: and said to him, "Run, speak to that young man, saying, 'Jerusalem will be inhabited without walls because of the multitude of men and cattle within it. 5: 'For I,' declares the LORD, 'will be a wall of fire around her, and I will be the glory in her midst.'"

Then, (3) in other places, measuring is a portent of impending destruction as in II Kings 21:3; Isaiah 34:11; Lamentations 2:8; Amos 7:7-8. In these cases, there is also the element of not being straight and level.

2a: Here, John is told to measure the temple and those who worship in it but not the outer court of the Gentiles. The contrast suggests that the area unmeasured is unprotected, while the measured area is secure.

What strikes the reader is that the outer court and the accompanying events have the flavor of a prophetic event to occur in history, while the measurement of the temple is more a spiritual image as John is measuring "people" much in the fashion of the prophets.

Spiritually, this makes sense and is consistent with other passages. Paul makes it clear that the true temple of God is the people in whom He dwells by the Holy Spirit.

"Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are."  
I Corinthians 3:16-17

The idea that a spiritual truth can be connected to a historical event is not unknown. For example, in the same breath Jesus said, "But you will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put *some* of you to death, and you will be hated by all because of My name. Yet not a hair of your head will perish." Luke 21:16-18

And, "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." Matthew 16:25

Regarding the trampling of the holy city and the measuring of then temple and those worshipping in it, some feel that there will be persecution of Jews under the "antichrist" but that their souls will be saved, while others simply feel this is prophesying the preservation of the Jewish faithful who will be saved.

But regarding the trampling of the holy city itself, Luke recounts Jesus' words as he speaks of the time leading to what Matthew recounts and Jesus terms "the great tribulation" (24:15-21),<sup>165</sup>

Luke 21:20-28,

20: "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. 21: "Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are in the midst of the city must leave, and those

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<sup>165</sup> Note Daniel 8:10-14.

who are in the country must not enter the city; 22: because these are days of vengeance, so that all things which are written will be fulfilled. 23: "Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days; for there will be great distress upon the land and wrath to this people; 24: and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. 25: "There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, 26: men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 27: "Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN A CLOUD with power and great glory. 28: "But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Though Luke quotes Jesus who speaks of the city and not specifically the temple, (noting that the temple is in the city) the images are quite similar. Perhaps Jesus excluded the temple because He knew it would be destroyed and not rebuilt. But there are those who insist that the physical temple must be rebuilt in Jerusalem to fulfill Old Testament prophecy prior to the return of Christ. Others disagree. In any case, chapter 21 sees a vision of the Holy New Jerusalem and it is specifically declared that there is no temple in it because "God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (21:22). Given that the physical temple no longer exists, this makes sense.

So this passage in 11:1-2 appears representative of Israel under the protection of God - not Israel according to the flesh, but those of faith according to the promise.

In Revelation 21:15-17 we have another vision of measuring. In that instance, the New Jerusalem is measured by an angel to display its grandeur, size and magnificence. But here, the measurement is to assure protection, and this corresponds with the sealing of the 144,000 in chapter 7 and though that event can be understood in various ways, here there is assurance that those Jews who hope in Christ will be protected. I must conclude that this protection is not from the "trampling" but from the judgments of God upon the wicked which we are presently seeing with John in his vision. The Jews living when that occurs will be assured protection as are all believers. But all the faithful living in the city at the time of the "Gentiles" will suffer persecution and death at the hands of the "Gentiles" although they will enter into eternity secure and rewarded.

2b: The court of the Gentiles is referred to here, and though a part of the temple complex, it now symbolizes an area not protected by God as it represents a time when the Gentiles will trample underfoot the holy city for three and a half years. This is fascinating in that Jerusalem, at the time of this writing, had already been trampled and destroyed by the Romans and the temple burned to the ground. So we have here a dual (or multiple) prophetic fulfillment. It appears that Jerusalem isn't done in the first century. And the trampling will be a frequent occurrence as indeed it has been over the past two millennia since it was ransacked by Rome, not to mention the numerous historical conquests and destruction of the city and the temple already experienced by the nation.

Luke 21:24 (quoted above) notes that "Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." Well, when will it finally be over? Here, it is the Jewish nation will suffer once again under Gentile invasion. This now goes back and reflects a time prior to God pouring out His wrath upon the nations...a time when those who are His, whether Jew or Gentile existing at that time will be protected from this outpouring. The out of sequence chronology is not unusual in the scriptures,<sup>166</sup> and we will see it again in Revelation.

So, prior to the pouring out of the judgments of God upon the wicked (which we are in the middle of in the visions of John) we go back and see other added essentials, namely this trampling of the city by the Gentiles, and then the appearance of the two witnesses. Other things will also be added to this period later in the book.

The three and a half year period (42 months) designated for the trampling of the holy city by the Gentiles is drawn from Daniel 9:24-27; 12:7-13. This destruction will be the last Gentile rebellion (under the rule of the "antichrist" it seems) prior to God stepping in and calling an end to the age with His great day of wrath upon the earth. (Note: Revelation 13:5-8)<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> If one studies Matthew 24, one will see Jesus bringing His discourse to the end or to His appearing. Then He goes back and adds elements to the already existing and presumed completed narrative and brings that to the same conclusion. The he does it again. He does this several times before He concludes His discourse.

<sup>167</sup> Ladd notes: "The most natural meaning of 'Jerusalem' is that it stands for the Jewish people. When in contrast to the city as a whole, the temple proper and its worshippers are preserved, The contrast seems to be between the Jewish people as a whole and a remnant who are the true worshippers of God." See footnote 161 for the reference, pgs. 152-153. However, this author disagrees that the trampling of Jerusalem by the Gentiles falls under God's wrath as is suggested by the totality of this reference.

This three and a half year period consistently refers to a time of the domination of evil and persecution of God's saints during the end times followed by God's wrath upon the evil powers. Here are some references,

Daniel 7:24-26, 24: "As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings. 25: 'He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a *time, times, and half a time*. 26: 'But the court will sit *for judgment*, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever." (Bold italics mine)

Here, the phrase "time, times and half a time" is normally recognized as a year, two years, and a half year, that is, three and a half years or 1260 days considering a 30 day month of the Jewish calendar. This concept is seen in Daniel 4:16, 4:25, and 4:32 where "seven periods of time" are seen as representing seven years. Some would see the seven periods of time as just that, indeterminate periods. It is John that funnels this type of statement into days, months and years.

The "seven year" period is quite frequent in the Bible and does not necessarily indicate a literal seven year period, but a time when all is complete or concluded and the period of rest, restoration or new beginnings commence. For example, in Genesis 29, Jacob served Laban two consecutive seven year periods for the hand of Rachel. In Genesis 41 Pharaoh's dream consisted of seven years of abundance and seven years of famine after which Israel was saved. Seven years constituted the remission of debts, the year of Jubilee in Israel and when slaves were to be set free. It took seven years to build the temple under Solomon, and so on.

The half of that time is represented by the terms: 42 months, a "time, times and half a time," "one thousand two hundred and sixty days", "twelve hundred and sixty days" all equaling three and a half years. Verses containing this number include: Daniel 7:25; 12:7; 12:11 (plus 30 days) and Revelation 11:2; 11:3; 12:6; 12:14; 13:5.

Though often taken literally, it could also mean that the period represents half of the time to complete the events of the last days, the time of the end. (The last days,

according to Peter, Paul, James and the writer of Hebrews began at the birth of Christ.<sup>168</sup>)

In summary, there will be an end time assault on Jerusalem again by non-Jewish forces and it will be another bloody and destructive occurrence. Later we will see that there are more details filling out this event. We also see that this interruption in the narrative of the seven trumpet plagues appears to bring us back to the period before they actually were sounded, as awkward as that is, even in the narrative. We are in the sixth trumpet plague and within in it we seem to be moved to a time before it began. More comments on this will be made at verse 7. Very strange , but within the nature of apocalyptic literature.

11:3-13

3: "And I will grant *authority* to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." 4: These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. 5: And if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way. 6: These have the power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire."

3: Though the word "authority" is not in the original, it does not detract from the point. God has selected "two witnesses" during these 42 months of trampling to prophesy to the world. The word "witness" is from the Greek "mar-toos" from which we get the word "martyr." Indeed it means to proclaim the truth at the cost of one's life if necessary. The word "prophesy" means to utter truth under divine inspiration. They are clothed in sackcloth. "Sackcloth" is a coarse cloth, often made from the hair of animals worn as a "sack" over the body. It was worn by mourners to display grief. It was also worn to express penitence, austerity in life, and worn often by the Hebrew prophets to show how the they and then Lord were in grief and mourning over their spiritual lives.

4: The image of these being "two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth" is seen in Zechariah 4:2-14. Verse 14 of that

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<sup>168</sup> Acts 2:17; II Timothy 3:1; Hebrews 1:2; James 5:3; II Peter 3:3

passage says,

"Then he said, 'These are the two anointed ones who are standing by the Lord of the whole earth.'"

In Zechariah there is only one lampstand noted, but the image is quite familiar. The two witnesses in Zachariah's vision are Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the governor.<sup>169</sup> Zerubbabel was instrumental in rebuilding the temple after the return of the exiles from Babylon. Ezra and Nehemiah attended to the walls but after they were rebuilt Zerubbabel attended to the temple restoration.

John's vision is a radical and detailed change from these two. It is interesting, that though the "measuring" vision is definitely symbolic with spiritual overtones, these two witnesses seem to lead to a more literal interpretation. This is not absolutely necessary, but we will try and see both sides of the matter. The olive tree is representative of Israel and the lampstand indicates the eyes of the Lord throughout the earth and the proclamation of His truth. These two witnesses are Christian witnesses as attested to by verse 8, "their Lord" referring to Jesus.

5-6: These two witnesses are invulnerable to any attack made by people during this period. If any attempt to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and burns them up. This leads us to think of a more symbolic interpretation of the witnesses. They do represent Elijah and Moses, the symbols of the Prophets and the Law. If symbolic, determining what form they take in this period is open to debate of course, but John certainly gives them enough definition to consider them literal appearances.

The identity of these two witnesses is made clear in this verse. Elijah is recorded as not allowing rain to fall on Israel for three and a half years except by his word (I Kings 17:1; 18:1; Luke 4:25; James 5:17). This is the same time period given for what occurs here in chapter 11. The rain will not fall nor can they be harmed until their prophesying is complete. Moses is the only one who mediated water turning to blood - in Egypt – along with other plagues. And though Hebrews they are seen as Christians and we know from the synoptic gospels (Matthew 17, Mark 9 and Luke 9) that these two appeared with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration.

These two figures do not need to be thought of as Elijah and Moses actually

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<sup>169</sup> Zechariah 3 and 4.

resurrected and appearing at this time, but as that which embodies the two prophets even as Jesus pointed to John the Baptist as the embodiment of Elijah.

In Matthew 17:10-13 we have this discussion between Jesus and His disciples. 10: "And His disciples asked Him, 'Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?' 11: And He answered and said, 'Elijah is coming and will restore all things; 12: but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.' 13: Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist."

The thought of Elijah coming again may well be fulfilled here in the vision of John. That Elijah would come and "restore all things" is an ancient hope in the scriptures. For example, Malachi 4:5-6 says,

5: "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. 6: "He will restore the hearts of the fathers to *their* children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."

Thus their "testimony" and "witness" is likely a proclamation from the Law and the Prophets attesting to the lordship of Jesus as God's Messiah. During this three and a half year period this witness is given to "peoples and tribes and tongues and nations" (verse 9). Included would be unbelievers both Jewish and Gentile. Verse 10 says that they "tormented those who dwell on the earth." (See verse 10 for a description of this "torment")

Again, Jesus adds this poignant note,

"But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land;..." Luke 4:25

11:7-13

7: When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them. 8: And their dead bodies *will lie* in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. 9: Those

from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations *will* look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. 10: And those who dwell on the earth *will* rejoice over them and celebrate; and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. They will be hated and exalt the beast. 11: But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were watching them. 12: And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." Then they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies watched them. 13: And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven."

7: This is the first time any "beast" is mentioned in Revelation. In Daniel, chapter seven, four beasts from the sea are described and Daniel is told that these are, "...four are four kings *who* will arise from the earth." The sea and earth are expressions that both signify worldwide historical significance. These are the only references for this use of the word "beast" in the Old Testament. But there is no beast from the abyss in the Old Testament.

Are the readers of John's apocalypse supposed to have some idea about the identity of this beast? It is specific, "The beast from the abyss", and said as if his readers could identify it. The abyss is also called the "bottomless pit" in chapter 9. The beast from the abyss is mentioned here and in chapter 17:8. There, this "beast from the abyss" is seen as "about to come up from the abyss" and described as a "scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns."

If this is the same "beast" of 11:7, then chapter 17 depicts primarily (though there is debate on this) either the city of Rome or Jerusalem and the empire controlled from there. We will discuss this later on in 17. However, again we have a chronological anomaly as here in 11:7, the "beast" is seen as already out of the abyss and ultimately killing these two witnesses, but not until their testimony is complete, while the beast in 17:8 hasn't apparently appeared yet, or returned to the abyss and is coming up again. We will see if this is cleared up as we go along.

It first appears, however, that this beast is different than the beasts from the sea, and the earth as portrayed in chapter 13, yet as they are all viewed, there is a correspondence that can't be ignored. In 17, the description of the beast from the

abyss is almost exactly as that of the beast in 13. It is likely that the "abyss" and the "sea" are synonymous, the abyss being perhaps in the "sea" but a separate entity from the sea itself. The term "beast" is used 37 times in Revelation and, though normally used as the term for some wild animal, in Revelation, each beast is a symbol of another entity. On the other hand, the description of entities having seven heads and ten horns seems to define the dragon of chapter 12, the beast of chapter 13 and the beast of chapter 17. "Ten horns" are also prevalent in Daniel 7 and we must consider all of this in our identifications as we proceed.

Another interesting point is that this beast from the abyss does appear to be a political power, or at least representative of a ruler of an empire. It "makes war" with the witnesses, overcomes them and kills them. "War?" This indicates a battle of indeterminate length, but we know that the two witnesses cannot be harmed until their testimony is complete, and that they give their witness for 3 ½ years. Then, they are allowed to be killed. This raises the question as to the actual nature of these "two witnesses" since it takes such a force to overcome them. Yet in verse 8 it seems that these are simply two very special witnesses with the ability to launch a fiery stream from their "mouths" and destroy those that would seek them harm. But this "weapon" is not effective against the beast of the abyss, or else it holds "him" at bay until they allow themselves to be killed. Interesting and thought provoking. I would propose that we are seeing in the beast from the abyss the envisioning of the two beasts from the sea and earth in chapter 13 as well as the beast in chapter 17. They well may be one and the same as there is the concept that the two beasts of chapter thirteen are in actuality a single entity or become a single entity. thus, we may well have the first glimpse of the so called "Antichrist" here in chapter 11.

8-9: In any case, the bodies of these two witnesses lie for 31/2 days in Jerusalem, "mystically called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified." There are several elements to this simple verse. First, Jerusalem is the best choice for this city as in the vision John is picturing the city and the temple, and, it was in Jerusalem that Jesus was indeed crucified. The word "mystically" is also "spiritually" from the original Greek. It intends a spiritual allegory. The designation "Sodom" may well come from Isaiah, chapter 1 where the Lord, speaking through the prophet calls Jerusalem "Sodom and Gomorrah",

1:1 "The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz concerning Judah and Jerusalem..."

1:9-11, 9: "Unless the LORD of hosts Had left us a few survivors, We would be like Sodom, We would be like Gomorrah. 10: Hear the word of the LORD, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the instruction of our God, You people of Gomorrah. 11: "What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?" Says the LORD..."

Also, in Ezekiel 16:46, the prophet, speaking to Jerusalem says,

"Now your older sister is Samaria, who lives north of you with her daughters; and your younger sister, who lives south of you, is Sodom with her daughters."

A comparison of Jerusalem to Egypt is less prominent, but in Ezekiel 23 the allusion is made and verse 27 says,

"Thus I will make your lewdness and your harlotry *brought* from the land of Egypt to cease from you, so that you will not lift up your eyes to them or remember Egypt anymore."

But the metaphor of Egypt alludes to Jerusalem having actually enslaved God's people, Jerusalem being representative of the Jewish religious authority there.<sup>170</sup>

Second, to leave a body unburied more than for twenty four hours would violate Jewish law and be deemed the ultimate barbarity and contempt for the person.<sup>171</sup> These two witnesses, embodiments of Elijah and Moses, are given the most dishonorable treatment possible and left to rot in the street in Jerusalem while the "peoples and tribes and tongues and nations" look at them and celebrate.

The three and a half day period noted may again be more symbolic than literal. Some think it to designate years, but John uses 1,260 "days" to describe the time of the witnesses testifying, so why would he intend "years" here?

10: Great celebration will take place at the death of these two witnesses as the world views their rotting corpses lying in the street. People will rejoice and send gifts to one another we're told...at least until the world is shocked by an amazing act of God.

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<sup>170</sup> See Paul's allegory in Galatians 4:21-31 for example.

<sup>171</sup> See Jeremiah 8:1-3; 16:4; 22:9; I Kings 21:24; II Kings 9:36-37.

One might think that the world isn't quite that crass, hardened and evil, but during a protest against the abortion bill passed by the legislature in Austin Texas in July of 2013, pro-life attendants sang "Amazing Grace" while pro-choice attendants shouted out "Hail Satan." There was a report that some were heard to shout, "Mary should have aborted Jesus." This is a good sample of the sharp division occurring in the United States between those who honor God and those who do not. The scene in this passage is not far removed from reality, even in our day. Imagine as it gets worse.

These two witnesses "tormented" those "who dwell on the earth."<sup>172</sup> The form of this torment is not defined, but it could easily be the "pricking" of the consciences of people and putting them in full awareness of their wickedness in God's eyes.

11: After the three and a half days had transpired, an incredible event took place. "... the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet..." In John 11, Jesus went to Bethany to raise Lazarus from the dead, and Martha his sister told Jesus, "Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been *dead* four days. Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"

And they did. And so did the people who saw what happened here in John's vision. But this event cause "great fear" in those who witnessed this. This "great fear" would be tantamount to "terror" or "panic." Now, an effect deliberately purposed in all this began to take place (verse 13).

12-13: To add to that, the populace also heard a loud (or great, massive) voice from the sky commanding the two risen witnesses to ascend. In watching the two ascend into "heaven" (the sky) in a cloud, the crown was shaken literally by a huge earthquake causing a tenth of the city to collapse and seven thousand people to lose their lives.

Again, "seven thousand" does not necessarily indicate an exact number, but a number representing that the deaths completed this phase of the event. But the good news is that, "and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven." Some do not see this as a repentance, but there is no reason not to do so, because as soon as this happened, these people put themselves in opposition to the beast. The bad news is having to consider what it takes to move the hearts of men.

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<sup>172</sup> A common idiom referring to the pagan world.

11:14: "The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly."

Presumably, all this took place before or during the seven trumpet plagues, but definitely before the seventh angel (third woe) sounded. Difficult to say. The term "quickly" is interesting because we will see that this term doesn't mean what we expect it to mean. There will be four more chapters of interludes and visions before the third woe begins. From this we can get an idea that the word "quickly" Jesus uses from time to time regarding His return may also not be as we think of it. Again, we must conform our minds to the intent of the text as best we can and not try and conform the text to our own thinking.

11:15-19,

15: Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become *the kingdom* of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever." 16: And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, 17: saying, "We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign. 18: "And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time *came* for the dead to be judged, and *the time* to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth." 19: And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm."

15: The sounding of the seventh angel's trumpet is to be the time of the end and the outpouring of the third "woe". But once again we are brought to the brink of the end or even the announcement that the reign of Christ is about to commence. The anticipation is placed in the past tense even though it is yet to occur. The actual "woe" (consisting of the seven bowls of God's wrath) does not occur until chapter 16:1. So, again, the chronology must not be forced into some sequential pattern even though it seems confusing at times. The placing of an event yet to occur in the past tense is a literary form called a "prolepsis." Jesus used this in John 12:31 as he envisioned the defeat of Satan based on an event (His crucifixion and resurrection) about to become reality, "Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out." We have the same style of proleptic

announcements in 12:10; and 19:6-7. So here, "loud voices" make the proclamation of Christ's reign.

The best way for us to understand a prolepsis is to think of our last will and testament wherein we may state something to the effect, "I (we) bequeath our estate to the following beneficiaries..." It is signed, notarized and placed in safe keeping until such day that it is actuated. Yet we put the language in the present tense even though it refers to a future event yet to occur. At that future event, the language is temporally correct. The "New Covenant" also called "The New Testament"

16-18: The twenty-four elders continue the theme in prolepsis to God as they fall on their faces before Him. Now we see another chronological shuffle. "The nations raged" has been going on since the beginning of the chapter and God, speaking through Isaiah the prophet said to His rebellious and idolatrous people,

"They will pass through the land hard-pressed and famished, and it will turn out that when they are hungry, they will be enraged and curse their king and their God as they face upward." (8:21)

Then we see, "Your wrath came." But it isn't complete yet and in fact, the seven bowls of God's wrath have not begun to be poured out. Then we read that accompanying the wrath of God came the judgment of the dead, the reward of the bondservants, prophets, saints, those who fear God's name, the small and the great as well as destruction to those who destroy the earth, none of which has yet to appear in the vision. This is also prolepsis. When these themes are actually taken up and explained, we have a recapitulation.

19: John's vision is again moved upward toward the temple vision. The first appearance of the Ark of the Covenant (and the last in the Bible) tells us that 1: We are in the Holy of Holies when up to this point any reference to the temple has been the outer courts and the Holy Place. 2: Though once lost, the meaning and purpose of the Ark is not. It contained the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments given to Moses on the mount, the rod of Aaron that budded and a jar of manna. These are representative of the Law, the promises and the provisions of God for His people. Fulfillment of them all is before them in the person of God and the Lamb.

"...and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an

earthquake and a great hailstorm." These dramatic weather signs are representative of the power and presence of God to accomplish all that he has ordained. But the Kingdom of God cannot be established until God's enemies are vanquished, defeated and destroyed, or else there can be no peace and harmony. So we move to this fulfillment. But, first, we are presented with another interlude.

[Note: The material in Revelation has more of a spiritual intention and focus rather than a historical or chronological one. For example, it is popular to use Daniel, Revelation and other sources as guides to future historical occurrences such as determining the time of Christ's return and the events of the end times. It has been shown multiple times that, even with the best attempts to do this, all have been in error. Included are the differing times of the so called "rapture," end time and last day theories about who might be the antichrist and so on. All have found to be wrong and misleading. Not that there is no historical references reflected in Revelation, but the intent of then scripture is to reach the heart of the believer and even the unbeliever, not establish some chronology or be a calculator. It is intended to be an inspiration to buttress the faith of the believer in His or her God and His Lamb regardless of the historical circumstances one might find him or herself on the midst of. It is to be a support for our walk with God and to give understanding to all who see and understand the evil days in which we live and to teach us what kind of people we are to be in the midst of it all and why. The spiritual battle and need to be strengthened and encouraged takes place in the midst of history and that is the key issue, not the history itself.]

# THE BOOK OF REVELATION

## Chapter Twelve

Introduction:

The interlude to follow is one of the more difficult to interpret clearly. There are many overlapping symbols and images and the chronology is again inconsistent. There have been many interpretations of this passage, some with incredible gall. For example, Mary Baker Eddy sees herself prophesied here and her "true science of mind" the child to whom she gave birth. Ellen G. White did the same thing.

Many legitimate scholars have varying views and we will present some of the most important ones here. Let me say that we will see several more literary devices in this passage that will help us understand this interlude a little more accurately, for example, a symbolic image presented in a personification presenting a spiritual theme (i.e. 12:16). Matthew also did this when he quoted Hosea 12:1 where God spoke of the Exodus and said, "Out of Egypt I have called my son" wherein Matthew applied it to Jesus. (Matthew 2:15) We need to be cognizant that in the midst of an apocalyptic masterpiece, all kinds of surprises and apparent chronological inconsistencies are actually the norm.

As we begin to move toward the end of the present age in the text, we see the need to be reassured that the power of the Kingdom of God will be victorious over what we see as an ever growing power of evil – Satan's kingdom. Will God really be victorious and will our faith, hopes and dreams actually come true? While we await the outcome, considering that the wait often brings difficulty, persecution and pain, what is our role to be? These are the questions to which believers of every age need a sure answer.

We again see a persecution of God's people by the earthly powers of evil inspired by Satan. After dozens of these portraits beginning in chapter 1:9, and seeing the historical record of persecution and tribulation to God's people, whether Jew or Christian, one has to wonder 1: Why some deny this could ever happen, and 2: How it is often ignored in the abundant amount of scripture making reference to it. In the upcoming section we see Satan with a three and a half year rule of evil and attack against the before the final battle between God and the armies of Satan

The first vision of the interlude is of the woman and her seed and the dragon, 12:1-

17. The primary focus of chapter 12 and 13 is on the dragon and his frustrating but futile efforts to dismantle God's work and what he does to attempt to do so. The woman represents the invulnerable spiritual place where all believers find their security and peace.

Chapter 12 gives us two heavenly "signs." They are the woman (verses 1-2), and the dragon (verse 3 ff.). Both begin as visions in "heaven." The vision then transfers them both to earth. There is both a key spiritual message and a message for believers of things to watch for on the earth. The spiritual battle in "heaven" between these two entities becomes a spiritual battle upon earth within the hearts and souls of people.

Spending much time on this chapter, and seeing the complexities it can generate, I have drawn two simple conclusions. First, the visions underscore the dragon's (Satan's) impotence to have any effect on the secure position of the faithful saved through his normal activity of accusing, lying, deceiving, and threatening. He and his efforts are simply cast out of heaven and rejected as having any influence, voice or stand whatsoever. Still, he has a rage that motivates him to pursue and attack those of God's faithful (the woman's "offspring") upon earth using evil agents to do so even to the point of persecution and death. Those that are faithful are faithful to even the end of their physical lives, but their eternal destiny and reward is assured. The identity of both the woman and the dragon fit into this theme.

Second, There is displayed in the two signs the timeless tension between God and Evil. This is a spiritual reality that has affected human history. Not the other way around. It is difficult if not impossible to pin down either sign to a chronology, a historical framework or an individual, or group of people. The tension and war is on a spiritual level and could even be seen as that which goes on inside each of us. After all, it was mankind that gave the serpent his dominion as Genesis chapter 3 tells us and mankind is the source of evil in the world as the consequence.

12:1-6,

1: A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; 2: and she was with child; and she \*cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth. 3: Then another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads *were* seven diadems. 4:

And his tail \*swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child. 5: And she gave birth to a son, a male *child*, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne. 6: Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

1-3: "Great sign." The vision of the woman is designated as a "great sign", while the dragon in verse 3 is simply a "sign." Both are complex images with multiple facets which together present a spiritual message that regardless of the circumstances we face in this world and the apparent power of evil, God will reign supreme and His faithful followers will be glorified. The "great sign" is in "heaven" as is the dragon "sign" indicating something of significance. The significance seems to be that while the "woman" has great value and is protected and nourished by God, the "dragon" is cast out and banished. The reader will recognize that those who are God's are eternally secure and safe while the dragon's days are numbered and he faces destruction. The visions also denote a panorama of spiritual realities that stand behind and are, in a sense, the causes of human history. It is intended to be a cause of "wonder." We must be careful that our wondering hits the mark and does not go off into some forced area to fit our ideas of the meaning of these "signs." There are far more important ramifications than trying to wedge these upcoming visions into some timeline.

This is the first time the term "sign" is used in revelation. It will be employed six more times.

1a: The woman. To understand the many possible identifications of this woman, we need to include verse 17. She not only gives birth to the child here in verses 1-5, but to more children, namely those, "who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus." So the sign of the woman first is presented as a "mother." Plus, she transcends history and is seen to exist before, during and after the birth of Christ. We are seeing a spiritual representation within a familiar historical framework. But the framework is not the emphasis.

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\* The NASB uses an asterisk when the text uses the present tense but is translated as a past tense.. This is called a "historical present" as the author of the text uses the present tense to give life to the text and bring the reader into the action as if it is happening "right now."

But again, a woman? This is a new and unusual addition to the narrative. Furthermore, her primary role is seen as a mother.<sup>173</sup> This, I believe, is significant and helps understand the sign. The reason that a woman is depicted would likely indicate the Jewish tradition that it is the woman through whom the identification of a child is determined as Jewish or as an Israelite.<sup>174</sup> This has ramifications in terms of the child's heritage, birthright and that of his descendants. It is not a biological, but a spiritual matter. Without a mother who is a true believer in the Biblical God, the child is not considered a part of the family until such time as he or she converts to Judaism in their heart and mind. It is a matter of the soul, the inner heart and core that is at issue here, not the biology.<sup>175</sup>

First, this woman could represent the true and real people of God, those with faith (as that of Abraham) and the perseverance and faithfulness to God to death, the believing messianic community past, present and future. The matter of fleshly lineage is moot.<sup>176</sup> So what we have in the woman is a personification of both a spiritual and, to a much lesser degree, a historical reality. This type of personification in imagery is found in Isaiah 66. In 66:7, speaking about Jerusalem and the nation, the Lord says through the prophet, "Before she travailed, she brought forth; Before her pain came, she gave birth to a boy." In verse nine, the Lord states that it is He who actually brings forth the child. In fact, there are some other corresponding elements in that chapter that one will find quite interesting.

1b: She is clothed with the sun, moon under her feet and a crown (victory wreath) of twelve stars about her head. I see each element here as descriptive of victory, glory and authority. The victory wreath is given to the one who finishes and wins. The moon under the feet signifies authority over the seasons (as Judaism follows the lunar calendar, not the solar) and being clothed (or arrayed) by the sun displays her glory.

The twelve stars about her head immediately bring to mind the twelve patriarchs (tribes) and the twelve apostles and rightly so. Since the number twelve indicates the number for governing and especially God's governing through His people, this

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<sup>173</sup> Note: 12:2,4,5,13,17

<sup>174</sup> See the appendix articles on the, "Identity of a Child from a Jewish Mother."

<sup>175</sup> What is fascinating about this is that Jesus encountered Jewish men who claimed their heritage based on their biological lineage to Abraham, while Jesus birthright is based on His mother's lineage, as it should be. Ishmael, born of Hagar, a non-Jew is cast out, while Isaac, the child of Sarah is the heir. (See Galatians 4:21-31) Further, Ruth, the Moabitess, converted to Judaism, married Boaz and is an ancestor of King David as well as our Lord. She, due to her conversion is considered a Jew as are her children.

<sup>176</sup> See the excursus in the commentary on chapter 10 regarding "Israel."

display can be understood in that light as well. The entire vision of the woman and all her accouterments presents the sovereignty of God in creation and through those He has chosen to bring about the fulfillment of His plan of redemption in human history despite attempts to thwart it.

Second, though many attempt to limit this sign to Israel or to the church or to the church in heaven or to some pagan myth source, or as having no thought of the history of God's people or the church at all being symbolic of some sort of vague messianic theme without pointing to Jesus directly and so on, we see a much more expansive and yet specific picture from this sign. My impression is that this woman is a representative portrait of faith itself or at least the faithful people of God throughout the time God's redemptive plan is in play and as such have persevered and endured in faithfulness resulting in the fulfillment of His promises. As such, these faithful ones find their true identity, victory, authority and glory in God's sight. It is these faithful who did indeed, in spite of all of Satan's attempts to thwart it, bring forth the Messiah through a woman and through the faithfulness of this woman (in both senses) bring forth the children of God who believed and worshipped the Lamb of God who is blessed forever. Faith begets faithful.

Third, there have been suggestions that the woman is Mary, the mother of Jesus, or Israel, or the church. But if we were to try and assign a single entity to this woman, one could easily add Eve, Sarah, Leah, Rachel, Ruth, and so on including Mary. But we cannot leave out the twelve patriarchs, the twelve apostles, and, if Israel or the church is to be included a discussion would need to be held to determine whether it is Israel of the promise or the flesh and the same with the church ad- infinitum.

Fourth, I would offer that the woman represents all of this and more, in that the entire line of faith and promise believers bringing about the Messianic birth and the continued birth of new children of the Lord through faith in Christ is probably a fair assumption. Plus there is a divine, spiritual essence to this woman suggesting that she is an overarching spiritual force encompassing all she has given birth to.

Fifth, this leads to yet another possibility. I asked myself the question, "What is it that transcends history, gives spiritual and physical birth and life and is spiritual?" My answer was, "The Holy Spirit." But is there any justification for this possibility? Well, the Holy Spirit was with God in the creation (Genesis 1:2), was the "breath" of God that gave life to man, and where we are taught that God made man in His own image, male and female, we see the female aspect in God

Himself...something the Rabbis have recognized through the ages. Throughout the Scripture is seen as the breath and power of God. The Holy Spirit conceived Jesus in Mary's womb, and Jesus made it clear that one must be born "of the Spirit" to enter the kingdom of God and it the birth of the church in Acts, chapter two, came as the Holy Spirit fell upon the gathered disciples. So we have all the aspects of the woman represented in The Holy Spirit as well. But there are things that don't fit as well. The dragon persecutes her briefly in verse 13. She is "nourished in the wilderness" in verse 14 and so on.

Finally, the concept generated by the above possibility leads us to the idea of a divine "companion" or at least an aspect of God we could call His "female" essence. Perhaps a spiritual "wife" as some rabbis and theologians through the ages have speculated. Perhaps this idea is not so far-fetched if we think of the many references to the "Bride of Christ" for example.<sup>177</sup> This is a spiritual metaphor, but could it be applied to an entity that existed eternally even before creation? (See Genesis 1:26 noting that the word for "God" in that chapter is Elohim, a plural.)

So in conclusion, I would have to come to the conclusion that the woman is the divine spiritual mother of all God's people of faith from the beginning, and symbolic of the spiritual dynamic that brought about the true people of God, those all through the ages those who have believed and trusted in Him and are thereby secure in His hands. She is the beginning, the "mother" of the past, present and the future of God's Spirit filled people. As such she cannot be destroyed though her children can be killed.

2: Her cry comes from sharp pain, as her labor brings her to the birth of a man child. We think of Mary and the birth of Jesus. But the labor could be easily seen as the turmoil and persecution of God's people from the time of Abraham onward perhaps earlier as we consider Noah as well as all those times included up until the birth of Jesus and onward.

Included in those times would be the Egyptian captivity and slavery, the cruel dominance of Assyria, Babylonia, Media-Persia, Greece and Rome some whom attempted at times to scatter the Jews or even destroy them.<sup>178</sup> Yet, in spite of it all, God's plan persevered through the faith of His chosen ones and the Christ was brought into the world exactly in accord with the prophecies of old. In Isaiah 66, it

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<sup>177</sup> Notice Revelation 18:23; 19:7; 21:2; 21:9; 22:17

<sup>178</sup> Daniel chapters 2 and 8 reflect these as well.

is God who brings forth the child. The glory comes in the faith of God's people and the woman reflects that glory.

3. At the time of the pending birth of this "man child" another "sign" was seen in the heavenly sky. This one of the dragon, the nemesis of the woman and her children. The dragon is described as red and having, "seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems." Again, like the woman, a figure incorporating many elements of differing realities both historical and spiritual, but transcending any specific point in chronology. For example, the dragon, a spiritual entity, has seven heads and ten horns reflecting an earthly reality. He is seen in both in heaven, a spiritual realm and on earth, a physical realm. His image as a dragon or serpent covers all of time and beyond as does his activity. The heads and horns symbolize the agencies through whom the dragon exercises his power and deception. These agencies include both an empire or territory and political rulers.

We already know, though told later (verse 9), that the dragon is indeed the "Devil", (or Satan)<sup>179</sup> but the manifestation (or personification) of Satan comes to life in the powers of evil rulers. The seven heads with seven diadems is frequently descriptive of one "beast" or another, kingdoms and kings all in whom and through whom Satan works his evil.

Each of the seven heads sports a diadem, and if each has a horn, this leaves three horns to be placed somewhere.<sup>180</sup> In Daniel 7 there are four beasts and it is the fourth beast alone that has the ten horns. Then an eleventh pops up and pulls three horns out by the roots. In asking for an interpretation, Daniel is told that the beasts are kingdoms and that the horns are kings. Likewise here, the seven heads are kingdoms, each with a diadem of rule, and each horn is a ruler of the kingdom. In 13:1, it is each of the ten horns wearing a diadem.

These rulers are controlled by and are agents of the "ruler of this world", (John 12:31) the "prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience." (Ephesians 2:2) They are manifestations of the character of the dragon. The additional horns may represent, as they do in Daniel, the usurping of power by an end time ruler who "uproots" others and takes the ascendancy as we see happening both later in the book and in the letters of Paul.

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<sup>179</sup> And in 20:2 where the defined also as the "serpent" of old.

<sup>180</sup> "Diadem" not "crown." The "crown" (normally "stephanos" in the Greek) is a victory wreath given to victors. A "diadem" is either a significant band indicating authority wrapped around the forehead as the Arabs do, or we can understand this as an ornament of ruling authority or kingship placed on the head often called by us a "tiara" or "crown." But Biblically, between the crown and the diadem there is a distinct difference in what each denotes.

The description of entities having seven heads and ten horns seems to define the dragon of chapter 12, the beast of chapter 13 and the beast of chapter 17. "Ten horns" are also prevalent in Daniel 7 and we must consider all of this in our identifications as we proceed. In every case, there is a correspondence to Satan and his overall authority in whatever bears these distinctive features. Again, this takes us to the spiritual realm as it is the "spirit working in the sons of disobedience" that brings the wrath of God upon them and that spirit is "according to the prince of the power of the air." (Ephesians 2:2, 5:6; Colossians 3:6) The image of "seven heads" on a dragon or serpent is very prevalent in non-biblical ancient literature from the mid-east when personifying the entity of evil.

4: The sweeping of a third of the stars of heaven by his tail before he stands before the woman can suggest several possibilities. First, and most likely in my mind, is that it is based on the reference in Daniel 8:8-10 that says,

8: "Then the male goat magnified *himself* exceedingly. But as soon as he was mighty, the large horn was broken; and in its place there came up four conspicuous *horns* toward the four winds of heaven. 9: Out of one of them came forth a rather small horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Beautiful *Land*. 10: It grew up to the host of heaven and caused some of the host and some of the stars to fall to the earth, and it trampled them down."

This reference in Daniel is nearly universally recognized as referring to Alexander the Great ("the male goat") whose death caused his empire to be divided into four territories, the most significant for the Jews being general Seleucus from whom came the conqueror Antiochus IV Epiphanes. In brief, a revolt between traditional Jews and Hellenistic Jews broke out over which faction would control the high priesthood in Jerusalem. The traditional Jews overcame and exiled the Hellenistic Jews who appealed to Antiochus who came to their support.

So in c. 167 B.C. Antiochus entered Jerusalem and devastated the priesthood and defiled the temple. The temple in Jerusalem was looted and he put a stop to the constant practice of offering a daily sacrifice of expiation for three and a half years. The practice of traditional Judaism was outlawed, circumcision was prohibited and he ordered pigs to be sacrificed on the altar. In a revolt, the Jews were able to drive out the Syrian army, but lost many of its leading "stars" in the process. However, the great victory is celebrated each year and called

Hanukkah, "The Feast of Lights" or "The Feast of Dedication (of the reinstatement of traditional Judaism when the new altar was dedicated once again to God's service.)" It is celebrated for eight days. This period commemorates the miracle of the olive oil. Olive oil was needed for the menorah in the Temple, which was required to burn throughout the night every night. The story goes that there was only enough oil to burn for one day, yet it burned for eight days, the time needed to prepare a fresh supply of oil for the menorah."<sup>181</sup>

Here in Revelation 12:4, we see the dragon sweeping a third of the "stars" in heaven to the earth. "Stars" are generally representative of God's leaders working to fulfill His purposes on the earth. In this scenario, Satan would be seen as having cast the righteous rulers, prophets and priests to the earth in destruction as in Daniel 8:10. Also, the idea of important and righteous people called "stars" is frequent in the Old Testament. For example, in Daniel 12:3, "Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. And in Genesis 37:9 Joseph calls his mother, father and brothers "stars" and God told Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars of heaven.

On the other hand, there is a reference in Jude 1:9-13 that describe men in verse for in an unusual way. Verse 4 reads,

For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Jude describes them,

10: But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed. 11: Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. 12: These are the men who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead,

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<sup>181</sup> The stories of this period are told in I and II Maccabees, Josephus in "Wars of the Jews", Book I, and reflected in Daniel and Revelation.

uprooted; 13: wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam; *wandering stars*, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever.

Some think that perhaps these stars refer to angels, those that oppose Satan seen as defeated or those that support him placed in a position to aid Satan in his quest of destruction. There is precedent for stars being understood as angels or messengers as we even read in Revelation 1:20.

Still, there are no references to fallen angels helping Satan, nor would the timing or context of this "sweeping" fit angelic intention. The dragon is displaying wrath and the sweeping tail takes place prior to the woman giving birth suggesting a period of time in Satan's failing efforts to thwart God's plan from the beginning and now stands poised to continue to do so by waiting the birth so he can devour her child. In I Peter 5:8 we read the cryptic warning, "Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." This has been a timeless trait, but one that, despite all efforts, will ultimately fail.

In the spiritual sense, this displays Satan's efforts to dissuade, rob and devour from anything that would keep a believer from persevering in his walk and faithfulness to God. In modern terms, Satan is trying to abort the newly conceived child of God, and if that can't be done, every effort will be made to destroy the faith of the new born child and thus the child himself.

5a: The woman, after great travail, and threat her child will be devoured gives birth anyway and it is a "male child." The description following cannot be mistaken for any except the Messiah. The phrase "rod of iron" comes directly from the Messianic second Psalm. In its entirety it reads,

1: Why are the nations in an uproar And the peoples devising a vain thing?  
2: The kings of the earth take their stand And the rulers take counsel together Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, 3: "Let us tear their fetters apart And cast away their cords from us!" 4: He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them. 5: Then He will speak to them in His anger And terrify them in His fury, saying, 6: "But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain." 7: "I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. 8: 'Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the *very* ends of the earth as Your possession. 9: '***You shall***

*break them with a rod of iron*, You shall shatter them like earthenware."  
10: Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; Take warning, O judges of the earth. 11: Worship the LORD with reverence And rejoice with trembling. 12: Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish *in* the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!

The psalm is quite germane to the study in which we are engaged. The phrase "rod of iron" is also seen in Revelation 2:27 and 19:15. In both instances there is no question that the subject is Jesus and/or those ruling with Him.

5b: "Caught up..." The efforts of Satan through his agencies whether historical or at the time of Christ's birth and crucifixion are not able to prevent the redemptive plan of God for mankind from being accomplished. He was caught up to His rightful throne and from there judgment will be forthcoming.

6: This verse is difficult to understand as so many possibilities could be offered for its interpretation. The challenges arise when one tries to figure out what the idea of what "nourishment" in the wilderness means and where the 3 1/2 years fit in.

First, the word "nourished" ("trepho" in the original) indicates a growth, a strengthening and a "stiffening." For some, if the woman represents the church or Israel, this event might be seen as the protection of those raptured at the end of the age, prior to the tribulation. But this would be a difficult interpretation when one considers verse 17. We see that Satan is determined to destroy her, but is unable to do so. However, verse 17 tells us neither she nor her "male child" can be touched but that her children, the faithful who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus, are the targets of the dragon's wrath. So she cannot be herself and her children at the same time.

If we see the woman as a eternal spiritual image, then we can see that she cannot ever be touched as "she" is secure in God, yet her spiritual mission and birthing of new souls into the kingdom continues on the earth. But those who remain physically on the earth now become the target of Satan's wrath.

But how does that fit in with the 3 1/2 years? We can state with some confidence that the 3 1/2 year period is the time of intensified evil directed at God and His people in the end time. In one sense if the 3 1/2 years indicates the time of Satan's wrath, the people of God are not protected from this at all as we have seen. We are

again projected into the future. Thus the 31/2 years once again seem to set out the period of tribulation just prior to the outpouring of God's wrath we see begun in chapter 8. Coincidentally, the nourishment of the woman, the spiritual resource for God's people, takes place during the same 31/2 year period as the dragon's wrath against her children. Perhaps the persecution itself is the means of strengthening His people. And perhaps her nourishment is that which is transmitted as mother to child.

In our view of history we have seen concerted efforts to wipe out the Jews and the church – the depositories and proclaimers of God's truth as presented in the Scripture. But all efforts have failed and often we have heard of the suffering and persecution of God's saints actually used to bring - by the witness of those suffering – many of the persecutors to Christ.

But another view is that the 31/2 year period indicates the church age until the time God pours out His wrath upon those who dwell on the earth. Though this view seems attractive, this view of the 31/2 year period is not supported by other passages using this time frame.

Bottom line, the overall vision is that of victory for God's saints and frustration and defeat for the evil one. The question is not so much how we try to understand all this is some historical context, but who we are in the midst of any historical environment in which we might find ourselves immersed. The message is one that magnifies the importance and reward of our faith.

Later, in verses 13 and 14 we see a repetition of this scenario.

12:7- 12

7: And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war, 8: and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. 9: And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. 10: Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night. 11: "And they overcame him because of the blood

of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death. 12: "For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has *only* a short time."

Comment:

We seem to have an insertion in the interlude which itself is an insertion in the events of the 7<sup>th</sup> seal, which stands between the sixth angelic trumpet plague (the second "woe") and the seventh angelic trumpet plague (the third "woe") . There is a significant passage in Daniel 12 that corresponds to our text, and the general theme of Revelation,

1: "Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands *guard* over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. 2: Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace *and* everlasting contempt. 3: Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever." Daniel 12:1-3

The scene transitions from a heavenly perspective to an earthly one as Satan is seen being thrown to earth with his angels. Are the questions to be, "When is this supposed to have happened?" "Is this a past event?" "An event presented in the time of Christ and the apostolic age?" "Or is it a future perspective?" "Or none?" "Is this to be understood as having more a spiritual connotation rather than reflective of a historical period?" I believe this last question brings us closer to the intent.

The content is quite simple and easy to understand from verse 9 and onward. It is verses 7 and 8 that cause us to scratch our heads a little. Let's look at two options.

A. If we try to place this event in the stream of time, it causes some confusion as to do so could place this event in several places; before creation itself, in the creation account, to the time Christ was born to the time He told His disciples that their ministry caused Jesus to see "Satan fall" (Luke 10:18). Then there is John's recording of Jesus' comment in light of His pending crucifixion, "Now

judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out" to the future end time and so on. And here we have it again.

There is dissatisfaction in trying to calendar this vision. If we stay within the linear framework in the vision, it would appear that after the woman gives birth, Satan goes to back into heaven (verses 3-4) for some reason and a war breaks out and he and his angels are cast down and take out their wrath on the other children of the woman. But what are we to make of this? There is no statement that the dragon returned to heaven, nor an indication of when the "war" took place and what it consisted of except that afterwards the dragon pursued the woman, and failing to destroy her went after her children.

B. If we see this as a spiritual matter, there is a great deal of support for this view beginning at Genesis 3. Several thousand years later Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:10-13,

10: Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. 11: Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12: For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. 13: Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

The "angels" could be seen as demonic forces or even as false prophets who, though once apparently dedicated to the Lord have found their true identity in spreading a false gospel and trying to move God's people into the way of the evil one.

Still, the battle is always within. Whether there is an external oppression or not, the battle is spiritual. Paul makes an argument for this in I Corinthians 2:9-14

9: "...but just as it is written, "THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND *which* HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM." 10: For to us God revealed *them* through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. 11: For who among men knows the *thoughts* of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the *thoughts* of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. 12: Now we have

received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, 13: which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*. 14: But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

To appraise the word of God spiritually before attempting to structure it according to human wisdom is what I am getting at. We need not get so hung up on historical and chronological efforts to make it all fit that we miss the spiritual significance of what is being taught. Bottom line, Satan has been excluded from having any influence or power upon those who are secure in God through their faith. As both the woman and the dragon are heavenly visions, we see the woman protected and nourished while Satan is cast out. This is simply an illustration to show that Satan has no say in the destiny of those who have placed their faith in God and the Lamb. They are secure in Him while he is now exiled.

John wrote a simple view of this in his first epistle (I John 5:19-20),

19: We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in *the power of* the evil one. 20: And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life."

That is the spiritual foundation in the middle of a historical environment.

7a: "War" in heaven. An apocalyptic scene wherein it is clear to the reader that any effort by the dragon to have a heavenly power or influence will not be tolerated by the Lord. In fact, it is not the Lord who cast the dragon out with his angels but the archangel Michael and his angels who do so. However, this entire scene expresses a spiritual reality and not a chronological or historical one because the chronological or historical setting of this can be seen as occurring repeatedly from before creation to the end of time.

We have the promise of the "serpent" having his head crushed by the offspring of Eve in Genesis 3:15. His appearance in the Garden could be interpreted as fulfilling the outcome of this war as some speculate. The remainder of his activity is seen on earth in the scriptures for the most part; He tempts Jesus at the beginning of our Savior's ministry; he enters Judas' heart; he takes away the word

sowed on hard ground; he binds a daughter of Abraham in bent over pain; he roars about like a lion seeking whom he may devour; he demands to sift Peter like wheat; he appears as an angel of light (messenger of truth); works in the sons of disobedience and is "the prince of the power of the air." But at the same time Jesus tells the disciples that during their ministry He saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning; that Satan has already been judged; he is soon to be crushed under the feet of the believers; and has been cast down from heaven to the earth. Well, this can't be placed in any specific historical or chronological setting.

So the message must be something else. Simply put, the Lord and His faithful are victorious over Satan and all his schemes. This is the reality in heaven whether we see it in our history or not. To be consistent in our understanding, the best idea is to see the personification and story of the dragon in the same light as that of the woman. Both stories transcend any attempt to place them in a historical or chronological setting and both are in contrast to one another, one being of the faith filled people of God and the other standing in total contrast to this - in other words a permanent adversarial conflict. The word "Satan" or "Devil" means "adversary." Yet those who have placed their faith in God through Christ are secure and immune from any influence, accusation or power the Devil may try and wield. He is done as far as they are concerned.

7b. Michael and his angels and the dragon and his angels. Michael is noted in Jude as being the "archangel", that is, the chief angel. He has command over an army of other angels. The dragon (Satan) is never specifically called an "angel" in the scriptures. It is often assumed and misinterpretations of Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 are often used to form a story of the "fallen angel." But this is inaccurate. Still, he has his own "angels." He is, of course, a created being and as such has been given the role of "adversary" and "tempter." His exact make up is uncertain but he is seen as among the demons and perpetrators of evil. He has a limited authority, a limited free will, and is under the direct authority of God. He is also subject to those who are bonded to Christ. That is why he is cast out by the use of Jesus' name. Satan's slander and accusations of the saints before God have no place in heaven as the sacrifice of the Lamb has forever eradicated all guilt for those for who the Lamb died. The timing of the war that is waged is inconsequential. The outcome is the focus.

8a: The dragon and his angels were not as mighty as Michael and his angels and there was no longer a "place" found for them. This is interesting in that as one studies this idea of a "place" one finds that there is scriptural evidence for realms in

the spiritual "heaven." These realms house certain created beings that are sent or released at times of God's choosing for His purposes. For example, in Jude 1:6 we read,

"And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day,..."

This fits in with many statements in Revelation regarding the abyss, and we read in 20:1-3

1: "Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. 2: And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; 3: and he threw him into the abyss, and shut *it* and sealed *it* over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time."

The binding and releasing of the "dragon" is totally in God's control. Therefore, we can conclude that Satan and all his company are used by God for the purpose of securing the genuine conversion, faith and perseverance of those who turn to Him.<sup>182</sup> The message of salvation is to be proclaimed by us who are to be the "light of the world." Our lives are to have no higher purpose. Our bond to and love for the things of this world must weaken and our bond to and love for God and His kingdom and its king must strengthen. The testimony and witness of the faithful, even under severe persecution, will be used by God to bring souls to Christ. As Paul said, "But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God." Acts 20:24

9a: There is no mistaking the identity of the dragon.

9b. "...who deceives the whole world..." The word "deceive" means to provide a message purporting to be the truth but which actually causes a wandering away from the truth. The scripture is filled with warnings about false prophets and deceivers in the world. Satan's agents, even his "angels" (literally messengers)] can be these who spew deception. Paul said it simply,

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<sup>182</sup> See the appendix on articles regarding "testing" and the importance to the believer to know that he is indeed God's child and filled with the pure gold of faith.

"But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of *devotion* to Christ."

II Corinthians 11:3

Satan cannot deceive God and so, after being thrown down his last effort will be to try and deceive God's people. John tells us that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one (I John 5:19) but at the same time Jesus commands the gospel to be proclaimed in the whole world. Thus we have the perpetual conflict between the woman and the dragon, but those who are represented by the woman are totally secure. It is interesting also that a woman, normally thought of as the "weaker sex" would be seen as the victor over the great and terrible power of Satan.

9c: "...thrown down to the earth..." In all actuality, it was the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ that ultimately defeated Satan's power.<sup>183</sup> It was then that he was "cast down." This was, of course, determined from before creation. Each time a soul turns in faith to Christ, Satan – the liar, deceiver, adversary and tempter is again defeated. Verses 10-11 attest to this as they read,

10-11: 10: "Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night. 11: And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death."

The tenses in this paragraph are interesting. Again, we have a prolepsis. We have in the present tense, "the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come," the past tense declares the accuser thrown down, as well as the overcoming of the accuser by the brethren. In other words, it is a look back from a future that has yet to occur. In any case, the accusations of the dragon against "our brethren" are no longer valid nor heard. The dragon is now possessed by great anger.

The "overcoming" of Satan by the "brethren" is not some spiritual or physical battle on the part of the believer, but because Satan has been defeated by the blood of Christ and those who are His participate in His victory. Their "testimony" of their faith is sufficient to grant them the victory because of what He has done.

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<sup>183</sup> John 12:27-33; John 16:7-11; Acts 26:18; Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14.

As Paul declares, "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place." II Corinthians 2:14

Yes, we are to stand firm and resist the wiles of the evil one as Paul teaches in Ephesians 6:10-18. But we must realize that it is God's armor that protects us from the "flaming arrows of the evil one." It is not our armor, but God's. And that armor begins first of all with "truth" which in itself will be a mainstay to keep deception at bay. However once again, the narrative indicates that our stand must be consistent through death.

So we have again the announcement, and again a postponement of the actual fulfillment of the announcement as there is more to the narrative to be told.

12a: There is confirmation of a two-fold effect, that is, 1. Rejoicing in heaven for the overthrow of the enemy and, 2. Woe upon the earth and sea. This phrase encapsulates the age long conflict between the woman and the dragon, God's own people versus the power behind evil. The rejoicing is that God is victorious and His people are saved because of the sacrifice of the lamb, an event incidentally and ironically perpetrated by Satan himself in ignorance (I Corinthians 2:6-9). We see in John 16:20 that Jesus, speaking of His pending death said to His disciples, "Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy."

And in Matthew 5:12, "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Only a true believer can rejoice in the midst of persecution. Acts 5:41 tells us that Peter and the apostles, after being arrested, interrogated and flogged, "...went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for *His* name."

12b. "Woe..." While the heavens rejoice, the earth faces "woe." The devil is the cause of woe for those on the earth faithful to the Lord. This is not the "third woe" or "seventh angelic trumpet plague." The preface to the final attack upon God's people is a dramatic defeat of Satan. This encourages the faithful and helps them to persevere under the persecution. Though they are assured victory, they still suffer martyrdom. As Jesus said,

"But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name's sake. It will lead to an opportunity for your testimony. So make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves; for I will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute. But you will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put *some* of you to death, and you will be hated by all because of My name. Yet not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives." Luke 21:12-19

12:13-17

13: And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male *child*. 14: But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. 15: And the serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood. 16: But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth. 17: So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

13: John now continues the vision of Satan's effort to destroy the woman and her children. In verse 6, the woman fled to the wilderness to a place God had prepared for her for three and a half years. Now, the Dragon is seen as persecuting her even before that occurrence - unless she went into the wilderness twice for 3 ½ years to be "nourished" - which is unlikely. So this is a reprise, adding the persecution of the Dragon to her flight into the "wilderness."

14: Her flight was facilitated by two wings of "the great eagle" given to her. Though there is the definite article and the adjective "great", there is no other reference to this "great eagle" in scripture. Perhaps the first century readers had some idea of the identity of this image other than a "great eagle." So with these wings, the woman flies to the wilderness. This is simply an image that the woman cannot be touched or effected by the dragon.

The "wilderness" designates a desolate, dry desert environment often in the rugged, dry hills filled with rocky canyons and caves. A place of isolation and solitude is often sought in the "wilderness." There she found "her place"(prepared by God in verse 6). She was "nourished" for 3 ½ years away from the presence of Satan. This imagery harkens back to the experience of Obadiah and Elijah. There are remarkable similarities.

First, in I Kings 18:3-4, Ahab called Obadiah who *was* over the household. (Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly; for when Jezebel destroyed the prophets of the LORD, Obadiah took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifties in a cave, and provided them with bread and water.)

Second, the Prophet Elijah had caused a 3-1/2 year drought. In the encounter with the prophets of Baal, Elijah had the altar and sacrifice filled and soaked with water and the Lord consumed it all with fire from heaven. Then he fled the wrath of Jezebel into the wilderness where angels cared for him until he came to a cave near Horeb where the Lord spoke to him.

In the case of this "woman" it is interesting that she is nourished while her children are attacked. My thought is that the spiritual life the woman represents is strengthened on behalf of her children and the dragon cannot defeat it though he steps up his rage and attack on her children during this 3 1/2 year period.

15-16: Either these verses fit best between verses 13 and 14 or the dragon finds the woman in the wilderness and attempts to drown her. This image is unusual and not drawn directly from any ancient or Biblical source. But we do think of Biblical times when floods or tides (such as the Red Sea) crashed upon the evil efforts of men who wished to destroy God's people as God preserved His own from harm. Yet these do not fit John's image at all.

Here, it is a torrent by the dragon that is swallowed up by the earth to preserve the woman. The earth is personified and given a "mouth" with which to catch the flood. These are spiritual images depicting the hopelessness of the dragon (evil) in attempting to thwart or destroy the spiritual work of God in people. This has brought the dragon to the point of rage.

17: The rage of the dragon in not being able to affect the woman at all now is turned toward the physical beings on the earth during this 3 1/2 year period. If he could have destroyed the spiritual mother, there would be no more children. But

since that has proven impossible, he is left with attacking human believers. In this summary, we can see the timeless spiritual reality before us.

He makes "war" with them. This is done, of course, through his agents both political and religious – the details we shall see shortly. Some would only see Messianic Jews in the description of the dragon's war with "the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus", while all the "Gentile" believers have been raptured. This of course makes no sense since in Christ there is "no Jew or Gentile" (Galatians 3:28). Further, the John's authorship of this volume is supported by his own letters which state,

I John 3:22-24, 22: "... and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. 23: This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. 24: The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

I John 4:21, "And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also."

I John 5:1-3, 1: "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the *child* born of Him. 2: By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. 3: For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome."

And of course quoting Jesus in his gospel, "This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you." John 15:12

Even Paul made it clear that we as believers in Jesus are not under the law, but neither given license to break the Law. He noted, "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled *the* law."

Romans 13:8 and, " Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of *the* law." Romans 13:10

Both apostles recognize that love, the first fruit of the Spirit, fulfills the law the same way Jesus love for us in giving His life for his neighbor, fulfilled the law. (John 15:13)

So there is no cause to bring separation between Jews and Gentiles in one's theology, especially when God has brought them together into one body in Christ. (Ephesians 2:11-22)

# **THE BOOK OF REVELATION**

## **Chapter Thirteen**

Introduction:

Chapter 13 continues the interlude between the sixth trumpet plague and the seventh which is comprised of seven bowls of God's wrath poured out on the wicked. In this chapter we are introduced to the two beasts. But we need to note that chapter 13:1 needs to immediately follow 12:17 where the dragon is seen as going off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.. and then John says, "...the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore. The spiritual war now moves from heaven to earth and takes place in the hearts and souls of people.

John writes, "Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns *were* ten diadems, and on his heads *were* blasphemous names." The beast from the sea is in the image of the dragon. This beast is an allied empire of nations represented by a powerful individual political person. The heads are kingdoms in alliance against God and the children of the woman. The horns represent political power wielded by a human being. In John's vision, the beast is a composite of Daniel's beasts as we will see.

This transition is important as now we see that the beast coming up from the sea has been beckoned by the dragon who stands on the seashore, enraged against the children of the woman and thus brings forth a beast in his own image. The "beast" from the sea is one agent the dragon now beckons to help him accomplish this war. The beast from the earth is another.

### **THE BEAST FROM THE SEA**

13:1-4,

1: And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore. Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns *were* ten diadems, and on his heads *were* blasphemous names. 2: And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like *those* of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power

and his throne and great authority. 3: *I saw* one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed *and followed* after the beast; 4: they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?"

1a: As noted in the comments of chapter 12:3, the seven heads are indicative of a political empire or territory, and ten horns are indicative of earthly rulers who do the bidding of the dragon. In this case we have a rare unified alliance. The beast is in the image of the dragon with some minor differences. So you have an identification with Satan and his evil intentions and powerful earthly rulers who do his bidding. In Daniel, chapter 7:7, we find this ten horned image for the first time,

"After this I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns."

The "Ancient of Days" tells Daniel a little later in chapter 7:23-26,

"...The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth, which will be different from all the *other* kingdoms and will devour the whole earth and tread it down and crush it. As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings." 7:23-24

Although this beast is often identified with Rome, we are confident that this image reflects Alexander the Great and his generals, especially the Seleucids and Antiochus IV.<sup>184</sup>

1b: Likewise here, the seven heads are kingdoms, each with a diadem of rule, and each horn is a ruler of the kingdom. In 13:1, it is each of the ten horns wearing a diadem rather than on each of the seven heads as the dragon was described in 12:3. This indicates earthly rule. In 17, these are indeed seen as kings. He comes out of the sea. The sea often was thought of as a vast, deep, mysterious darkness in which dwelt monsters of many kinds.

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<sup>184</sup> See: Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 7, Zondervan, 1985.

Isaiah the prophet wrote,

"For behold, the LORD is about to come out from His place, to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; And the earth will reveal her bloodshed And will no longer cover her slain. In that day the LORD will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, With His fierce and great and mighty sword, Even Leviathan the twisted serpent; And He will kill the dragon who *lives* in the sea. Isaiah 26:21-27-1

The sea was a fearful place and many in the ancient world held deep seated superstitions about it. The sea also corresponds with the abyss in 17.

1c: "On his heads" that is on each forehead. "Blasphemous names" means that on each forehead of the seven headed beast was a name indicating the focus of the faith and belief of each kingdom. Each head proclaims itself to be God or pronounce allegiance to Satan as God. In this case the names are an insult to God and Christ denying His true place as God, anti-God, anti-Christ, insulting and profaning the name of God and His Lamb.

2: The description of the beast is the same as in Daniel 7:3-7 except that Daniel sees four separate beasts while John describes the same attributes to the one composite beast from the sea – a single end time alliance embodying the same attributes as Daniel's ancient kingdoms but in one entity and therefore attributed with the combined power of three of Daniel's beasts.

Daniel writes, "...I was looking in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. And four great beasts were coming up from the sea, different from one another." (Daniel 7:2-3) He then goes on to describe four beasts, one like a lion, one like a bear, one like a leopard and one terrible beast with ten horns on its head. Daniel's beasts, depict the power and authority over nations as ruled by Assyria/Babylon, The Medes, The Persians and the Greek Empire (Alexander and his succeeding four generals). Some feel that Daniel 7:7 (the terrible beast) and Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great statue in Daniel, chapter 2:31-45 includes Rome (2:40-43).<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> There are several visions in the book of Daniel about Empires and Conquerors. In Chapter 2, there is the vision of the "great statue." Daniel interprets the head of Gold as Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian Empire, The following empire (represented by a chest and arms of silver) is seen by some commentators as the inferior Medo-Persian Empire, the third (represented by a belly and thighs of bronze) as the Greek Empire and the legs of iron and feet of iron and clay interpreted as Rome. However, the interpretation might be better understood as Babylon, The Medes, The Persians and the Greeks. In chapter 7 we have the vision as discussed in the commentary. And in chapter 8,

In Revelation 13 the beast from the sea is described in reverse order to Daniel's list, which is in the historical order. We have a single beast with the body of a leopard (or panther) [The Persian (or Greek Empire)], the feet of a bear (The Median or Medo/Persian Empire), and the mouth of a lion (The Assyrian/ Babylonian Empire). The point in Revelation 13:1-2 is that we seem to have here an alliance of nations or empires in one composite beast not seen in history before and it has a religious basis. The only historical alliance of nations with a common religious basis has been the Ottoman Empire now extinct but its basis has expanded beyond Turkey to most of the Mediterranean nations and the Middle East.<sup>186</sup> Islam is the religious basis for the entire territory. Israel stands alone in the midst of these Muslim nations.

Regardless of whether Rome is seen in either of these visions is moot, because, 1. Rome is alluded to in Revelation and, 2. This end time "beast" is a single entity displaying the power, rule, viciousness and territory of all the previous empires seen in both Daniel and Revelation. It exceeds the threat and lawlessness of any of the previous empires as well. The single beast comprised of all of them could be a personification of the Roman Empire or of all the empires. The common link they all share is their control over the same territory, the Mediterranean and Mid-East nations. However, The Roman Empire was not an alliance of cooperating nations with a single agenda based in a religious unity as the beast in Revelation 13:2 appears to be. His power, throne and authority were directly from the dragon. The mention of a "throne" indicates an end time "world-wide"<sup>187</sup> political authority the likes of which the world has never seen before.

3a: The fatal wound that was healed is that of both one head and also apparently the entire beast if we consider verses 12 and 14. In any case, it manifests itself ultimately in a personification because later, in verses 14 and 15 a statue is built before whom people worship. Identifying this image in a historical sense is difficult and as a first possibility, there has been proposed by some that this is

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there is no question that the Ram is the Persian Empire (or Medo-Persian Empire) and the Goat is the Greek Empire under Alexander with the four horns being the four divisions of his empire led by Antipater and Cassander (Greece and Macedonia), Lysimachus (Thrace and Asia Minor) Seleucus I (Syria, Lebanon, Israel) and Ptolemy I (Judah and Egypt). The little horn is Antiochus IV Epiphanies, descendant of the Seleucids.

<sup>186</sup> The Ottoman Empire, empire created by Turkish tribes in Anatolia was one of the most powerful states in the world during the 15th and 16th centuries. It spanned more than 600 years and came to an end only in 1922, when it was replaced by the Turkish Republic and various successor states in southeastern Europe and the Middle East.

<sup>187</sup> The term "world-wide" normally includes the nations surrounding the Mediterranean Sea plus parts of Europe, and the Mid-East. This was the territory that affected the nation of Israel and to whom God and His prophets addressed their messages. i.e. This territory was and is the focus of the scriptural experience. In the last days the same territory is under scrutiny. This does not mean that other nations outside of this region are excluded however.

reflective of the suicide of Nero on June 9, 68 A.D. after being deposed by the senate. He apparently was to have slashed his own throat with a sword. But then rumors arose that he did not die, but escaped to Parthia and appeared alive some time later. None of this was ever verified nor denied. But it fits the idea that the wound the beast bore seemed to be a fatal one but was not. Further, there was a persecution of Christians under Nero in the City of Rome and apparently Paul suffered execution under his rule as did (according to tradition) Peter. But this is a rather far-fetched idea for a late first century document. By this time, anything to do with Nero would be several decades in the past.

However, the idea of a resurrected leader would imitate Christ's resurrection and be of great wonder to the world. We will need to see how this plays out either in a historical sense or a spiritual sense. But there is a definite correlation between Christ and a false Christ as we will see, although this beast is an empire and it well may be the empire that fell and another (of a type of the beast) rose up.<sup>188</sup>

The second possibility is that the Roman Empire rose out of the demise of the Greek Empire even as the Greek empire rose out of the Medo-Persian Empire and so on. In fact, Rome and Greece shared much in common and common Greek continued to be the written language of the outer territories of the Roman Empire. In either case, the final beast from the sea will have a seemingly fatal wound that is apparently healed. This is looked upon in the same way by the world as Christ's resurrection is by the church. But the fatal wound is by a "sword" (verse 14) and this indicates "war." In verse 5, a "mouth" is given to the beast. This mouth must be a single ruler of the alliance or confederacy. The leader of an empire who at one time seemed to be killed, but now is viable again.

Considering the historic empires of the Mediterranean area, and looking at the present religious rule of the same area, it would seem that we ought to keep our eyes on Islam. Most of the same territory governed by the ancient empires is now governed by Islamic nations. Further, if one looks back at the fourteen hundred year history of Islam, one can point to the crusades as an attempted fatal blow to the head, only to see a resurgence of Islam. Finally, considering that Jesus pointed to the "abomination of desolation standing in the holy place" as a sign, we see the Dome of the Rock in that exact place for nearly fourteen hundred years now. A ruler of Islamic persuasion could fulfill the vision. Perhaps something to consider.

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<sup>188</sup> See the commentary in chapter 17:8-14.

3b-4: The apparent resurrection of the beast (note 5:6 regarding Christ, as the same words are used there) causes amazement in the whole earth. The power of the dragon to bring this about and give his authority to the beast caused worship of both. It is incomprehensible to even think of opposing such power, let alone go to war against it. A rhetorical question is posed, "Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?" Best to submit and worship the earth decides. But for the Christian, the answer is obvious, "The Lamb that was really slain and raised from the dead will be able to not only wage war with the beast, but defeat him.

13:5-7, (These verses directly correspond with Daniel 7:19-25. Note the highlighted comparisons)

Rev. 13:5-7

5: There was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him. 6: And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, *that is*, those who dwell in heaven. 7: It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him.

Daniel 7:19-25

19: "Then I desired to know the exact meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its claws of bronze, *and which* devoured, crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet, 20: *and the meaning* of the ten horns that *were* on its head and the other *horn* which came up, and before which three *of them* fell, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth uttering great *boasts* and which was larger in appearance than its associates. 21: "I kept looking, and that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them 22: until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom. 23: "Thus he said: 'The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth, which will be different from all the *other* kingdoms and will devour the whole earth and tread it down and crush it. 24: 'As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings. 25: 'He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to

make alterations in times and in law;<sup>189</sup> and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time."

5: This beast from the sea is now given a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies. In other words, the end time world political empire now has a leader and a spokesman who personifies and speaks for the political entity. This "mouth" (what is "spoken") is definitely given him by the dragon. And though he receives his power, throne and great authority from the dragon, his ability to act for 42 months (31/2 years) is an imposed limitation by God.<sup>190</sup> This is the prophesied period for the end time persecution of God's saints by evil rulers empowered by the dragon.

6: He speaks aloud to the world and blasphemes God, and all those who have been faithful to God throughout history. This is not just human expressions involving cursing and swearing but demeaning and desecrating the person, people and power of God. Assuredly this would include the Scriptures, both Jews and Christians, the synagogue and the church and all that have demonstrated faith and devotion to the God of Heaven as revealed in the Bible.

7: He strikes out against God's faithful and overcomes them. In other words, there is a massive end time attack and persecution against those who name the name of God or Christ. He seeks to turn people away from Christ even to the point of bringing them or their loved ones to death. But even then, faithfulness to death is a victory and death cannot stop the blessings of God upon the faithful.<sup>191</sup>

He also has political power over the "world."<sup>192</sup> This is nothing new. As we have seen, the patterns of this are frequent in the Bible and they are brought to the reader's attention by John. There is no reason that the end time events would differ from the established patterns, regardless of whether they are of worldly origin or of God's intervention.

13:8-10

8: All who dwell on the earth will worship him, *everyone* whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the

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<sup>189</sup> This phrase will be noted later in our discussion but here it points to Antiochus' efforts to outlaw the daily sacrifice at the temple in Jerusalem and to impose the Greek calendar and culture on the Jews.

<sup>190</sup> See: Revelation 17:17

<sup>191</sup> See: Daniel 7:21; Revelation 12:11 and I Corinthians 15:51-58

<sup>192</sup> See footnote 181.

Lamb who has been slain. 9: If anyone has an ear, let him hear. 10: If anyone *is destined* for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints.

8: "Those who dwell on the earth" always designates the unbelieving pagan world. But here, John makes the distinction clear. Those worshipping the beast are those not written in the Lamb's Book of Life.<sup>193</sup> This Book of Life, along with the Lamb<sup>194</sup> has been in existence since before the foundation of the world, the creation. This does not mean, however, that those who are saved are predetermined and that there is no free will involved. It simply reflects foreknowledge. This is why it is more important for the Lord to know us than it is for us to claim we know the Lord. The worship of the beast and the dragon is noted again by John and is linked to the power, apparent resurrection of one of the kingdoms or its rulers, and the incredible charisma and persuasive abilities of the "mouth."

9: It is imperative that the saints grasp the implications of their faithfulness to God both in the positive sense as one turns his face to God and in the negative sense as one turns his face to the world. Verse 10 elucidates this:

10: "If anyone *is destined* for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints."

I scratch my head at those who still believe and teach that the church and the Holy Spirit has been removed from the earth at this time (all the way back in chapter 2) and that those referred to as "saints" are Jews who on their own somehow figured out that Jesus was the Messiah after all and are now rewarded by persecution and death. This, of course, means that from chapter 2 onward that the Book of Revelation is irrelevant to the church since it won't be involved or affected by 90% of the material in the book. Amazing! Now they have to conclude that the term "saints" only refers to Jewish converts during this period. So what do we do with the apostolic address and application of "saints" to all believers, Jewish and Gentile throughout the New Testament? And so on. This will be discussed further.

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<sup>193</sup> See explanation on pages 89-91 regarding the "book of life" at the commentary on chapter 3, verse 3b.

<sup>194</sup> Speaking of Christ, I Peter 1:20 says, "For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you. And John 1:1-10 testifies to the same matter.

Here, it is clear that in having an ear to hear (the same term in the seven letters to all believers) one must take into consideration the likelihood that in this era (and any era for that matter) that his faith in Christ alone may attract contrary political and personal attention and result in persecution and possibly imprisonment and even death.<sup>195</sup>

Summary conclusion: This beast from the sea is a single entity combining the power of all the historical empires of the past, perhaps even Rome. It is an alliance or confederacy unified by a religious commonality and led by a single leader who speaks for the entire alliance. The nations comprising this alliance are nations surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, the mid east, North Africa, parts of Europe and more. Its power and authority come directly from the dragon. The specific goal of this alliance is world domination both politically and religiously. To become such this alliance targets the destruction of both Judaism and Christianity and all who would oppose the religious system of the alliance. The political leader is a charismatic, influential man who speaks in a conciliatory manner offering peace and unification to all if they will but submit to the system presented both politically and religiously. The world has never seen anything quite like this before. In order to persuade the world and especially dissidents to join the "empire", the dragon through the beast acquires another assistant to promote and compel the religious order of the empire.

### **THE BEAST FROM THE EARTH**

13:11-18

11: Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb and he spoke as a dragon. 12: He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed. 13: He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men. 14: And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life.

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<sup>195</sup> (Of course, if I were to be sarcastic, I could say that this has never happened to believers in all of history, but then I would be as big an ass as those who claim it never will.) Please pardon my language but there are times when I just get annoyed.

15: And it was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed. 16: And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, 17: and *he provides* that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, *either* the name of the beast or the number of his name. 18: Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.

11: This second beast is the servant of the first beast and the dragon, but the power and authority of the dragon infuse both. Though he appears as an imitation of Christ, his words are that of the dragon, deception and manipulation. His sole purpose is religious in order to bring people into worship of the first beast and the dragon by using clever speech and displaying all kinds of wonders in order to deceive people into thinking he is from God and is the real Messiah (Christ). He comes from the earth and this is a reflection of Daniel 7:17. There the four beasts from the sea (7:2-3) are now seen as rising from the earth after a scene of conquest and season of rule by the "son of Man."

This beast has two horns like a lamb suggesting an impersonation of the true Christ. John says he is a "man" in verse 18. He is called "the false prophet" in 16:13; 19:20 and 20:10. Jesus Himself warned the disciples, "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves." (Matthew 7:15) Luke records Paul warning the Ephesian elders, "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them." (Acts 20:29-30) Then of course is the note to the church at Corinth also warning them about unscrupulous men, "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." (II Corinthians 11:13-14) "Angel" is "messenger" and "Light" is a metaphor for "truth." Such advise is pertinent today.

He fits Paul's description of the "Man of Lawlessness" (as does the first beast) which we will examine later on. The first beast represents civil or political power and this companion beast religious power.

**The first key** to his identity as a false prophet is the clever but deceptive speech. In Mark 13:21-23 Jesus tells His disciples that during the time of the great tribulation, " And then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ'; or, 'Behold, *He is* there'; do not believe *him*: for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But take heed; behold, I have told you everything in advance."

Even early in the Bible we see God warning His people about the same things,

"If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods (whom 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 find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. "You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the LORD your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, to seduce you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from among you."  
Deuteronomy 13:1-5

So the warnings about false prophets are numerous throughout the Bible yet it is amazing to watch "Christians" flocking to them by the millions and millions even today.

12: In exercising all the authority of the beast, we see an intertwined relationship between the two beasts and the dragon. "In his presence" indicates this relationship. The phrase is not needed except to emphasize the unity and oneness of the unholy threesome. He "makes" is indicative of a compulsion to motivate people to worship the beast from the sea as well as himself and the dragon. This compulsion becomes a "force" later on to worship and receive the mark of the beast upon threat of death if one does not comply. Early on, much of the world the world flocks to these beasts in wonder and worship voluntarily. (13:3-4) It is odd that in the beast's rising to power there is a reflection of a "resurrection" in imitation of Christ. And Jews who have rejected Christ as God's Messiah and are awaiting the "true" Messiah may well flock to this leader, especially if the leader speaks out against Christ Jesus and those who have "foolishly" believed in Him.

So in previously rejecting Jesus, Jews might well gather in worship around one who is an imitation of Him? Wow!

Some see these two beasts as pointing to pagan Rome and papal Rome. This sounds like it might be probable, but pagan Rome was forced, under Constantine, to become Christianized and the Papacy did not come into power until after that event. So, technically, there was actually never a pagan Rome and a papal Rome in coexistence as a co-power.

13: "Great signs." **The second key** to his identity as the false prophet are these "great signs" including making "fire come down out of heaven to earth in the presence of men." Paul speaks of this time and the "Lawless One" when he says of him, "...*that is*, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false,..." II Thessalonians 2:9-11 Note the phrase "false" wonders. "Fire coming down from heaven" could be lightning.

This corresponds with 13:13-14. We must be able to distinguish between what is from God and what is pure Satanic power displayed on the earth. Much like what took place in Egypt when Moses and Aaron produced signs and wonders generated by God by frequently duplicated by Pharaoh's magicians, we must recognize the truth of where these signs and wonders originate. For example, Elijah called down fire from heaven and God powerfully answered. But here, fire is called down from heaven but is a Satanic trick to deceive. Verse 14 makes this goal clear.

14a: "And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast..." The deception is that the false and Satanic presents itself as the true and divine. The two horns "like a lamb" is the picture of this. As Jesus said in Matthew 24:24, "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect." But we know the elect will be those who have an ear to hear and will not be deceived. But many who claim to be "Christian" and who follow men rather than the Lamb of God will be revealed as the phonies they are. "Those who dwell on the earth" is used once again of the pagan and unregenerate population on the earth.

14b-15: **The third Key** to his identity is that the deceived who worship the beast and the dragon are instructed to build an image of the beast of the sea. This was done as demonstrating that the beast was the real resurrected Messiah who came to life after the sword wound. This would be a statue (likely of considerable size) of an individual, the one identified as the "mouth" in verses 5-8, probably that of the one we call "antichrist." This statue recalls Daniel 3 where Nebuchadnezzar set up a golden statue of himself and commanded that all bow down and worship it upon penalty of death.

However, in Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, we have attributes of both beasts in the "Man of Lawlessness" and it is possible that the "antichrist" carries both aspects of a political ruler and a religious one. This suggests that both beasts in Revelation are described by Paul as one figure in II Thessalonians. The fatal sword wound indicates that the wound was incurred through war. This would make the beast an empire that fell and was raised up again. In the apocalyptic sense, an empire defeated by war to another empire that then rises to power and so on in succession fits nicely with both the text and the history of the Biblical narrative. The "beast" becomes the final appearance of these anti-God empires. Chapter seventeen covers this more thoroughly.

The false prophet, having the authority and power of the dragon and the beast from the sea is able to show that the statue can breathe and talk. But the text does not say that it is alive. This is more trickery to grasp the hearts and minds of the uninformed and ignorant. Those who dwell upon the earth worship him but there are those who refuse to do so.

Under the emperors Domitian and Trajan Christian leaders especially were targeted for failing to offer sacrifice to an image of the emperor. Jews were exempted from this and had been for some time. So there is a correlation between the text and the persecution of Christians during John's time and beyond. Those who feel that all this activity of the "antichrist" and the great tribulation at his hands is directed to the Jews only during this period have several problems among them being that: 1. This end time tyrant is the "antichrist" not the "antimoses" and that, 2. Jews were exempt and the pattern is given in John that this is a Christian persecution, not a Jewish one.

Of course, Jews would never worship an idol. It is the worst of the sins. Unfortunately, some Christian groups bow before images and worship their origins. However, this is prohibited so many times in scripture one has to wonder

what is being taught and why. Jews see this as a sign of a false religion and understandably so. Nevertheless, there are those who refuse to worship the image and as a consequence are killed. Jews who have been deceived at first by the beast might well reject the beast when this practice is instituted. Much like the three Hebrews in Daniel, chapter two who refused to bow down to the golden statue of Nebuchadnezzar, many will sacrifice their lives in wonder about what God is doing in the Messiah department and perhaps realize that Jesus was the real thing after all.

The figure of Nebuchadnezzar has a number of similarities to the description given of the beast and the city (religion) called "Babylon the Great." In 18:7 Babylon the Great is noted as saying, " I SIT *as* A QUEEN AND I AM NOT A WIDOW, and will never see mourning." This is from Isaiah 47:7-8 describing the attitude toward and treatment of the ancient city of Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar toward the captive people of God, especially then elderly. And, the ruler Antiochus IV is also a model of the end time tyrant.

16-17: **The fourth key** to his identity is that the beast (false prophet) causes people to have a mark on their hands and/or foreheads. Again, this is not a visible mark. This "mark" tells us it is in the nature of a permanent stamp, brand or etching. The right hand is marked and the forehead. The significance is that the right hand is the hand of power and work. Therefore the issue is the ability to work and purchase and unless one is fully committed to the beast work and purchase power is denied. The forehead symbolizes where one's mind, heart and allegiance is focused. In 9:4, those faithful to God are given a "seal" on their foreheads recognizing their devotion to God from the heart, soul, mind and strength. Here, the heart, soul mind, and strength are dedicated to the beast. So the ability to buy and sell, that is provide for one's family is denied to those who do not worship the beast. Even under Rome's worst persecution, this was never instituted although there was some effort to boycott Christians from some public forums late in the second century, However, during the days of the early church, those Jews who turned to Christ were disenfranchised from their family, heritage, community and income. They often lost their jobs, homes, property, and were denied the ability to engage in commerce, or even buy goods to support themselves or their families. The church became their supporters as we see in Acts 4:32-35.

We can compare the challenge to God's people with the matter of Esau and Jacob. Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of lentil stew because he was hungry. Believers can learn from this that poverty and starvation are not causes for denying

their birthright – the inheritance of the saints. It is quite possible that God will provide for His people as He did for Israel in the wilderness even in these terrible last days of persecution and suffering.

**The fifth key** to his identity is that the mark seems to consist of a cipher indicating the name of the beast. The name is represented by 666 (or 616 – in some early references) and is the number of a man. Nothing has caught the attention in Revelation more than this number and what it could mean. Many have done complex calculations to get it to fit either a historical person or a person they think might be the "antichrist" in their own day. John tells us that the beast is a man and that his number is 666. Those with wisdom and understanding are to calculate it and figure out who this is.

But since the publication of Revelation, there has been no certain identification of a man connected to this number. Most speculation centers around the previously mentioned Nero resurrection rumor which has no fulfillment.

A few things we can say. One is that the number 6 (in Hebrew only) is often used as the symbolic number for mankind, created on the sixth day. The number 666 in Greek letters is zeta, zeta, zeta having no meaning. Some think that 666 is a number representing that which claims to be God but falls short of the 777 that might designate the divine trinity. 666 could then represent the demonic trinity; the dragon, the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth. We know that the number of the man is attached to a Caesar like ruler, and will be recognized when he appears. But John's specific designation has never been known for certain.

[Personal note. In a recent lecture to a body of Christians, I proposed a scenario that has never happened in the United States. I set the scene of a foreign, pagan, religious and political entity coming to power in the country. During its rule it sets out to eliminate any people who will not comply to its religious beliefs and worship. In so doing agents of this power come to my home and accost myself, my wife, my children and grandchildren and threaten to shoot and kill my family if I do not deny Christ and comply with the new religious order.

"In my shoes" I asked of those in attendance, "What would you do?" For me I would ask that I be shot and my family spared. If that failed, then I would present as best I could the truth about God's plan of salvation in His Son Jesus Christ. If that failed and all else was rejected, then my final conclusion would be to ask for a moment of prayer with my family and then tell our captors, "Shoot them."

Now this was shocking to many in the group. Some left the group never to return again. But here it is. As the husband, father, and grandfather it is my responsibility to see that my family are connected by faith, heart and mind to Jesus and Jesus alone and know the reasons why this is critical. If I fail in this responsibility and the above should happen, then my heart and soul would be broken and I would be a disgrace to myself, to God and my family. Some say this could never happen here in the states. I would hope not for the sake of my descendants. But that is not the message of Scripture. It could happen. It is incumbent upon parents that their family be secure in Christ. Further, we are told to be "lights" to the world and to love our neighbor as ourselves. To walk away from the possibility of this happening and to abstain from the responsibility I have described above is the height of foolishness.

To many of our churches are weak, worldly, self satisfied, and wallow in luxury, safety and a false sense of security. We preach "prosperity", "escape theology", "name it and claim it", and our families are disintegrating as fast as the world's. Our young people are being left to follow the leading of their own lusts instead of that of God and holiness and righteousness. The church and its people are ignorant, look for preachers to say nice things that won't make them uncomfortable, lazy, corrupt and self centered and uncaring. They follow preachers and teachers who spew all kinds of false doctrine, and seek to please the ears of their hearers. It is done often simply for money. But there is no guarantee that the scenario above will never happen. Are you prepared? Are you committed to the Lord no matter what? Or are you a fair weather Christian? Someday, this truth, whichever it might be, will be revealed to all of us.]

## **EXCURSUS ON THE "ANTICHRIST"**

### **I. The origin and meaning of the term "antichrist"**

The term "antichrist" is only found in I John 2:18, 2:22, 4:3 and II John 1:7. Here are the texts within their contexts,

2:18-28, 18: "Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. 19: They went out from us, but they were not *really* of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but *they went out*, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us. 20:

But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know. 21: I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth. 22: Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. 23: Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also. 24: As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. 25: This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life. 26: These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. 27: As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him. 28: Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming."

I John 4:1-6,

1: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2: By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; 3: and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the *spirit* of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. 4: You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. 5: They are from the world; therefore they speak *as* from the world, and the world listens to them. 6: We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error."

and II John 1:7,

7: "For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ *as* coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist."

From these verses, we see that an "antichrist" denies the Messiahship of Jesus, the divine relationship between the Father and the Son, is a deceiver, denies the truth,

are liars, denies that Jesus came in the flesh or is from God, and demeans spiritual matters while elevating worldly philosophy. John makes it clear that in his day these "antichrists" have already appeared and are infiltrating the church (I John 2:19) as well as leaving the church to spread their deception. Historically, and based on John's description of what they teach, these deceivers are probably disciples of the Jewish mystical movement called Gnosticism.<sup>196</sup> But in any age, false teachers who spout some or all of these lies are "antichrist" as far as John is concerned. Certainly modern day Islam falls into this category as well as many so called Christian teachers and preachers popular due to their charisma and media presence.

The term "The Antichrist" that we use to describe the end time world ruler is not called "The Antichrist" anywhere else in scripture other than in I John 2:18-22 and II John 1:7. But the term has come to stick. Only in the loosest way can we scripturally call this end time world ruler "The Antichrist" if we apply John's description. But some elements of the early "Antichrist" description and teachings are also seen in this end-time person, namely those that align with Satanic power and deception. This was with the church in John's day and with us today and will continue to be until the Lord returns.

In the Scripture, this end time individual is described as a "beast," (Daniel), a "horn" or "little horn," (Daniel), a "man of lawlessness" or "lawless one" (Paul), or a "beast with a mouth" in Revelation where the mouth would be the focus of the matter and represent this end time tyrant.

## **II. The end time "beasts," the "man of lawlessness" and the "day of the Lord" from Paul's letters to the Thessalonians.**

This beast (or these beasts) in Revelation, chapter 14, is (are) not unlike the Man of Lawlessness described by Paul in II Thessalonians. Paul's epistle was specifically written to direct the thinking of his readers to the truth so they will not be deceived by false teachings and proclamations regarding the return of Christ. By way of introduction Paul says,

1:6-10

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<sup>196</sup> There is much on this movement in books and online. Remnants of the teaching still remain on today in the form of other religions and pseudo-Christian groups.

6: "For after all it is *only* just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7: and *to give* relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, 8: dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9: These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, 10: when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed--for our testimony to you was believed."

And then in:

2:1-15,

1: "Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, 2: that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. 3: Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, 4: who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. 5: Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? 6: And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. 7: For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains *will do so* until he is taken out of the way. 8: Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; 9: *that is*, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, 10: and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. 11: For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, 12: in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness. 13: But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. 14: It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15: So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the

traditions which you were taught, whether by word *of mouth* or by letter from us."<sup>197</sup>

Let's underscore some things here. First, Paul speaks to people in Thessalonica who are being afflicted by tormentors. He commends them in I Thessalonians 1:4 for " your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure." It's not as if they are immune to these things or removed from them as some think will happen in the end times. Paul assures them that both they and he and his fellow workers will be given 'relief" from the persecution when the Lord Jesus returns in retribution raining eternal destruction upon those that are imposing the affliction on them. This "relief" can be interpreted in various ways and we will address this more fully later on. But in I Thessalonians 1:8-10, Paul teaches,

8: "For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. 9: For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, 10: and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

Paul calls this "wrath" the "day of the Lord" in chapter 2:2. The "day of the Lord" is defined by Paul here not as a "rapture of the church" prior to a time of persecution or tribulation, but as a wrath filled appearing of Jesus Christ in the midst of it from which they will be rescued. Then and only then is the day of the Lord linked with the gathering together with Him. Paul has not suddenly changed horses in the middle of the stream in chapter 2, abandoning the theme of chapter 1, not to mention that he did not write in chapters and verses but in a continuing, unbroken narrative. Chapter 2 is a continuation of chapter 1 and is in the context of chapter 1. Therefore, the context of "day of the Lord" is the description of Jesus' return in chapter 1. But it includes more. 2:1 includes a gathering to Him as well. Notice that this is at the same time as the Lord returns in retribution against the wicked.

**BUT!** This event will not occur until something else takes place, namely, 1. The apostasy and then, 2. The appearing of the "man of lawlessness!" He is called,

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<sup>197</sup> Mt commentary on I and II Thessalonians is available online at: [www.bibleclassroom.org](http://www.bibleclassroom.org)

"...the son of destruction (*or perdition*), who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God." (Italics mine)

"The apostasy" has the definite article suggesting that this is an event that is expected and known by his readers. "Apostasy" in the original is "apostasia" meaning, "to stand or establish oneself away from." It indicates a "defection" or "a turning away" or "a falling away." In any case, apparently, (verse 5) Paul has taught them about these things. For one, Jesus mentioned this in Matthew 24:10 as He spoke of these last times, "At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another." Peter warns, "You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness..." II Peter 3:17 And in writing to Timothy Paul said in I Timothy 4:1-2, "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron..." Timothy uses a form of the same word upon which "apostasy" is based. The warning is clear as to what to watch for. Those who follow charismatic teachers or religious leaders like sheep rather than the scriptures themselves or the Lord Himself are more susceptible to being led astray.

The first apostasy occurred in the first through fourth centuries as those attracted to Christianity fall into the grasp of the doctrines of false teachers, specifically the potent Gnostic movement. Both those of the Jewish synagogue and in the Christian church were being persuaded by these teachers. Of the seven letters to the seven churches in Revelation chapters 2-3, two reveal that this was occurring and two more reveal that false teachings were in the midst of the churches. Perhaps those in Jesus' parable of the soils who are seen as seeds falling on rocky ground or on the road side could be considered as among these who fall away.<sup>198</sup>

Many varieties of false teachings were brought into the early church and are still with us today. Again, there is a repetitive pattern that looks to occur in the end time once again. thus, the persuasiveness of this end time "Lawless man" may cause Jews, who have rejected Jesus as their Messiah all these centuries, to flock to

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<sup>198</sup> "The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no *firm* root in himself, but is *only* temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away." Matthew 13:20-21

him as their Messiah and watch with glee as Christians are persecuted and killed. This would fit the idea of the great "apostasy" quite well. So it seems that in the end days, it appears that the motivation for this apostasy will be the presence of the "man of lawlessness" himself a charismatic man who is able to produce illusions that cause the world to be amazed and persuaded to follow him.

But he will not appear until whatever who whoever "restrains" him is taken out of the way. The debate over what or who this is extensive. Those who hold to a pre-tribulation rapture theory claim this must be the Holy Spirit. This is concluded in order to support a doctrinal rather than Biblical position. However, there is no support for this whatsoever. In fact it is ridiculous. The Holy Spirit is never seen as restraining evil. If so, what has been going on all these centuries with the wicked and evil world rulers who have obliterated millions of people, often targeting both Christians and Jews committing genocide and attacked God's people with a vengeance? Please!

The context tells us that, 1. The Thessalonians know what or who this is because Paul had told them about it when he taught there. 2. The Greek indicates that the translation of verses 6 and 7 include both the neuter and the masculine article referring to the "restrainer." 3. The nature and description of the "man of lawlessness" (verses 2-3) reflects on both who he is and who or what the "restrainer" is. 4. Something restrains him now until the time or season in which he is to be revealed and do his dastardly deeds for a time but be destroyed by the coming of the Lord in power and fury.

There are many views of what this is all about and admittedly Paul does not give us enough detailed information to make a positive case regarding the many views of what this is all about. Those views can be researched by the student. Here are my thoughts.

It is generally agreed that Paul writes this epistle around 51-52 A.D.. This is several years before Nero becomes emperor and some ten years before Nero begins a serious persecution against Christians in the City of Rome and is ultimately deposed as emperor by the senate. So Nero is an unlikely candidate as a model, especially as in his early days as a teen-age emperor under the tutelage of Seneca, his reign was positive and applauded.

But Paul's experience prior to and during the Thessalonian ministry was one of the most painful of his life. His wounds were still raw from the beating he and Silas took at Philippi. He still suffered from the stoning at Lystra (Acts 14:19 ff.).

Then in Thessalonica Paul set about teaching again in the synagogue for three Sabbaths and won some converts (Acts 17). But a hostile uprising by Jews who vociferously objected to what Paul and Silas were teaching sought to have them arrested and tried for the crime promoting another king in place of Caesar. This was the typical ploy for getting the attention of the Roman officials and hopefully getting Paul and his companions beaten, imprisoned, perhaps executed but at least prohibited from continuing their work which was causing disturbance in the city and thus causing the Roman authorities to take preventive action. Remember this same ploy was used when Jesus was brought to Pontius Pilate. (See Paul's account in I Thessalonians 2:14-16)

However, in each case when Roman officials were called to investigate, once they examined the case, and found no cause for alarm and found out that Paul was a Roman citizen, they released them. So it was the Roman Government (tolerant of most religions) that protected or restrained further evil upon the apostolic effort and the spread of the gospel. However, under Claudius, the Jews were expelled from Rome in 48 A.D. for failing to conform to Roman customs and dress codes imposed by Claudius. This actually aided in the spread of the gospel and under Caligula the Jews were allowed to return to Rome. But this was not a persecution as such.

Though there was a "Roman Emperor Cult" designed to deify the emperor, a serious application of this doctrine did not occur until the end of the first century and into the second under emperors Domitian (81-96), Trajan (98-117). But persecution was more focused and intense in the third and fourth centuries under Decius, Valerian, Diocletian, Galerius and Julian the Apostate where Christians were targeted for failing to offer sacrifice to an image of the emperor among other offenses.

Death of the saints is specifically mentioned in Revelation 2:13 and 6:9. both Domitian and Trajan are noted as persecuting, exiling and even executing Christians who failed to proclaim the emperor as god or bow and sacrifice to his image during this late apostolic period. The persecution that effected John's exile could have come under Domitian (or possibly Trajan, but more likely Domitian). We have written correspondence between Trajan and Pliny, the governor of Bithynia, regarding the treatment of Christians who persisted in their faith and refused to bow or sacrifice to an image of the emperor. Executions did transpire.

But at the present, Paul and Silas' persecution was at the hands of the disgruntled

Jews and it was the Roman authority that actually granted them safekeeping of sorts. So, Paul and Silas were ushered out of the city to protect them from yet another arrest and possible beating. All these persecutions were at the hands of the Jews who viciously opposed Paul's presentation of Jesus as the Messiah. On the other hand, during John's era it was the Romans who intensified persecution against the Christians (the Jews often being exempt but accusing the Christians all the same). So we need to see how this all fits in to what they both say and experienced. Bottom line, the power that restrained evil when these letters were written to the church at Thessalonica was that of Roman law and military might.

The power to restrain evil on this earth is left to political authority in the scriptures. Political authority over human affairs was instituted by God clear back in Genesis 9:6, if not before. But Paul makes it clear that this is the role of political authority and refers specifically to Rome in his letter to the church there in the capital city. Romans 13:1-7

1: Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. 2: Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. 3: For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; 4: for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. 5: Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. 6: For because of this you also pay taxes, for *rulers* are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. 7: Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax *is due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor."

Speaking of taxes, Jesus answered in support of this when He answered the Jews question as to whether it was proper to pay taxes to Caesar. The dialogue went like this as recorded by Luke,

"Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" (Asked by the scribes and Pharisees) "But He detected their trickery and said to them, 'Show Me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?' They said, 'Caesar's.'

And He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." 20:22-25

In the next chapter Jesus predicts the entire destruction of Jerusalem by these same Romans.

My conclusion is that the restraint of any evil world power will be handled by the political authority God has established for that very purpose. It "bears the sword", that is, it has military power. But when the political authority becomes as evil, or more evil than the evil it is supposed to control, then we are in trouble. And if there is no other political authority able to bring it under control, then the season of the end and the appearing of the "man of lawlessness" may well be imminent. Since the Thessalonian church knew what this restraining force was, and since at that time it was the Roman authority and power that protected the early apostles and maintained order and law in the empire, and since the Romans were quick to pounce upon any pretender to the throne of the emperor, my conclusion is that the pattern here is (as patterns tend to be) repeated in the end times.

This man of "lawlessness" is so called because he disregards all human law in general and in particular the Law of God in its entirety as well as anything that smacks of righteousness and holiness.<sup>199</sup> In fact he blasphemes against it and all that is of God. He, "opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God." He becomes a law unto himself. (II Thess.2:4) And he is, "...the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders..." (2:9)

This is in accord with the "beast" John describes in Revelation 13, and more. John says that the beast is given his throne, power and authority by the dragon (Satan). And that, "There was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months (3 ½ years) was given to him. And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, *that is*, those who dwell in heaven. It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him."

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<sup>199</sup> Note: I John 3:4 There is a juxtaposition in II Thessalonians 2:6-7 where the lawless one is restrained until something is removed. I propose that which restrains is law allowing the lawless one to emerge.

It is also in accord with Daniel who heard from the Ancient of Days,

"Thus he said: 'The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth, which will be different from all the *other* kingdoms and will devour the whole earth and tread it down and crush it. 'As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings. 'He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.'" (42 months- 3 ½ years) 7:23-25(See footnote 182)

In Paul's teaching about the "man of lawlessness" in II Thessalonians 2, there is no specific mention of this man "persecuting the saints." However, the context from chapter one is definitely within the theme of the suffering of the saints. But he says that, "...the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains until he is taken out of the way." II Thessalonians 2:7

The mystery of lawlessness already at work in the first century is probably a reference to the false teachings infiltrating the church in the first century, teachings still with us today. In the first century before Christ's birth, a Jewish mystical heresy we have termed "Gnosticism" developed and infiltrated the church thereafter for several centuries. The apostle John was particularly focused on dismantling its basic tenants through his writings. One of those tenants was that the God of the Bible was an inferior, corrupt god because He created a material, flawed and corrupt world and population. Thus, all that the Bible teaches about Him is to be basically set aside as one moves upward to spiritual enlightenment. This would include, of course, the Law and the Commandments. In Paul and John's day, this teaching (called antinomianism) needed to be refuted.

"Antinomianism" means against the law or "lawlessness" and comes from the very root Paul uses in II Thessalonians 2:3,7 and 8 ("anomia"). The "mystery of lawlessness" fits perfectly with this historical movement. For Christians, not being "under the law" in Christ is not the same as antinomianism. Antinomianism teaches that the Law has no place or value in Christianity because of the "salvation by grace and faith alone." The conflict arises because Christians would not know what the standard of righteousness is that God desires apart from the law. The Spirit of God does not lead those who are in the New Covenant to violate the tenants of the Old Covenant. Antinomian teachers, like some Gnostics and modern

teachers, believe anything, even actions against the Law of God are permissible under grace. This, however is incorrect and though one might, as a Christian, violate one or more tenants of the Law, the issue is that the penalty for doing so has been paid for Christ but is not a license to deliberately become "lawless." So this "lawlessness" attitude is what John and Paul are arguing against and which becomes a tenant of the end time "antichrist."

This "man of lawlessness" is also defined as "the son of destruction" (or perdition) meaning that he is the child of the one who will be lost and destroyed and whose destiny is destruction. Also, as a son of "destruction" his nature then is to destroy.

Further, he is defined as, "who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God." First, this tells us that the power and impact of this man's works are so persuasive that people from all the other religions of the world will leave their religious moorings and attend to this man. Unfortunately, many Jews who have rejected Christ will probably flock to this man as their Messiah and be swept away as Christians are decimated. Perhaps this is the essence of the great apostasy.

Next, he "takes his seat in the temple of God." This statement is full of challenges. It is pretty clear the Jerusalem temple no longer stood when John wrote this document. Even if it did, John was present when Jesus said it would be destroyed or at least John was alive when it was. So there are only a few possibilities. One, as some claim, the temple will be rebuilt in the end times. But to accomplish this, the Mosque of Omar (Dome of the Rock) which now sits on the temple mount would have to be removed. That would cause quite a conflict, plus it is Israel, not the Palestinians who protect and guard the Mosque. Two, the "man of lawlessness" could sit in the Mosque itself. Or, by his power be the one to destroy the mosque and rebuild the temple. Three, the temple could refer to the church described by Paul as the "temple of the Holy Spirit (or God), I Corinthians 6:19; Ephesians 2:21. This means that this man or lawlessness could spring up out of the "church." Four, the term "temple of God" includes the area surrounding the ancient site of the temple proper. Conquering Jerusalem or in treaty with Israel, this man could set up a center on the temple mount adjacent to the mosque and make these boastful claims.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Some teach that Daniel 9:27 predicts such a covenant will occur in the end time. Daniel 9 rests essentially upon Jeremiah 25:11-12. It again describes the activities of Antiochus IV but the total prophecy has been subjected to a

But none of these are totally satisfactory. But we can see that John is reflecting the time of Antiochus Epiphanes whose name means "god manifest" and set up a statue of Zeus in the temple area. He also outlawed the temple sacrifice, and attempted to impose the Greek culture on the Jews. He met with both measured success on the one hand and rebellion on the other. Another image that is presented to us later is Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>201</sup> Perhaps the fourth option makes the most sense.

Summary: Looking at all the material, one is prompted to combine the images in Daniel, the prophets, The Olivet Discourse taught by Jesus, Paul, John's epistles, and Revelation and what one could conclude that an event of the end time would feature a political/religious power centered in the Mediterranean Area and Mid – East that combines all the power and territory or the major empires of the Biblical accounts into a single entity led by a person or persons called "The Antichrist." In Revelation 13, this "Antichrist is seen as a "beast" from the sea, but may also include the "beast from the earth" presenting a unified political and religious power. This "Antichrist" presents a solution to world unity as "the Messiah" and requiring submission to him and the empire but at the same time taking a blasphemous stand against God and all that is His. He is called the "man of lawlessness" by Paul. Many follow him thinking he may be indeed the Messiah due to the signs and wonders he produces. This "following" seems to be seen as the "apostasy" in Paul's narratives. He invades Israel, sets up an idol in the temple area in a reflection of Antiochus IV Epiphanies and demands worship. He initiates a severe persecution against all who refuse to obey and conform to his mandates.

When the signs of Christ's return begin to appear, he initiates a gathering of armies to fight against the Lord. Meanwhile, concurrent with Chris's appearance, the Lord has begun to pour out a series of plagues upon the kingdom of the "beast" called "The Day of God's wrath" or "the Day of the Lord" infuriating the beast. At the same time, the faithful of God are sheltered from these plagues and in time a great battle takes place called "Armageddon" ("Har-Magedon" – "The valley of Megiddo) where the Lord defeats and destroys the base, army, and person of the "beast."

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wide variety of interpretations as it is applied to various historical events from the restoration of Jerusalem during the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. to the appearance of Christ to the activities and events of the end days.

<sup>201</sup> See commentary at 18:7 and on page 296.

### **III. The Biblical description of events before, during and after the time of Christ's return.**

Before the return of Christ, several books of the Bible describe dramatic events to watch for. Let me be clear about something. The return of Christ is seen everywhere as a return in glory and power, not an unseen, secret, mysterious, hidden affair wherein believers are somehow swept into the sky and disappear leaving the world to wonder what happened to a portion of the population. On the contrary, the Bible talks about this event as the leading edge of the "Day of the Lord" and then comes the conclusion. At that time, according to the New Testament, believers who have died in the faith will be resurrected and those living will indeed be ushered into the sky with them to meet the Lord.

Further, there are some matters that we can call indisputable and others we can call disputable. We will list those at the end of this first outline. the outline is not intended to be an exact chronological presentation. Some events seem to be concurrent with others and it is hard to know exactly where to place some events as the scripture does not give a detailed chronology about this. Plus, the primary concern is the spiritual strengthening of God's people during any time of persecution, personal or world chaos. Let's look at some descriptions from both the Old and New Testaments working toward from the appearing of Christ in the sky.

1. Things go on as they always have for an unexpected length of time.

This is revealed by: Matthew 24:3-14, 37-42, 48-50; Luke 12:45; II Peter 3:3-7; Revelation 6:1-8.

2. The last days and end times will be more chaotic and corrupt than ever before and filled with mocking of God's people.

This is revealed by: I Timothy 4:1-3; II Timothy 3:1-7; II Peter 3:3-4; Jude 1:18-19.

3. People will flock to false teachers and prophets.

This is revealed by: Matthew 24:11, 23-25; Acts 20:29; 3:13; 4:3-4; II Timothy 4:3-4; II Peter 2:1-3; II Peter 3:17; Revelation 13:11-14, 16:13-14.

4. Many will betray each other and fall away from the truth (apostasy).  
 This is revealed by: Matthew 24:10; Mark 13:12; Luke 8:13; 21:16; II Thessalonians 2:3; I Timothy 4:1.
5. The "beast from the sea" and the "beast from the earth" are revealed. Also called popularly the "Antichrist" and the "False Prophet" as well as the "Man of Lawlessness" by Paul. This is revealed by: Revelation 13:1-6, 11; (Prefigured by Daniel 7:7-8, 19-21); II Thessalonians 2:3-4; I John 2:18; I John 4:3; II John 1:7; Matthew 24:23-24; Mark 13:21; Luke 21:8.
6. The "Abomination of desolation" is built or placed in the temple or on the temple grounds in the area of the ancient "holy place."

Jesus spoke of this in Matthew 24:15-16 (and Mark 13:14) saying, "Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains."

This is a key event to watch for, He teaches, prior to the "great tribulation." He refers to information in Daniel 9:21-27; 11:15-37; 12:8-13.<sup>202</sup>

7. The prophetic 7 year great tribulation is divided into two periods. The first 3 ½ years speaks of the terrible persecution of God's faithful ("The Great Tribulation") and the second 3 ½ year period speaks of God's retribution against the wicked called "The Great and Terrible Day of the Lord."<sup>203</sup> This first period, then, includes: a. A 3 ½ year period of the reign of the Beast(s) of Revelation 13, also called "The antichrist" and "The Man of lawlessness". b. The abomination of desolation set up. c. Persecution of God's faithful by the "Antichrist". d. The trampling under of Jerusalem (times of the Gentiles). e The two witnesses.

<sup>202</sup> The term "abomination" normally refers to an idol but is also used to describe sexual perversion. "Desolation" means to cause something to fall into ruins, be desecrated and cause those that look upon it to be appalled. An interesting building to notice is the Dome of the Rock, an abomination, sitting in the temple place (now desolate) for nearly 1,400 years now.

<sup>203</sup> For a detailed explanation of the difference between the great tribulation and the Day of The Lord, see the excursus in chapter five. Also, we cannot say with absolute certainty that the 7 year period (divided into two 3 1/2 years segments) is not symbolic or spiritual in nature rather than literal or that it might not be 3,500 years as odd as that might sound.

a. Note: Revelation 6:9-11; 7:13-17; 11:2-3;12:6; 13:5; Daniel 7: 25; 8:14; 11:12; 11:36; 12:7. b. Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14; Daniel 9:26-27; Daniel 12:11; (prefigured in Daniel 8:8-26, and chapter 11) c. Daniel 7:21, 25; Matthew 24:21-22; Mark 13:19-20; Luke 21:20-24; Revelation 12:7; 13:7, 15, 14:9-13; 16:5-6. d. Daniel 7:19; 8:10, 24-25; Luke 21:23-24; Revelation 11:1-2, 7 e. Revelation 11:3-12.

8. The heavenly (cosmic) signs of the impending "Day of the Lord" and Christ's return. This begins the second 3 ½ year period.

This is revealed by: Joel 2:10; Isaiah 13:6-11; Isaiah 4:1-10; Ezekiel 30:1-6; Amos 5:18-20; Zephaniah 1:14-18; Malachi 4:1-6; Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:24-25; Luke 21:25-26; Peter speaks of it in Acts 2:16-21; I Thessalonians 5:2; II Thessalonians 2:2; II Peter 3:10-12; Revelation 6:12-15; Revelation 8:12.

9. The signs of Christ's return and beginning of the Day of The Lord. This is in conjunction with the above passages and those to follow. So some repetition will be noticed.

See: Daniel 7: 12-14; Matthew 24:29-30; 26:64; Mark 13:24-27; Mark 14:61-62; Luke 21: 25-26, 36; Acts 1:11; II Thessalonians 1:7; Revelation 1:7; Revelation 6:16-17.

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10. War against the Lamb.

Christ's return is immediately preceded by a revolt by the beast against Him which he dispels. This is revealed by: Isaiah 66:15-24; Daniel 7:25-26; Joel 3:11-16; Mark 13:37-43; 49-50; I Thessalonians 1:6-10; II Thessalonians 2:8-10; Revelation 14:9-10, 16:12-16; 17:14; 19:11-21 (esp. verse 19); etc.

11. Outpouring of God's wrath upon the forces of wickedness and sheltering (sealing) of God's people from this day of wrath. The additional prophetic 3-1/2 years of the great tribulation ("Day of the Lord") is fully engaged.

a. Outpouring: This is revealed by: Daniel 7:24-26; Isaiah 2:12-17; Zephaniah 1:15-18, 3:8; Malachi 4:1; I Thessalonians 5:1-3; Hebrews 10:27; II Peter 3:7; Revelation 6:16-17; 16:1-21; 17:7; 18:1-24; 19:15-21

b. Sheltering: This is revealed by: Isaiah 26:20-21; Joel 3:16; Zephaniah 2:3; I Thessalonians 1:10; 4:14-18, 5:9 (although this could refer to final judgment); Revelation 7:3-8; 9:4 ff.

There is a definite pattern of sheltering or protection from the outpouring of God's wrath upon wicked humanity while His people are still present at the time. Among these is the great flood in Genesis 6-8, The Passover in Exodus 12, safety while crossing the Red Sea in Exodus 13-14, and The protection of Rahab and her family when Jericho fell; The sealed 144,000 of Revelation 7; The woman of Revelation 12. Other examples might include the three Hebrews in the fire in Daniel 3, the Lion's den in Daniel 6, Joseph's life and trials, Jesus' escape from Herod and so on. These last examples are not in the setting of God's wrath upon man.<sup>204</sup>

The most important pattern is that of the Passover/Exodus as many illusions to the captivity in Egypt, the plagues and the rescue of God's people are made in Revelation.

12. Resurrection and gathering of the faithful dead and alive. (See: footnote 195)

Christ's return is concurrent with the resurrection of the faithful dead and the "rapture" of the living to meet Christ in the sky. This is revealed by: Matthew 24:31; Mark 13:26-27; John 5:24; John 14: 3; I Corinthians 15:22-25,<sup>205</sup> 15:51-52; I Thessalonians 4:15-17; II Thessalonians 2:1, Revelation 1:7, 14:14-16 (Perhaps).

13. The completion of God's wrath. Daniel 7:11, 26; Matthew 13:40-43; Mark 13: 41-42, 49-50; II Thessalonians 2:8; II Peter 3:10-12; Revelation 11:15-18; (a prolepsis); 19:1-2, 19-21.

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<sup>204</sup> There is the legitimate perspective that Christ's return at the tribulation midpoint will also be the time of His gathering His own from the earth. Matthew 24:29-31; Mark 13:24-27 and Luke 21:25-28 make no mention of an outpouring of God's wrath upon the wicked at the time of Christ's return, but an immediately gathering of His people to Himself.

<sup>205</sup> Quoted here so that a little different picture is seen, combining several views into one. 22: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. 23: But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, 24: then *comes* the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, *when* He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet." The term "*when*" in verse 24 could be legitimately translated "after" as is done in many other translations.

14. Establishment of the earthly kingdom of Christ.

Revealed by: Psalm 2; Daniel 2:44; 7:14, 18, 22, 27; Matthew 25:31-34; Luke 1:33; Revelation 7:15-17; 20:1-15.

15: A new heavens and earth.

Revealed by: Isaiah 65:17-19, 66:22; II Peter 3:13; Revelation chapters 21-22.

Now the previous outline is only given as a general idea of the times. More specifically we have a simplified concept. These are indisputable Biblical truths.

First, we will state that the Biblical idea is contained in the contrast between "this age" and "the age to come."<sup>206</sup> This phrase is frequently used in the New Testament by both Jesus and the New Testament writers.<sup>207</sup> The phrase "this age" refers to the rule of humanity over the earth and "the age to come" refers to the rule of the Messiah."

Second, the power and presence of the age to come became present in the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>208</sup>

Third, those who believe in Christ are subject to persecution for doing so. False prophets and teachings will be rampant. The continued perseverance and faith in spite of all to dissuade them will demonstrate their true faith and citizenship in the Kingdom of God.

Fourth, There will be a greater persecution and pseudo unifying world power at the end time in opposition to God and all that is His. Jerusalem will be under the foot of "Gentiles."

Sixth, In the end times, great heavenly (cosmic) signs will appear.

Seventh, Christ will pour our judgment upon the wicked to achieve a final repentance.

Eighth, Christ will return, gather the dead and alive who are His.

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<sup>206</sup> See diagram in the appendix.

<sup>207</sup> See: Matthew 12:32; Mark 10:30; Luke 16:8, 20:34-36; I Cor. 2:6-8; Ephesians 1:21; Titus 2:12; Heb. 6:5.

<sup>208</sup> See: Matthew 3:2; 4:17, 23, 28:12; Mark 1:15, Luke 10:9

Ninth, there will be a decimation of the forces of the wicked who oppose Christ at His coming.

Tenth, Christ will establish a kingdom presence among men.

Eleventh, There will be a divine judgment of the wicked and reward to the faithful.

Twelfth, God will create a New heavens and Earth.

The more disputable elements are the exact events and timing or chronology of the events during the transition between this age and the age to come. Included would be: 1. The origin and base of the end time world political and religious power. 2. The exact nature of the end time "Abomination of Desolation" if it is not the dome of the Rock." 3. The timing of Christ's return and the gathering of His people to Him in relation to all the attending Biblical events. 4. The territorial extent of the "world wide" persecutions in the end time. 5. Whether during the outpouring of God's wrath in Revelation His people are sheltered at Christ's return. 6. The meaning of the 3 ½ year periods. 7. Whether the narrative is speaking spiritually without any time frame or specific historical and political intent for the end days at all.

Note: From the very beginning of chapter one of the Revelation narrative, at the conclusion of each of the seven letters, and throughout the book, the time of the victory, vindication over evil, the fulfillment of the kingdom, the coming of Jesus the Messiah and the reward to the faithful is repeated and repeated most often in the form of a prolepsis. For example, in chapter 1:6-8 the promise is made,

6:"... and He has made us *to be* a kingdom, priests to His God and Father--to Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 7: BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen. 8: 'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.'

Then at the end of each letter we have similar promises such as the one to Thyatira,

"Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come. 'He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY

OVER THE NATIONS; AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received *authority* from My Father; and I will give him the morning star." 2:25-28

These recurrences are sprinkled all through the book but are fulfilled only for those who are "faithful" or "overcome" until death.<sup>209</sup> They are faithful to the truth and to the true God and His Messiah Jesus, and overcome any pressure, temptation or coercion to be unfaithful or believe other than the truth. They are there to encourage and assure God's people that He has not abandoned them or forgotten them even when times are terribly challenging and frightening but also to let them know that they will not be spared those times. Rather than question and doubt God, they are to remain steadfast and trusting, persevering in their Christian duty, faith and testimony at all times.

Though many of the Revelation visions appear to have a future historical and chronological setting (though patterned after past events), the focus and intent of the book remains spiritual and the message is for the strengthening of the spiritual life of God's people in the midst of any historical or personal circumstance, more than any attempt to fit the narrative into an exact historical or chronological framework. Regardless of any interpretation of the narrative, the message to the people of God is perseverance, faith and trust in the Lord "despite temporary evidences to the contrary."<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Note: Matthew 10:22, 24:13; Mark 13:13; Romans 2:7; Hebrews 3:14, 10:39; James 1:12; Rev. 2:10.

<sup>210</sup> Martin Rist, *The Interpreters Bible*, Abingdon Press, 1982, page 467.

# **THE BOOK OF REVELATION**

## **Chapter Fourteen**

Introduction :

In 11:15, we had the sounding of the seventh trumpet. the contents of the seventh trumpet are seven bowls of God's wrath. But to this point and until 15:1 ff. the seven bowls of God's wrath have yet to be poured. In the meanwhile, interludes and insertions are presented in order to explain to the reader some of the things to look for prior to the pouring out of the seven bowls of God's wrath. Among them why He does this, what the fate of His people will be during the entire end time period and what God expects of them. It is simply that God wants all who can be saved to be saved and give the time needed for this while Satan wants to derail the entire effort.

Chapter 14 looks ahead to the day when the Lamb of God sets His feet down upon Mount Zion with the 144,000 and the judgment of Babylon the Great, the "beast" and its followers is foreseen. Verses 1-11 are again in the form of prolepses and verses 13 onward pick up the narrative as from 13:18. These are heavenly visions of a future earthly reality and are intended for assurance and encouragement of the saints. Chapter 13 brought the dragon's two beasts into the vision and they were seen as compelling people to submit to them and receive their mark on penalty from not being able to buy or sell to death.

Now, chapter 14:1-11 foresees that the persecution against God's faithful is done. They are now in the presence of the victorious Messiah watching the events pour forth that bring this age to a close and with it, the vanquishing of evil against God's chosen ones. The rest of the book envisions God's response to the beast and his cohorts and the wrath He pours out upon them.

Though this struggle has been a spiritual battle with clips of what the end will entail, John sees that it is now fully emerged in the historical end of days when every effort of Satan is gathered to make a final attempt to destroy Christ's true church and Jesus Himself at His coming.

The actual events themselves do not transpire until chapters 20-22 as well as other passages in both testaments. These visions in chapter 14 are a series of prolepses revealing the outcome of what is yet to transpire. A difficult matter is the

interpretation of verses 14-16. Does this represent the reaping of God's saints into His "barn" or is it a prelude to the destruction of the wicked? We will discuss that when we get there.

14:1-5,

1. "Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb *was* standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads. 2: And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard *was* like *the sound* of harpists playing on their harps. 3: And they \*sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth. 4: These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These *are* the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb. 5: And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless."

1a: "Then I looked" indicates a startling shift in the vision. "All of a sudden I saw" is the idea. We have yet another interruption in the flow and it is of a future that is yet to come to pass in the overall narrative. Again, a prolepsis. The Lamb is seen standing on Mt. Zion. The Lamb of course is the victorious Messiah, Jesus, and this pictures His victory and that of those who have been faithful. Mt. Zion is geographically the hill from just south of the Temple Mount on up to the temple area itself. In other words, from the place where the palace of Solomon was built at the north part of the city of David to the Temple mount. The Lamb probably stands where the image of the beast was set up. This is the only place in Revelation where Mt. Zion is mentioned. Mt. Zion is noted in the Old Testament as the place where the king is established (Psalm 2:6, 48:2) and also where God dwells (in the Temple there, Psalm 76:2, Isaiah 2:3) and from whence the deliverer of Israel will come and take away their sins (Isaiah 59:20, Jeremiah 31:31-34). Further, the future reign of the Lord is seen to emanate from Mt. Zion (Micah 4:5-8; Joel 2:30-32; Obadiah 1:15-21). This vision is a heavenly vision of a future earthly reality as we shall see.

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\* Again, the asterisk indicates John's use of the present tense. The Greek is "are singing." It is the writer's way of bringing the reader more fully into the scene. In technical terms it is called use of "the historical present."

1b. These 144,000 are seen again from chapter 7. They have been sealed with the names of the Father and the Son on their foreheads. They are seen standing with the Lamb in victory on Mt. Zion and are untouched by events yet to be described.

2-3: Now, John's attention is drawn to a voice from heaven. This voice is described in the same manner (many waters) as that of Christ's in 1:15. But a similar voice sound is told in 19:6 where a multitude is praising the Lord. Here, it also has the volume of loud thunder and sounds like company of harpists playing. So we could say little more than this is a mighty crescendo from heaven, especially since the Lamb is now seen as on earth, though in a heavenly setting.

Accompanied by the heavenly crescendo of music and song, the 144,000 join in singing a new song before the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. This shows that the vision, even though that of an earthly setting is actually seen in the heavenly environment. No one else could learn the song except the 144,000, the first fruits of those purchased from the earth. (verse 4).

4-5: The chastity (literally "virginity") of the 144,000 refers to the spiritual purity and faithfulness of the multitude in that they have not succumbed to the temptation of the beast as to turn from Christ and worship it. This does not suggest some sort of "men only" celibate group, but as Paul said to the Corinthians, "...for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you *as* a pure virgin." (II Corinthians 11:2). This is confirmed by the following phrase, "These *are* the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes." John uses the word "porneia" to describe the idolatrous worship of the beast and its image.

Further, the 144,000 are people of truth as they speak no lie. In other words they do not believe or repeat the deceptive message of the dragon or his beasts. They are faithful to the word of God and of the Lamb. They are blameless. In other words, above reproach and without fault in what they say. Zephaniah 3:13 says of the faithful remnant in Israel, "The remnant of Israel will do no wrong, And tell no lies, Nor will a deceitful tongue Be found in their mouths;..."

An important break takes place here as we now are caught up in successive messages brought to the world by three angels.

14:6-7,

6: "And I saw another angel flying in mid-heaven, having an eternal gospel

to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; 7: and he said with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters."

6: "Another angel" leaves us wondering where the first angel is referenced. Verse 8 speaks of a "second one" and verse 9 a "third one." So it seems clear that the angel in this verse simply follows on the many angels John has seen in the drama so far and is the first in this series of visions. This vision displays the final gospel message to those on earth by an angel flying in mid-heaven. Mid-heaven is the path in the sky that follows the transit of the Sun. The message is a call to repentance and faith in light of the judgments to come from on high to the earth and upon the beast and its kingdom. It begins with "Fear God." This common term is potent and one needs to give it heed, especially in light of the impending doom to come upon the beast and its followers.

Some commentators are concerned that the definite article is not attached to the phrase "eternal gospel" and have gone off on a rabbit trail. The lack of a definite article does not make the "eternal gospel" a different or random gospel anymore than leaving the definite article off of the word God (theos) makes it a reference to a different or random god. When a subject is well understood and special, the writers often leave off the definite article simply to save space and time as writing material were rare and quite expensive. The ancient readers understood this. Every bit of space was used and margins were quite small.

The entire earth will hear the message and be given a final chance to respond. "The hour of His judgment has come." This could be referring to the judgment upon the earth, the completion of which is imminent or the final judgment, or both. In the following verses we have the announcement of judgment on the beast and its followers on the earth and ultimately. Regardless, the call to worship the true God, the creator, is given requiring a turning from worship of the beast and his image.

Similarly, in Acts 14:14-15, the people of Lystra tried to elevate Paul and Barnabas to a level with Zeus and Hermes wherein Paul and Barnabas,

"...tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out and saying, 'Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a

living God, WHO MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM."

The propensity for people to deify people, nature or the universe is still with us today. The message of the angel will always be relevant.

14:8,

8: "And another angel, a second one, followed, saying, 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality.'"

Again, an announcement in a prolepsis of an event to be recapitulated and described in chapter 18.<sup>211</sup> We can now introduce a multifaceted description of the religious element associated with the beast.

We have these titles needing clarification:

- 1: Babylon the Great
- 2: The Great Harlot
- 3: The beast(s) – from the abyss, the sea, and the earth.

### Babylon the Great

References to "Babylon the Great" are found in: Daniel 4:30; Revelation 14: 8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21. The gender designation is feminine to reflect the idea of harlotry as later passages reveal. A full description is given of her in these passages, but the fundamental reference is to the capital city, the political and religious base, of the beast(s).

Identifying this base is not as easy as some think. Immediately the first idea was that it is located at Rome. In 17:9, her alter-ego sits on seven hills. Often this is spoken of in reference to Rome. But technically, Rome does not sit on seven hills nor does the context fit a city at all. We will dig deeper when we arrive at the passages.

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<sup>211</sup> On "prolepsis" and "recapitulation", two keys to interpreting this book, see the discussion on pages 14-16.

The phrase, "Babylon the Great" encompasses more than just a base of operations. The primary power is religious. The religious power gives its authority to the political power. The religious power of the beast is called:

### The Great Harlot

References to The Great Harlot are found in: 17:1,5, 15, 16 and 19:2. She is identified with Babylon the Great in 17:5 and sits on both the beast and upon "many waters" (nations). In other words she controls the beast and many of the nations whose kings commit "immorality" with her (spiritual idolatry and pagan/demonic worship). Though identified with Babylon the Great, she is not the entirety of Babylon the Great but controls this great city and the empire it centers in a religious bondage.

### The Three Beasts

As we come to chapters 17-19, it looks more like the "beast from the abyss" (Chapters 11, 17, 20), the "beast from the sea" and the "beast from the earth" (chapters 13, 14, 16, 17, 19, 20) all seem to meld into one beast when it is all said and done, though this is debatable. In any case, both the purpose and end of these beasts is the same. We have a demonically controlled political and religious empire set on destroying everything of God. In the end time this effort will be focused on God's people. But after a limited time, the Lord will step in and end it and establish His kingdom and destroy the beast and all who are marked by it.

This brings us to:

14:9-11,

9: "Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, 10: he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11: "And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name."

9: This "third" angel followed the other two. We have in sequence, then, three connected messages to the world before the actuality occurs. 1. A message and call to repentance and faith in God, and a turning from the beast and all his deception since judgment from God is about to come. 2. An announcement that Babylon the Great is fallen, and 3. A warning to any who would follow the beast.

In this last warning, an angel with a "loud voice" announces the impending judgment upon all who worship the beast and his image and receives a mark on his forehead or hand and this judgment is called, "the wine of the wrath of God." This is in contrast or response to the "wine of the passion of her immorality" in verse 8.<sup>212</sup>

10a: The "wine of God's wrath" is undiluted in His "Anger" and those who follow the Lamb will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the Lamb and His angels. There is an important distinction between the human emotions associated with "wrath" and "anger" and what is described of God here. First, God's wrath is that which is foretold for all who would reject His provision of salvation through faith. It is a foregone conclusion and is not a flare of emotion. Had that been the case, God's "anger" would have been poured out immediately upon those who brought pain, torture and death to His Son Jesus. So God's patience is for the express purpose of prompting people to repentance. Peter noted this in II Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." But when the time is fulfilled, and men's hearts are hardened to the point of submitting to the deception of the beast and is set on destroying God's people in mass, then God will step in and bring about a final opportunity for men to repent and believe in Him. So the wrath of God is in balance with the love of God in that for God to love mankind to the extent that He gave His Son for their sake, He will give time for repentance for all possible. At the same time, to demonstrate His love for those who trust Him, He must eradicate evil and establish His kingdom for their sakes.<sup>213</sup>

10b. "Tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb." This figurative language does not mean that these wicked people have been given a presence in heaven but that the Lamb is the

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<sup>212</sup> Also see 17:2 and 18:3 that speak of the wine of her immorality, and 14:19 and 16:19 that speaks of the wine of God's wrath.

<sup>213</sup> Ladd has a fine argument about this in, "A Commentary on The Revelation of John," Eerdmans, 1972, pages 195-196.

authority and judge of their fate and that they will see Him who they have crucified and attempted to destroy.<sup>214</sup>

11: There is a special torment for those who worship the beast and receive the mark of his name. This is due to their focused effort to destroy God's people and war against the lamb. The imagery of Isaiah 34:9-10 comes to mind speaking of judgment on Edom where he says,

"Its streams will be turned into pitch, And its loose earth into brimstone, And its land will become burning pitch. It will not be quenched night or day; Its smoke will go up forever."

Other non-believers may not share the same fate but be completely destroyed. There is debate about this, but also ample Scripture to support this possibility.

14:12-13

12: Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus." 13: "And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them."

12-13: This note demonstrates that the previously described events have not taken place in the narrative and are a preview. But in light of their inevitability the saints may rest assured that their faithfulness will be vindicated even though they may well die before the Lord returns or be persecuted to death by the opposition.

In any case, the emphasis is upon perseverance and faithfulness regardless of the circumstances. "From now on" probably indicates from the time of John's writing to the churches onward. Those who die in the Lord are blessed and it is called a "rest" from their labors. Their good deeds and faithfulness will follow them into death and they will be rewarded in due time.

14:14-16,

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<sup>214</sup> Note: 6:16-17; and Malachi 3:2; Romans 2:4-6; etc.

14: "Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud *was* one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand. 15: And another angel came out of the temple, crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, "Put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe. 16: Then He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped."

14a: The "one like the son of man " harkens back to Daniel 7:13-14 where

Daniel recounts,

13: "I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. 14: And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed."

So John's vision would also be of the Messianic Jesus appearing in the manner Daniel and others portray. In 1:13, John uses this same term to describe the glorified Jesus. This verse prefigures 19:11-16, the appearing of Jesus to bring judgment upon the beast and the false prophet and those that follow them (19:20-21).

14b. The sickle is for reaping the harvest and it is He who does so. There are two harvests in verses 14-20, and they may represent the final result of decisions made after the warning given by the angel in verses 6-7. In this first harvest following upon the previous note to the faithful to persevere and noting the blessedness of those who die in the Lord, one would indicate, if this is all sequential, that the reaping by the one with the sickle would be of the faithful that had died as mentioned in verse 13. But commentators are divided as to the subjects of the first harvest because this image is also used to initiate judgment upon the wicked. There is no question that verses 17-20 fulfill that image.

For the former possibility, a parable of the Kingdom of God Jesus taught lends support,

"And He was saying, 'The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows--how, he himself does not know. The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.'" Mark 4:26-29

Luke 10:2 and John 4:35-36 present the idea that grain harvest is intended for those who believe.

For the latter possibility, Joel 3:12-13 fits well,

12: "Let the nations be aroused And come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat, For there I will sit to judge All the surrounding nations. 13: Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, tread, for the wine press is full; The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great."

However what is reaped seems to be different. In the one case it is grain, in the other it is grapes. In one parable God's faithful are seen as the good grain and the wicked as tares (or weeds) looking like wheat, but different. The lengthy parable in Matthew 13:24-43 is similar in nature as these two harvests. If the grain harvested in verses 14-16 are the righteous, then this would serve as a picture of the "rapture" albeit after the tribulation and in the midst of or following the outpouring of God's wrath.

The son of man is seen sitting on a white cloud. A cloud or clouds is symbolic of the divine presence in nearly every instance. Jesus is seen as returning in a cloud or with the clouds in Luke 21:27 and Matthew 24:30. I Thessalonians 4:17 says that those alive when Jesus returns will caught up together with the resurrected dead in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

15: The angel with the loud voice commands that the reaping begin. this disturbs some commentators in that it is unseemly that an angel would be telling the Lord what to do and when to do it. But the angel, as we have seen, often represents the voice of God or even that of the Lamb. It is not coming in the sky but from the temple. So the origin of the message is divine. The Lord Himself said that he did not know the day or hour of His own return, but the Father did (Matthew 24:36). So the command is not out of line, even though it seems unusual.

Finally, in verses 14-16 it is the son of man that reaps with the sickle who does the reaping Himself and there is no mention of any judgment. But in 17-20 it is an angel with another sickle accompanied by a second angel and it is specifically noted that it is untended for judgment of the wicked. So there is support for the view that this first harvest is of the righteous while the second is of the wicked.

14:17-20,

17: "And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle. 18: Then another angel, the one who has power over fire, came out from the altar; and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, "Put in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe." 19: So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God. 20" And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses' bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles."

17-19: Two angels appear now, one with a sickle and one with power over fire. The angel with power over fire maybe one of several different angels with various given powers. In 16: 5 there is mention of an "angel of the waters." But the contrast between this vision and the former is striking. The second angel commands the first to put his sickle into action and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth and here we see a different crop. Rather than grain, we have grapes. The grapes are symbolic of men who will issue blood when pressed just as grapes issue wine when pressed. The wine of this harvest is blood.

Old Testament scriptures also use the winepress as a picture of judgment. In Isaiah 63:2-6, a rather graphic and brutal portrait is given,

"Why is Your apparel red, And Your garments like the one who treads in the wine press? "I have trodden the wine trough alone, And from the peoples there was no man with Me. I also trod them in My anger And trampled them in My wrath; And their lifeblood is sprinkled on My garments, And I stained all My raiment. For the day of vengeance was in My heart, And My year of redemption has come. I looked, and there was no one to help, And I was astonished and there was no one to uphold; So My own arm brought salvation to Me, And My

wrath upheld Me. I trod down the peoples in My anger And made them drunk in My wrath, And I poured out their lifeblood on the earth."

And the afore mentioned Joel 3:13,

" Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, tread, for the wine press is full; The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great."

20a: "Outside the city...". Possibly Babylon the Great mentioned in verse 8. There is a correspondence to her "wine" and God's "wine" of wrath which is hers in the long run.

Later, there will be an argument made that Babylon the Great could be Jerusalem herself. Many prophets note that after judgment on Jerusalem, the city is then restored and all the armies that surround her are crushed by the Lord Himself. Zachariah 14:1-7 fits here (and in other visions in Revelation), as does Isaiah 13, 34; Joel 3; Ezekiel 39:8-20; and more. Regardless, the prophets see the last battle taking place in Israel, normally at Megiddo.

20b. This is reinforced by the distance the blood is seen to spread, one thousand six hundred stadia which is between 185 and 200 miles which is the length of Israel from Dan to Beersheba. And it is about four feet deep. This extreme picture demonstrates the wrath that God will pour out upon the beast and his followers.

So chapter 14 is a summary of what is to be understood in terms of what His people can expect. Now the actual judgment upon the beast is to begin in the text. and the details will be seen as we continue.

# THE BOOK OF REVELATION

## Chapter Fifteen

Introduction:

Chapter 14 makes the transition from the Devil's rage against God and His people to the divine response of God against the Devil and his beasts. Scattered throughout the book are the continual reminders that God is and will be the ultimate victor and that those who are faithful to Him will be vindicated and rewarded with eternal blessings. Those who follow after the beast, worship him and receive his marks will be subject to God's extreme wrath and suffer torment for eternity.

Chapter 6:12-17 left off with the breaking of the sixth seal and the anticipation of the seventh.

12: "I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth *made* of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; 13: and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. 14: The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. 15: Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; 16: and they \*said to the mountains and to the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; 17: for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?'

After sealing the 144,000 in protection against the seventh seal (9:4) in chapter 7, the seventh seal was broken in chapters 8-9 and seven trumpet plagues began to sound and their plagues be cast forth upon the earth. The first four were natural disasters. These failed to bring about the intended repentance. The next two, "woes" one and two, affected mankind, but no repentance is seen. Now we come to the time of the seventh trumpet plague, which is the third woe and consists of the seven bowls of God's wrath.

Chapter 15 is the vision of an elaborate preparation for the outpouring of the third "woe", the seventh trumpet plague. It consists of seven bowls of God's wrath and

we have seen similar plagues in chapters 6 and 8 but not as intense as we have here. Another difference is that there are no further interludes or interruptions in the narrative from this point on. We do have the continual reminders of the coming victory of the Lamb and songs lauding God and the Lamb. We have already seen the end in proleptic visions several times. But as the Expositors bible commentary notes, "Yet we are now met by another series of visions setting before us judgments that must take place before the final issue. This is not chronology; it is apocalyptic vision, which again and again turns round the kaleidoscope of the future, and delights to behold under different aspects the same great principles of the Almighty's government, leading always to the same glorious results."<sup>215</sup>

15:1:

1: Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, *which are* the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished.

1: This verse is John's introduction as to what is to come. This is the third and final vision given the designation "sign" in Revelation. The other two are in chapter 12. This sign is both "great and marvelous" giving it a grander title than either of its predecessors and also describing the "works" of God in the song of the victors in verse 3.

Although he has yet to see the actual vision, he is describing it in summary and can do so since he is writing after the fact and tell the readers in advance many things that are designed to encourage and strengthen their perseverance in following the Lord (14:4).

15:2-4:

2: And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God. 3: And they \*sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations! 4: "Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; For ALL

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<sup>215</sup> Alan F. Johnson, Expositor's Bible Commentary, Zondervan, 1982, The Seven Bowls

THE NATIONS WILL COME AND WORSHIP BEFORE YOU, FOR YOUR RIGHTEOUS ACTS HAVE BEEN REVEALED."

2: This is another prolepsis. We are transported to a future time. The "sea" is probably the same one seen in 4:6, clear as crystal, (See commentary there) but here it is mixed with fire. That is that the glass sea itself (the floor of the throne room of God in the vision) has fire in it. On it we find "...those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God" singing "the song of Moses."

The symbolism of the now fiery sea is not certain, but it may be indicative of the judgment to come on those who have gone to war against the Lamb and His followers. Those who rejected worshipping the beast and the number of his name are seen as victorious. Victory here is not conquest, but a willingness to die in faithfulness rather than to submit to the demonic powers that stand against the Savior. They stand with harps of God in their hands. This symbolizes their victory given them by God and they praise Him for it.

3a: "And they sang the song of Moses and of the Lamb..." This song is a song of deliverance. It first reflects the deliverance from Egypt and the song sung by Israel in Exodus 15 (or Deuteronomy 31:19-30) and perhaps Revelation 5:12.

3b-4: However the song itself in the text is not a reprise of these expressions but a praise of God recognizing His marvelous works, Righteous and true ways and His sovereignty as all the nations will ultimately know the truth and worship Him the true and living God. Much of the phraseology may be found in the Psalms and the prophets. For example, Psalm 86:9-10, 9: "All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, And they shall glorify Your name. 10: For You are great and do wondrous deeds; You alone are God."

15:5-8

5: After these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened, 6: and the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple, clothed in linen, clean *and* bright, and girded around their chests with golden sashes. 7: Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever. 8 : And the temple was filled with smoke from the

glory of God and from His power; and no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

5-6: We saw a similar vision in 11:19 (see commentary there). "The tabernacle of testimony" (or witness) is so called because of the Ark of The Covenant contained therein. Verse 5 displays the structure as the "tabernacle", an elaborate tent the Israelites set up for worship as they traveled in the wilderness under the leadership of Moses, Aaron and Joshua. Verse 6 see that from this heavenly structure (now the temple) come the seven angels indicating they are sent by God. Dressed in heavenly finery, they radiate righteousness, power and authority. Some think there is a priestly element in the description of their clothing. But there is no sacrifice being made in what is to follow, nor a petition to God and their function is not that of any Jewish priest in the Scripture.

7: As they stand in readiness, one of the four living creatures distributes to each angel a golden bowl filled with a terrible plague of the wrath of God. Each "bowl" is typical of the broad and relatively shallow dishes used in the temple worship.

8: "The temple filled with smoke...and no one was able to enter." In Isaiah 6:3-4, the prophet was in a vision in the temple and above him the huge Seraphim stood,

"And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory." And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke."

The smoke suggests the power and glory of God. Here, as the scene is activity in front of the tabernacle of "testimony", or "witness" we are reminded of Exodus 40:34-35 where,

"...the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle."

The Israelites were not permitted to continue their journey until the cloud lifted. Here, no one was permitted to enter the temple until the seven plagues were completed. John's presentation is another indication that the history of the Exodus is a pattern of the way God will protect His people from His wrath as represented by these bowls. As the Israelites were sheltered from the Passover plague of death

upon Egypt and from the flood waters of the Red Sea, so God will not allow His faithful ones to be harmed by His judgments upon the wicked on the earth.

# THE BOOK OF REVELATION

## Chapter Sixteen

Introduction.

We now come to the final chapter in God's dealing with the forces of demonic evil on the earth and the wickedness of man against Him, His son and His people. This is the third "woe" of the seventh trumpet plague. Where there have been interludes and visions in the midst of the unfolding of the events of the end times, now it proceeds to the end with no interruptions. Similar to the plagues of the six seals and the six trumpets, there are significant differences from here on. This series of plagues, like the others, bear similarities to the Egyptian plagues but in these last seven bowls, the plagues are much more intense and severe.

The faithful of God are protected and sheltered from these plagues and the song of deliverance and victory has been sung. Now comes God's final effort to bring the hardened hearts of evil men to repentance and to bring His response to the prayers of the saints who cried in 6:10, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" The promise of 14:9-10 is about to come to pass. "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger;" And, at last, we have the follow up to chapter 6, verses 16-17.

There is no specific time frame given for the extent of each plague or if they overlap or are sequential. Traditionally, the entire episode of the end period of these days is seven years with the last three being the period of God's retribution. But some of the period will be filled with a great end time battle, the extent of which is unknown in terms of length of time. I would speculate that the time of the plagues would be comparable with the time it took for the plagues to be released upon Egypt. This, of course, is not known with certainty either. Perhaps as short a time as weeks or months or as long as a year or two.

16:1-7,

1: Then I heard a loud voice from the temple, saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God." 2: So the first *angel* went and poured out his bowl on the earth; and it became a

loathsome and malignant sore on the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image. 3: The second *angel* poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like *that* of a dead man; and every living thing in the sea died. 4: Then the third *angel* poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of waters; and they became blood. 5: And I heard the angel of the waters saying, "Righteous are You, who are and who were, O Holy One, because You judged these things; 6: for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it." 7: And I heard the altar saying, "Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments."

1: Since the heavenly temple seems to be vacated, the only source of the "loud voice" must be that of God Himself. The angels are then commanded to commence with the pouring out of the bowls of His wrath upon the earth. Again, mention of "the earth" means to afflict evil and wicked men and in this case those who have accepted the mark and worship of the beast.

2: The first angel pours his bowl upon the earth and the first plague falls upon those who bear the mark of the beast and worship his image. It consists of malignant and loathsome sores much like the plague in Egypt described in Exodus 9:10, "...boils breaking out with sores on man and beast."

3: The second angel pours his bowl into the sea and the second plague turned the sea into something similar to the blood of a dead man. In 8:8 at the second trumpet plague, "...*something* like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea; and a third of the sea became blood, and a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life, died; and a third of the ships were destroyed." But here, everything in the sea died. A catastrophe.

4-7: The third angel pours out his bowl into the fresh waters and springs and they also became blood. In Egypt, the Nile was struck and became blood. Though the fresh water is affected, there is no comment about the damage done. There is however, a statement made by the "angel of the waters." This angel is not mentioned anywhere else in scripture. But this angel has an apparent companion in 14:18, an angel having power over fire. there may be other angels given special authority over the elements. In 7:1 we have four angels holding back the four winds of the earth.

This "angel of the waters" makes a statement first upholding the righteousness and

holiness of God and then pointing out that this judgment is appropriate and deserved considering all the blood of the saints and prophets that has been spilled by the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image. Interestingly enough, the blood of the saints and prophets was mostly spilled in the cities of Jerusalem and Samaria.

This statement meets with the approval of "the altar." This altar, probably of incense, represents the prayers of all the saints who have suffered through the ages. This is the only place in Revelation where the altar is heard speaking. Its voice is a reprise of verse 5 attesting to the righteousness and justice of God.

Although a vast subject, it needs to be stressed that God is not the source of evil. too often believers make statements attributing some disaster or other to God and wonder why He did such a thing, allowed it or did not prevent it. This book makes it clear that it is man choosing the instigation of evil that is the source of evil in our world and that the natural disasters, war, and other human evil are not of God. this is clear from Genesis, chapter 3, and onward. Man gave his dominion and decided to choose evil rather than good (god) by which to conduct his existence. Being cast out of paradise, man has made his own bed and God, who gave man dominion to do as he wishes, has not rescinded it. Thus, by His own decree, and with man's willingness He does not interfere with the free will of a person unless requested to do so by the repentant and willing heart of that person.<sup>216</sup> Here, God is using the last means to bring anyone to repentance that remains before the end. Much like the plagues in Egypt were designed to motivate Pharaoh, so these plagues have a purpose. But as Pharaoh heart was hardened in rebellion, so it comes to pass here. There is no excuse for this.<sup>217</sup> God's actions here are completely vindicated.

16:8-9,

8: "The fourth *angel* poured out his bowl upon the sun, and it was given to it to scorch men with fire. 9: Men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues, and they did not repent so as to give Him glory."

8: The fourth angel pours out his bowl upon the Sun and its heat upon the earth was increased as to cause people to suffer from an intense heat, not enough to

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<sup>216</sup> See a full discussion of this subject in the series of short articles by this author entitled, "Essentials Of Our Faith Understanding The Problem of Evil" online at: [www.bibleclassroom.org](http://www.bibleclassroom.org).

<sup>217</sup> See: Romans 1:20; 2:1; John 15:22.

consume them, but cause an agony and suffering as if too close to a fire. Now we begin to see that these plagues are not sequential, that is, as one dissipates another begins. But they are compound, one coming soon after the last one and now those with the mark of the beast suffer even greater. This is clearly what is going on when we reach verses 10-11.

9: They choose to "blaspheme God" rather than seek His face in repentance and contrition. What is fascinating is that they recognize that such power must come from God who demonstrates His superior power over the beast, but rather than acknowledge this in their hearts, they continue to trust in the beast and make war against God. Strange, but this is the way people are as illustrated by the next verse.

16:10-11,

10: "Then the fifth *angel* poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became darkened; and they gnawed their tongues because of pain, 11: and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they did not repent of their deeds."

10: The fifth angel pours out his bowl upon the center of power of the beast and his throne. In 13:2 the "throne of the beast" is noted as having been given him by the dragon. These are the only two places where the throne of the beast is mentioned. The "throne of the beast" may well be located in Babylon the Great. We will look at this more closely in chapters 17 and 18.

This plague is of a supernatural darkness like that on Egypt in Exodus 10:21-23,

21: "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even a darkness which may be felt.' 22: So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days. 23: They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the sons of Israel had light in their dwellings."

"Darkness" is frequently the sign of impending judgment. The heavenly signs before Christ's return (the Day of the Lord) includes the darkening of the sun, moon and stars. At Christ's crucifixion "from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour." This darkness was indicative of God judging Christ in our place, a judgment upon universal sin the penalty of which was death. But

here it is now indicative of judgment, not upon sin, but upon evil and its leadership.

The darkness was so intent that they could not see their hands in front of their faces it appears. Their pain (perhaps from the scorching ) could not be alleviated. Perhaps they could not find water either to soothe their burning skin or to drink and this would cause their tongues to swell and increase their pain. If the fresh water sources are still bloody, then this would cause even more difficulty.

11: But rather than fall on their knees and appeal to God, they blasphemed Him once again because of their pain and sores (still extant from verse 2) and did not repent of their deeds. It would seem that there is an awareness that God is superior in strength to the beast and is behind these plagues. Perhaps they even know the message of the angel in 14:6-7,

6: And I saw another angel flying in mid-heaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; 7: and he said with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters."

Thus, they are in full knowledge of the situation and conflict between God and the beast. Perhaps this also corresponds with the message of the events and the two witnesses in chapter 11. So they have, with knowledge, deliberately chosen to harden their hearts against God and remain bound to the beast.

16:12-14,

12: The sixth *angel* poured out his bowl on the great river, the Euphrates; and its water was dried up, so that the way would be prepared for the kings from the east. 13: And I saw *coming* out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs; 14: for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.

12: The sixth angel pours out his bowl upon the Euphrates River and it dries up. This plague is not poured out upon men but rather prepares the way so that the way for the "kings from the east" can be prepared. As we saw in 9:13,"the Euphrates

was known to be the border or limit of civilization as well as the limit of Israel's greatest rule under Solomon. Beyond it lay enemies and heathen, particularly Babylon.. It says in Genesis 15:18, as God spoke with Abraham, "On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates:..."

The confederation of these kings "from the east" are either the "kings of the whole world" or combine with other kings and are gathered together by the influence of signs performed by these spirits. Then they are to join with the beast in battle against God and the Lamb. In 17:2, the kings of the earth have committed immorality with the "great harlot" and in 17: 12-14 there are ten kings having given their authority to the beast to make war with the Lamb. It is reasonable that all these kings and their armies are one and the same but given John is descriptive of them in varying ways. The nations of the "east" would include modern day Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. There is a curious correspondence with the plague of chapter 9:14-21, in that the hordes there cross the Euphrates to bring death to 1/3 of mankind except for those who have the seal of God on their foreheads.

13-14: Each one of the three evil powers is seen spewing out an "unclean" "demonic" spirit. Each is likened to a "frog." There are possibly two reasons for this description. 1. It once again takes us to Exodus 8:1-14 and the plague of frogs upon Egypt and 2. Frogs were considered among the unclean creatures and were not to be eaten.<sup>218</sup> The beast from the earth is now identified as "the false prophet" for the first time giving us the specific religious (demonic) element in this end time power.

These three demonic spirits exhibit signs which influence a coalition of kings and armies to agree to come to the aid of the beast and do war against God at the final great battle John calls, "The Great Day of God Almighty." It is to be noted that this day is defined by the word "war." Other attempts to define this in other terms are inaccurate.

16:15,

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<sup>218</sup> Leviticus 11:10, 29-31; Deuteronomy 4:9-10.

15: ("Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.")

15a: In the midst of this terrible event reassurance is given to the readers of John's manuscript and to those who may be living during this period. Christ is quoted and draws the attention of the reader to Himself. "Behold" is "Look." This is where our focus is to be, not on world chaos. Our trust, hope and faith are to be fixed on Him who is to come. Paul wrote Timothy, "Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. I Timothy 6:17. And the writer of Hebrews notes,

"Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:1-2

15b. "I am coming like a thief." This is not a reference to style, but to time. In Luke 12:39 we read,

"But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have allowed his house to be broken into."

And Paul writes in I Thessalonians 5:1-3,

1: "Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. 2: For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. 3: While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape."<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> The rest of the passage is germane also, 4: "But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; 5: for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; 6: so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. 7: For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. 8: But since we are of *the* day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. 9: For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10: who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him. 11: Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing."

Then Revelation 3:3 makes it clear as Jesus says to the church at Sardis, "I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you."

15c. "Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.")

Here, the mandate is to alertness since the time of Christ's return is unknown. The emphasis is on then unexpected time of His coming and this message is frequent in the New Testament.<sup>220</sup> Wearing the clothes is evidence that the believer is awake and alert to the coming of the Lord regardless of when it is. He will be ready and will not sleep. One removes his clothes when he goes to sleep. If the master comes then, he would be caught "naked" and his shame would be evident. In other words, he is to always be in a state of focus on the Lord, awaiting His coming regardless of the chaos in the world.

Jesus spoke of this need to be ready many times. We think of the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25, and Luke 12:35-38 we read,

35: "Be dressed in readiness, and *keep* your lamps lit. 36: Be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open *the door* to him when he comes and knocks. 37: Blessed are those slaves whom the master will find on the alert when he comes; truly I say to you, that he will gird himself *to serve*, and have them recline *at the table*, and will come up and wait on them. 38: "Whether he comes in the second watch, or even in the third, and finds *them* so, blessed are those *slaves*."

There is no mention of "white" clothes. So the idea that one is to always live righteously and holy is not as strong here as it is in 3:18 in the letter to Laodicea though there is a definite similarity.

"I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and *that* the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see."

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<sup>220</sup> Matthew 24:42-43;, 25:13; Mark 13:33-37; Luke 12:37-43 21:36; I Thessalonians 5:6; I Peter 4:7; II Peter 3:10; etc.

Though buying "white clothes" point to the need to repent and come to Christ in humility rather than trust in one's own physical wealth and self righteousness, in chapter 16, the context is readiness. Not that believers are not to conduct themselves any less than righteously and lovingly in a world filled with chaos. And not that they are to live a phony life putting on the cover of righteousness but secretly engaging in ungodly behavior. This is a legitimate issue, but here the context points first to the focus and readiness on Christ's person and coming. that focus will impact conduct.

16:16

16: And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon.

16: "Har-Magedon" is a transliteration from the Hebrew and means "Mountain of Megiddo." Its name is derived from an ancient town on Mount Carmel that overlooks the valley (or plain). It may have been named for a Canaanite ruler before the conquest. Today, Megiddo is a Tel on the eastern slope of the Mount Carmel range. The "Valley of Megiddo" is roughly located in a flat plain between this range and Nazareth. It runs SE-NW and the Kishon River flows on the western side of the plain in the same direction to the Mediterranean. It is also associated with the Valley of Jezreel and the Valley of Esdraelon. Today, the IDF has an airbase in the valley.

The Valley of Megiddo is one of the few flatter areas in all Israel and has been the sight of historic conflicts including battles with Egypt, The Hyksos, Canaanites, other surrounding nations and between Judah and Israel to name a few.<sup>221</sup>

John sees it as the battleground of the final conflict between the forces of evil empowered by the dragon and the Lord. Here, the coalition of armies in support of the beast from "the east" gather "together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty."

16:17

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<sup>221</sup> See: Joshua 12:7, 21; 17:11-12; Judges 5:19; II Kings 23:28-30 (and II Chronicles 25:32); II Chronicles 35:22. It is possibly referred to in Ezekiel 38: 8, 21 (the mountains of Israel); and in 39:1-17.

17: "Then the seventh *angel* poured out his bowl upon the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, "It is done."

17: The seventh angel pours out his bowl upon the air. The voice from the temple announces the completion of both the outpouring of the bowls and the period called "this present age." The fifth poured out his bowl upon the Euphrates so that it dried up. Here the air is affected. We are not told immediately how the air is affected by this bowl. Those loyal to the beast are already suffering from sores, water pollution, scorching, and darkness. The bowl poured out on the "air" is defined for us in verse 21. It is a severe plague of heavy ice hailstones. The message of the loud voice from "out of the temple and from the throne" states, "It is done." This voice is clearly that of God Himself based on from where it originates.

The consummation of this present age is now at hand and God's work to bring men to repentance and into His kingdom by any and all means necessary is complete. Now, all that remains is the final battle and the destruction of the earthly empire and the rule of the beast.

16:18,

18: And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake *was it, and* so mighty."

18: A historic earthquake preceded by the divine heavenly expression of God's glory and power is unleashed. The earthquake is more massive than any known to man.

16:19-21,

19: "The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath. 20: And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. 21: And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe."

19: The result of this cacophony of sound, fury and a massive earthquake is that,

A. The "great city" was split into three parts. The term "great city" is used of Jerusalem in 11:8 and begs the question, "Is this 'great city' and perhaps 'Babylon the Great' one and the same and is "Babylon the Great" a designation for Jerusalem? Though many commentators point to Rome, some also have questioned if this could be Jerusalem. The evidence for both is possible as well as that Babylon the Great is simply the capital of the beast's empire located somewhere else, even ancient Babylon itself. We will look at this more carefully in chapter 17. Meanwhile, the "great city" is split into three parts by the great earthquake. In 11:13, a tenth of the city of Jerusalem fell due to a great earthquake. Now it appears that more devastation befalls the city if indeed Jerusalem is the intended "great city." The collapse into "three parts" is difficult to interpret. There is no other reference to anything like this. Several have made either no attempt at an explanation or simply state this represents the totality of the destruction.

Today, there are three parts or sections to the city of Jerusalem, Muslim, Christian and Jewish. Whether this has a bearing on the meaning is difficult to say.

B. The cities of the heathen are turned into rubble, a proleptic statement - the details of which will be described more fully later on. The cities affected are those of the kings coming together to support the beast in his war against the Lamb.

C. Babylon the Great is mentioned separately from the "great city" giving question whether they are the same or not. Here, they seem to be seen differently as Babylon the Great, the capital of the empire (kingdom) of the beast is called out for special "remembrance" in God's wrath. Yet this is not conclusive.

20: The massive earthquake leveled mountains as well as islands. In 6:14 we see a similar statement, "The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places." This could actually be the same event if we look at 6:14 as a prolepsis as well considering it looks ahead to the brink of Christ's return in wrath.

At the end of chapter 6, a prolepsis occurs where we read,

6:14: The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. 15: Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of

the mountains; 16: and they \*said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; 17: for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

The fulfillment of that is now taking place. 6:17 left us with a series of interludes and ancillary visions until this point. Chapter 19 will finally conclude the vision of 6:14-17.

21: The final plague upon the wicked of the earth was ice hailstones from the sky weighing a "talent" each. Used of metals, a "talent" of silver weighed about a hundred pounds and a "talent" of gold about two hundred pounds. This part of the plague is the result of the seventh bowl of God's wrath being poured out into the air. Again, this resulted in blasphemy against God rather than repentance. The blasphemy might be not just for recognizing that the plague was divine in origin but lacking that insight, blasphemy because God does nothing to prevent it. Thus, he receives the blame for the perceived evil in the eyes of men. A rather common view today among both Christians and non-believers.

# THE BOOK OF REVELATION

## Chapter Seventeen

Introduction.

The next two chapters are dedicated to the judgment of Babylon the Great. The identification of what Babylon the Great is and where it is located is filled with debate and confusion. The suggestions are not definite, even this author's. But the opinions are worthy of examination and study.

There are important and corresponding terms that must be defined as we look at these two chapters. Included are: "The throne of the Beast"; "The Great City"; "Babylon the Great" and the "Great Harlot."

THE THIRD MAJOR VISION (17:1-21:8)

17:1-5,

1: Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, 2: with whom the kings of the earth committed *acts of* immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality." 3: And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns. 4: The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality, 5: and on her forehead a name *was* written, a mystery, "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."

1-2: These next two chapters are given to the judgment of Babylon the Great. The importance of this event is underscored by the amount of time given to it. In this verse we are introduced for the first time to the term "the great harlot (or prostitute)" a feminine personification of "Babylon the Great" as we find out in verse 5.

She sits on "many waters." This we find in verse 15 to be, "... peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues." This is also a reflection of Jeremiah 51:13 where speaking of ancient Babylon the Lord says through the prophet,

"O you who dwell by many waters, Abundant in treasures, Your end has come, The measure of your end."

The designation "great harlot" is defined as her "committing immorality (fornication) with the kings of the earth" (14:8, 17:2 and 18:3). This immorality is spiritual in its foundation and effects the entire relationship with the kings and multitudes of the earth who were made "drunk with the wine of her immorality." This last phrase is repeated in 14:8, 18:3, 18:9 and here in 17:2. This indicates that these nations were engaged in both religious and commercial enterprises and both are corrupt in the eyes of the Lord. Those without the mark or name of the beast are excluded from benefitting from such commerce.

So we see that this great harlot is both a city (17:18) and a system. It is likely the place of the "throne of the beast" (16:10). She "sits" on both the "many waters" and on the beast (verse 7). This pictures either a controlling influence and directional mandate or, as some suggest, a dependence upon the beast and the nations for her power. Actually both are likely. Though she certainly exerts a controlling influence, she is also being "carried" by the beast (verse 7). The "harlot" and her influence is religious at its core. Her power and wealth however, comes from the commercial enterprises of the beast as business is done with the kings of the earth. This "great harlot" is to be judged and what exactly for? Well, let's find out.

3. John is once again placed into a spiritual ecstasy as in 1:10; 4:2 and 21:10 where the exact same phrase is used. The "wilderness", though reminiscent of the place where the glorious woman went in 12:6, is not necessarily related to that but represents an isolated place where God's presence is not welcome or has been rejected. There, John sees a woman sitting on a scarlet beast full of blasphemous names having seven heads and ten horns. This suggests that the "many waters" upon which she also sits is to be identified with the scarlet beast and are synonymous.

The beast is the one from the sea as the heads and horns indicate (13:1), and we see for the first time the color of the beast as scarlet or crimson, noting a frequent royal color and perhaps relating to the color of the dragon which is fiery red. The beast,

in 13:4ff. receives its authority and power from the dragon. "Full of blasphemous names" indicates the names of deity applied to itself, a direct insult to the true God and a denial of His power and person.

So we have the woman sitting both upon "many waters" (verse 1) and upon "the beast" (verse 3). In apocalyptic language and images, this is not a contradiction but a recognition that both metaphors or images represent essentially the same entity as the beast (the antichrist empire and its ruler) and the many waters (peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues) are under the control of the dragon.

4. The harlot is both a religious system and a city - the capital of the beast and throne of its ruler, the antichrist. Though some have seen the colors as representing the garb of the Catholic clergy, cardinals and Papacy, this is not John's intention. The colors are those of wealth and luxury, if not royalty. The wealth is noted in 18:3,17 and 19. The religious element of the "woman" is that she symbolizes the demonically inspired idolatrous worship of the ancient Empires. The wealth, we find out in chapter 18, convinces the merchants and kings of the earth that she can buy their goods and enrich them if they submit to her.

Her harlotry comes in the fact that many of those (especially kings) in Judah and Israel who were supposed to be bonded to God, indeed "married" to Him, engaged in idol worship. At this end time period, the inference is that the "great harlot" of false religion and idolatry (see: 13:14-15) will be in the holy land, probably in the holy place in Jerusalem (See: Daniel 8:11-14; 9:27; 11:31; 12:11; Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14; Luke 21:20).

The gold cup full of abominations is right out of Jeremiah 51:7,

51:5, "For neither Israel nor Judah has been forsaken By his God, the LORD of hosts, Although their land is full of guilt Before the Holy One of Israel. 6: Flee from the midst of Babylon, And each of you save his life! Do not be destroyed in her punishment, For this is the LORD'S time of vengeance; He is going to render recompense to her. 7: Babylon has been a golden cup in the hand of the LORD, Intoxicating all the earth. The nations have drunk of her wine; Therefore the nations are going mad."

Though full of supposedly fine wine, it is actually full of deception (intoxication) and corruption. The term "abomination" means anything detestable to the Lord,

but particularly is used to describe idolatry. So the religious nature of the woman and the city is again emphasized. All of this becomes the way in which the great harlot seduces her victims and they fall into a stupor as it were in their spiritual and commercial intercourse with the harlot.

5. Here we now know that the woman and "Babylon the Great" are one and the same. Chapter 18:18-21 tells us that she is also called "the great city." On the forehead of this female personification of the city is the despicable title, "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." The title, "Babylon the Great" comes from Daniel 4:30. The term "mother of harlots" and "abominations of the earth" are synonymous with false religions and especially idolatry.

We are told that this name is a mystery. This "mystery" means that the name is not to be taken literally, but has a hidden meaning. Both the meaning and the identification of this image has been the source of debate since the first century. Among the candidates are Rome (and the Roman Catholic Church), Ancient Babylon, The USSR (now defunct), Russia, The European Common Market (now "Union"), The United States, Jerusalem, Islam, and others. We will do our best to sort this out and represent both the spiritual emphases and historical/earthly possibilities as best we can. Frankly, Nahum's tirade against Nineveh fits better than does most of these.

We see from the title that there is a correlation to ancient Babylon, but as a "mystery" we cannot conclude that ancient "Babylon" is intended, especially since it was a ruin over two hundred years before John wrote his apocalypse. Some think it will be rebuilt in order to fulfill this prophecy. But there is something about ancient Babylon that relates to John's identification of the woman and the waters and beast she rides.

First would be the correlation that this entity is the mother of harlots. Israel is noted often as being a harlot in its idolatrous practices throughout its history. The passages are too numerous to list. However, Ancient Babylon is never called a harlot. This is because she is already an idolater with no bond to God, whereas Israel seen as bonded to God and His "bride" is called a harlot because of the frequent journeys into idolatry. This gives us a direction. Literal Babylon can't be a harlot because she was never "engaged" or "married" to God. But Israel is another matter. The Lord speaks through Hosea the prophet a poignant message

about Israel's unfaithfulness in 1:1-2:5 and more. Speaking to the tribes of Israel personified as their mother, here is a sample,

2:2, "Contend with your mother, contend, For she is not my wife, and I am not her husband; And let her put away her harlotry from her face And her adultery from between her breasts, 2:3, Or I will strip her naked And expose her as on the day when she was born. I will also make her like a wilderness, Make her like desert land And slay her with thirst. 2:4, "Also, I will have no compassion on her children, Because they are children of harlotry. 2:5 "For their mother has played the harlot; She who conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, 'I will go after my lovers, Who give *me* my bread and my water, My wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.'"

Speaking of Israel and Judah in metaphorical language, Ezekiel writes a scathing rebuke in chapter 23 of his book, and it fits well with what we see in this "great harlot" and those she seduces turning on her. (See: 17:16-17)<sup>222</sup>

1: The word of the LORD came to me again, saying, 2: "Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother; 3: and they played the harlot in Egypt. They played the harlot in their youth; there their breasts were pressed and there their virgin bosom was handled. 4: "Their names were Oholah the elder and Oholibah her sister. And they became Mine, and they bore sons and daughters. And *as for* their names, Samaria is Oholah and Jerusalem is Oholibah. 5: "Oholah played the harlot while she was Mine; and she lusted after her lovers, after the Assyrians, *her* neighbors, 6: who were clothed in purple, governors and officials, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding on horses.

11: "Now her sister Oholibah saw *this*, yet she was more corrupt in her lust than she, and her harlotries were more than the harlotries of her sister. 12: "She lusted after the Assyrians, governors and officials, the ones near, magnificently dressed, horsemen riding on horses, all of them desirable young men. 13: "I saw that she had defiled herself; they both took the same way.

17: "The Babylonians came to her to the bed of love and defiled her with their harlotry. And when she had been defiled by them, she became disgusted with

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<sup>222</sup> See also: Isaiah 1:1-4,21-25; Jeremiah 2:1-3, 20; 3:1; Ezekiel 16; Hosea 2:1-7 etc.

them. 18: "She uncovered her harlotries and uncovered her nakedness; then I became disgusted with her, as I had become disgusted with her sister. 19: "Yet she multiplied her harlotries, remembering the days of her youth, when she played the harlot in the land of Egypt. 20: "She lusted after their paramours, whose flesh is *like* the flesh of donkeys and whose issue is *like* the issue of horses. 21: "Thus you longed for the lewdness of your youth, when the Egyptians handled your bosom because of the breasts of your youth. 22: "Therefore, O Oholibah, thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold I will arouse your lovers against you, from whom you were alienated, and I will bring them against you from every side: 23: the Babylonians and all the Chaldeans, Pekod and Shoa and Koa, *and* all the Assyrians with them; desirable young men, governors and officials all of them, officers and men of renown, all of them riding on horses. 24: 'They will come against you with weapons, chariots and wagons, and with a company of peoples. They will set themselves against you on every side with buckler and shield and helmet; and I will commit the judgment to them, and they will judge you according to their customs.

30: 'These things will be done to you because you have played the harlot with the nations, because you have defiled yourself with their idols. 31: 'You have walked in the way of your sister; therefore I will give her cup into your hand.' 32: "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'You will drink your sister's cup, Which is deep and wide. You will be laughed at and held in derision; It contains much. 33: 'You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, The cup of horror and desolation, The cup of your sister Samaria. 34: 'You will drink it and drain it. Then you will gnaw its fragments And tear your breasts; for I have spoken,' declares the Lord GOD. 35: "Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, 'Because you have forgotten Me and cast Me behind your back, bear now the *punishment* of your lewdness and your harlotries.'"

36: Moreover, the LORD said to me, "Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Then declare to them their abominations. 37: "For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands. Thus they have committed adultery with their idols and even caused their sons, whom they bore to Me, to pass through *the fire* to them as food. 38: "Again, they have done this to Me: they have defiled My sanctuary on the same day and have profaned My sabbaths. 39: "For when they had slaughtered their children for their idols, they entered My sanctuary on the same day to profane it; and lo, thus they did within My house.

46: "For thus says the Lord GOD, 'Bring up a company against them and give them over to terror and plunder. 47: 'The company will stone them with stones and cut them down with their swords; they will slay their sons and their daughters and burn their houses with fire. 48: 'Thus I will make lewdness cease from the land, that all women may be admonished and not commit lewdness as you have done. 49: 'Your lewdness will be requited upon you, and you will bear the penalty of *worshiping* your idols; thus you will know that I am the Lord GOD.'"

We can see from these and other examples (as in Jeremiah) the spiritual element in the image. So first, we would note that the major problem with the kingdom of the beast is spiritual. The caution is of course for any who would be drawn to the kingdom, deception and wondrous works of the beast to look out for the spiritual and religious focus and beware of being entrapped. The ancient religions of Babylon were astrology and the worship of a pantheon of gods led by Marduk, pictured as a bearded man with a staff. Many gods had animal or bird like features similar to the Egyptians. These gods, numbering more than a dozen, had their temples, priests and religious rituals. However, none of these quite fits the portrait of what John describes to us in his text.

17:6-8,

6: And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. When I saw her, I wondered greatly. 7: And the angel said to me, "Why do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns. 8: "The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come.

6: Second, this "woman" is "drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus." Being drunk on blood is from Ezekiel 39:19. Although the term saints could apply to Christian believers, the separation suggests the faithful from the Old Testament. The word "and" is in the Greek and if John wished to identify that both the saints and witnesses were the same, he would have left off the word "and." Now who (or what), Biblically and historically can be accused of shedding the blood of both the Old Testament saints and the witnesses of Jesus? 18:24 supports this as it notes, "And in her was found the blood of

prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth."

If we take the list of possibilities in the comment on verse 5, all are eliminated except Jerusalem. The ancient empires were all gone by the time Christ arrived and Rome did not exist at the time of the Old Testament patriarchs. Is Jerusalem ever called "Babylon" anywhere else in the Bible? Perhaps I Peter 5:13 could be an illusion to this. Rome doesn't fit regardless of how hard people try to make it fit, especially when verse 9 is considered (which we will do shortly). We can't be absolutely conclusive about the Jerusalem designation, but it actually fits better than Rome as we shall see. So John wonders at the sight of the woman who is drunk with blood of saints and witnesses for Jesus.

7-8. The angel promises to explain the mystery of the woman and the beast. He addresses the beast first and gives no explanation of the woman except for a small reference in verse 18. The seven heads and ten horns identify this beast as the beast of the sea in chapter 13 (see the commentary there). So the information to follow is supplemental to that explanation. The beast in chapter 13 duplicated here pictures an empire which combines of all the ancient empires up to John's day in one single entity. That is why it was, is not and will appear again (verse 8). It will come up from the "abyss" and go to destruction. This would suggest that Rome is not a part of the image because during the vision of John the beast "is not" but will appear again. But John has made it clear from his references to Daniel that this beast includes the essence and territory of Assyria, Babylonia, Medo-Persia, and Greece. Since it is the beast of the sea, the abyss and the sea are seen in correspondence. Yet the abyss, though perhaps in the sea, is a separate entity from the sea itself as noted in 9:11, 11:7, 20:1, and 20:3.

The beast will go to destruction as we will see in the next two chapters. This is also prophesied and the patterns of this destruction are seen in the judgments of the other aforementioned empires.

Once again, here mention is made of those "who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world." This is repeated from 13:8 and perhaps referenced again in 20:12,15. These are the unbelieving citizens in the world. They will wonder (or be amazed) at the "resurrection" of this beast and must be cognizant of the history of the past empires and of the history of Israel as it related to these empires.

17:9-14,

9: "Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, 10: and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while. 11: "The beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth and is *one* of the seven, and he goes to destruction. 12: "The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour. 13: "These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast. 14: "These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him *are the called and chosen and faithful.*"

9: Verses 8-12 must be considered together. So following upon verse eight and in that context, wisdom is to discern the clue John gives here. The vast majority of commentators disregard verses 8, and 10-12 in their interpretation. Most see Rome in the "seven hills upon which the woman sits." Some claim it is certain and an inescapable conclusion. But not so fast. Yes, there is the adage of Rome being built on seven hills and many Roman authors have said so.<sup>223</sup> But Rome isn't technically actually built on seven hills and the designation was not made until just before the time of Christ in a poetic expression. The City of Rome actually boasts being built on more than seven hills. Among many cities also so designated are: Jerusalem; Istanbul; Amman, Jordan; Moscow; and Cincinnati, Ohio to name a few and, to note the foolishness of depending on this as the identifying mark of the entity upon which the woman sits. But *if* it is Rome, then there is the effort to try to squeeze a selection of seven emperors into the image plus realize that according to verse 8, the beast "is not" at John's time - a time when Rome was near the peak of her power. None of this can be honestly done. Then of course, one has to make sense of the beast that "is not" in verse 11 and the king that "is" in verse 10. On the other hand, verse 18 bears looking at as this, at first, does not appear to fit Jerusalem...or does it?

Further, in Biblical and especially apocalyptic presentations, the number seven often symbolizes completion. This could simply be a number designating the

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<sup>223</sup> Among them: Juvenal, Ovid, Virgil, Pliny, Cicero, Varro (116-27 B.C. and he lists them and may have invented the concept). The Roman personalities mentioned Above (all poets except Pliny) lived after Varro and into the second century A.D.. There is no mention of "seven hills" before Varro even though the City of Rome existed over 600 years before his time.

transpiring of a sequence of events, kingdoms and kings until the last one without really attempting to be literal.

Now, she is sitting on "many waters", the "beast", and "seven mountains" which are actually "seven kings" (verses 10-11). These are all synonymous for the empire of the Antichrist. The woman is seen as exerting power or direction over the beast since she is "sitting" on it.

10-11: Going back to these "mountains" or "hills", verse 10 tells us they are kings, not mountains at all. In addition, verse 11 makes it clear that the beast is of the seven and is an eighth. The word "one" in verse 11 is added. Leaving it out we have, "which was and is not, is himself also an eighth and is of the seven." This refers back to verse 7.

Also, John speaks of the "kings" in the present tense, yet "five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while." So John speaks of kings in the present tense. But the present vision is that of the end time battle of Armageddon about to commence, not necessarily of the time of John's writing as most assume. The debate over the interpretation of this verse is intense. Certainly it is not an easy passage to interpret. If one tries to see these kings as the Roman emperors from Augustus onward it is awkward and does not fit the theme. Some eliminate some emperors or change the order so it will fit in with what they think. But this is not Biblical scholarship. Plus, the question still remains, "Is John seeing the vision as present in his time or in the time of the end?" If the time of the end, as the context tells us, then we cannot determine how to interpret this as we have no time frame and thus no reference to which kingdom these could refer. Thus we can move away from the historical/literal to the symbolic/spiritual without fearing to do damage to the overall narrative since the message to the readers is a spiritual warning at its core.

Looking at the whole passage, the woman rides the beast with seven heads and ten horns (verse 7). This is also seen as "many waters" – "peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues." But this ridden entity (the beast) is also described as "seven mountains" (verse 9) and the "seven mountains" are also "seven kings"(verse 10). And of the "seven kings" we find the beast itself. It is of that group, but not of the seven. Instead it is an "eighth" and "is not" now but yet to appear (verse 11). Then it will go to destruction.

Allow this consideration. If the beast is the end time empire empowered by the dragon (which seems clear), then the seven kings (or mountains) with which it is identified must also be empires (or kingdoms), the kings representing each empire or kingdom. The beast is an empire yet to appear in the end time but is not "now" in existence (John says this three times in 17:8-11). But it did exist, does not now, but will appear again out of the abyss. John also said (13:2,12,14) that the beast had a fatal wound by a sword (war) but was healed and came back to life. This also fits with the commentary above. And, of the seven kings, one "is" but the beast (another later empire) is not and is yet to appear. Well, the one king (empire) that "is" must be present at John's writing and that could indeed be Rome. Five before it have fallen (verse 10) and it is the sixth. But it will fall and the seventh will come for a little while. Then, finally, the eighth will appear and it will be the last and called the beast.

The five empires that have come and fallen are easy to identify. Assyrian, Babylonian, Median, Persian and Greek. Then the Roman, a seventh and the final empire called the beast. This is a suggestion and it remains consistent with the full contextual images John gives us.<sup>224</sup>

Another important facet of all this is that we cannot ignore the symbolic/spiritual understanding of these verses. Though John is rather specific about this, seven kings could represent the total amount of kings (kingdoms) before the end regardless of the actual number (see footnote 220). The eighth would be the final chapter in the saga of the present age. These kings, kingdoms and empires are to all be seen as corrupt, the creation of man empowered by the dragon. They are intrinsically anti-God and Anti-Christ. The spiritual message is found in 18:4 and it is timeless, "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues..."

12: Now, speaking of the last "beast" we return to the original description given in

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<sup>224</sup> Evolving out of the Roman Empire came the Byzantine Empire. The capital was placed at Constantinople and named after the emperor Constantine who moved the capital there. It lasted roughly a thousand years until the crusades and then the Turks gained power in the region and the Ottoman Empire arose. Since then we have had the British Empire - as well as other smaller empires (primarily in the far east) that have also been scattered throughout the planet for the past two thousand years so it is nearly impossible to try and pin down the vision to an historic time frame. A division may be found in that the ancient empires were all involved in the practice of idolatrous religion while the byzantine empire was essentially Christian as was the British Empire. There is some discussion about idolatry within Islam. Mohammed is reported as having offered a sacrifice to "Al-Uzza" the morning star of Venus and other gods. Muslims venerate places and things like Mecca and the Quran. They bow to Mecca daily and hold the image of Mohammed and the Quran so sacred that to desecrate either is a capital offense.

chapter 13 as this verse refers to the "beast" just described upon which the woman is riding. The ten horns are ten kings, but different than the seven kings/empires of verses 9-10. The ten horns are seen in chapter 13 as each having a "diadem." In Daniel 7:24 the horns are identified as "kings" and though chapter 13:1 notes the "diadems" on each horn, we can be reasonably certain that this is the same beast in chapter 17 even though the definition of "kings" is used to define the horns. They have not yet received a kingdom placing them in the future and this corresponds with the previous passage and commentary above.

They receive authority with the beast for a short time as the term "one hour" suggests. This fits in with the mountains and many waters, (peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues) upon which the woman is also seen as riding. The purpose of that shared authority for a short time is given in verses 13-14.

16:13-14.

13: "And I saw *coming* out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs; 14: for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty."

13-14: This is again a prolepsis as the future tense suggests in the narrative of the vision. The purpose (or: "one mind") for the coalition of these ten kings and the empire called "the beast" is to wage war against the Lamb. The kings have apparently been manipulated by the three demonic spirits seen in 16:13-14.

This war will take place at Armageddon and the Lamb will defeat this coalition. He can do this because, "...He is Lord of lords and King of kings." This war will be described in chapter 19.

14b: "...and those who are with Him *are the* called and chosen and faithful. These chosen and faithful are without question believers from the ages. They accompany Him because they have been resurrected at His appearance as promised by the Lord Himself, reiterated by Paul in I Thessalonians 4. The defeat of the beast is at His coming as is the resurrection of the faithful. These are not previously "raptured" saints who accompany Him. Regardless, all will witness His victory. Every eye will see and every knee will bow.

17:15-18,

15: And he said to me, "The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues. 16: "And the ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire. 17: "For God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled. 18: "The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth."

15: Already discussed.

16-17: A fascinating passage and corresponds with the portrait of Babylon and its fate in Ezekiel 23as discussed above. The ten horns (kings and kingdoms) that have given their authority to the beast AND the beast itself now turn upon the religious "harlot", hate her, and destroy her. The why is explained in verse 17. They are under her demonic influence until the purpose of God is fulfilled and then their eyes are opened. The "purpose of the Lord" is seen by some commentators as 1. Their cooperation with the beast in the war against the Lamb. 2. Another sees their cooperation with Him in the destruction of the harlot. 3. Another view sees it as the recognition of their error after His conquest. In other words, they see the Lord and experience defeat at His presence and now know the truth. In a violent action they overthrow the trappings and garments of the false religion and reject every aspect of its power, wealth and influence. The first and third have the most credibility.

18: Now, can this be descriptive of Jerusalem? Many say no. Well, once again the term "great city" used of Jerusalem in Revelation 11:8 is found here.<sup>225</sup> Also, in speaking of Jerusalem, Jeremiah 22:8-9 reads,

8: "Many nations will pass by this city; and they will say to one another, 'Why has the LORD done thus to this great city?'(Jerusalem) 9: Then they will answer, 'Because they forsook the covenant of the LORD their God and bowed down to other gods and served them.'"

The "great city" is also "Babylon the Great"(18:21) and the "great harlot" - the

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<sup>225</sup> This term "great city" is also used of Nineveh in the book of Jonah.

religion of deception and of the killing of the prophets and witnesses of Jesus. In chapter 11, the Lord of the two witnesses was crucified in the city "mystically called Sodom and Egypt" and the two witnesses were killed by this same beast there. We know that to be Jerusalem. It isn't a stretch to think that John could also call Jerusalem "Babylon the Great" as well. The "great city" is probably also the place where the "throne" of the beast is set up (16:10) as well as where the temple is desecrated and its image set up as the "desolation of abomination in the holy place" as Jesus put it in Matthew 24: 15. The term "great city" is also used in Revelation 18:10, 16, 18, 19, and 21. Now as far as "reigning over the kings of the earth", this is not a problem if the throne and power of the beast and the harlot is in Jerusalem in these end days as the passages quoted above could indicate.

This realization is an important warning flag to God's faithful that regardless of the place, power or presence of any earthly entity, the focus of the believer is to be on Jesus and not on a city like Jerusalem where it would be easy to be deceived because of the intense prophetic emphasis and focus on it. The last place one would think to be the capital of evil in the end times is Jerusalem. Yet for fourteen hundred years the Mosque of Omar, the Dome of the Rock, the place where Mohammed supposedly rose into heaven stands directly upon the temple mount in the area of the Holy Place. One MUST not ignore something like that. Yet for centuries, the church has essentially ignored its presence.

Why would the designation "Babylon the Great" be given to Jerusalem? Because it has succumbed to the idolatry and power of the ancient city of Babylon and is now controlled by the power of the dragon and has allowed the abomination of desolation to be set up in the holy place.

The declaration of the destruction of "Babylon the Great" is made in the next chapter and described in detail, but here in verses 16 and 17, she is destroyed, not directly by the Lord, but by the kings of the earth who see that she has deceived and seduced them.

This pattern is seen not just in the history of Israel, but reflected in the seven letters, especially the letters to Pergamum and Thyatira. Then, to the church at Philadelphia Jesus said,

3:10-13, 10: "Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that *hour* which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. 11: 'I am coming quickly;

hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 12: 'He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name. 13: 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"

The content of this letter stand out in light of the recent chapters we have covered, especially the outpouring of the seven bowls of God's wrath.

# THE BOOK OF REVELATION

## Chapter Eighteen

18:1-3,

1: After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory. 2: And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird. 3: "For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed *acts of* immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality."

1: Another angel comes down from heaven (the sky) and John's viewpoint is from the earth once again. Notice that in his visions he is transported to many different places to report the images and messages there. Now, a different angel, one that has great authority and whose glory (splendor) illuminated the whole earth, appears in John's vision. The last angel to speak was one of those seven who held a bowl filled with a plague of God's wrath. This one is a totally different angel. He has an announcement to make.

2-3: He makes the same announcement that was made in 14:8, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great". That is why the announcement there in the text is seen as a prolepsis. In this recapitulation, we now have the actual event. "Babylon the Great" is a religious deception grounded in idolatry, empowered by the dragon, led by the Antichrist, promoted by the False Prophet and dead set against Christ. It is portrayed as a "city," and as a "harlot" dressed in crimson and purple finery, bedecked with the jewels of the great wealth, "riding" the beast in power and authority and deceiving the kings of the earth who commit "immorality" (idolatry) with her, build commercial wealth as a result and succumb to her deception and seduction in both religious and commercial enterprises. They carry the mark of the beast and/or the number of its name and worship the great image set up in Jerusalem (it seems). Thus they are able to engage in commerce and line their pockets.

But the deception of this religion is seen in its powerless to stop the plagues and

wrath of God and the Lamb and the kings of the earth turn on it and reject the religious influence and destroy the city where it is based (17:16-17).

2b-3: The indictment on the city is clear, " She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird. "For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed *acts of* immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality."

The triple parallelism, "demons," "unclean spirits," and "unclean birds" all are different ways of saying the same thing. The city has captured and possesses every evil, foul, detestable, disgusting and unclean spiritual entity in the eyes of God. The reference to "unclean and hateful birds" is reflective of the prohibition to eat many species of birds primarily because they eat carrion, that is they eat dead flesh. Therefore these birds are used as an image of that which feeds on death. (see: 19:17-18, 21). Spiritually, one can see how this applies, as the people of the city have eaten, in God's eyes, spiritually dead, corrupt and detestable "meat."

3: This description was discussed in 14:8 and 17:2 where it also occurred. Engaging in the filthy idolatrous religion of the "city/harlot" allowed kings and merchants to enrich themselves because they had the proper "permit" to do so. They had apparently submitted to the "mark" of the beast, that is committed themselves to the religious system of the beast and the economic commerce associated and controlled by it.

18:4-8

4: "I heard another voice from heaven, saying, 'Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues; 5: for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. 6: 'Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back *to her* double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her. 7: 'To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, 'I SIT *as* A QUEEN AND I AM NOT A WIDOW, and will never see mourning.' 8: 'For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong.'"

4a: Another voice from heaven cries out, "Come out of her, my people..." This call apparently takes us back to a time before the plagues are poured out. And this suggests several things. 1. This is a timeless call that has been and is announced to God's people throughout the history at all times, and we see this in Jeremiah 51:6, 45.

6: "Flee from the midst of Babylon, And each of you save his life! Do not be destroyed in her punishment, For this is the LORD'S time of vengeance; He is going to render recompense to her."

45: "Come forth from her midst, My people, And each of you save yourselves From the fierce anger of the LORD. "

In other words, the call in verse 4 is not just intended for the latter days, but for all generations as well.

2. But if we focus the call at only the last days, then we see that perhaps the persecution of the church by the beast did not kill all the believers, and that there are still believers at that time. Perhaps they are in hiding as the threat to them is serious. The call is not to come out of hiding but come out of the corruption they are engulfed in. They are within the system established by the beast much like the Israelites were in Egypt when God came and began to pour out plagues in order to persuade Pharaoh to let them leave. That there is still an opportunity to repent and return to the Lord. The call is to those, who not yet God's people, or among the apostate, are being drawn by the Lord to become His. Otherwise they will suffer the plagues that pour down on the Great City.

Paul makes a case for something like this in II Corinthians 6:14-18,

14: Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15: Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? 16: Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. 17: "Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," says the Lord. "AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; And I will welcome you. 18: "And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me," Says the Lord Almighty.

This call is not unlike the call of God through Jeremiah in 51:6, "Flee from the midst of Babylon, And each of you save his life! Do not be destroyed in her punishment, For this is the LORD'S time of vengeance; He is going to render recompense to her." And 51:45, "Come forth from her midst, My people, And each of you save yourselves From the fierce anger of the LORD."

We remind the student that to try and fit the narrative of the book into a sequential chronology is impossible and that John, especially in his gospel, also ignores historical chronology for the sake of theme, impact and message to his specific audience.

4b. They are cautioned to do so that they will not "receive of her plagues." We have proposed that no believer will ever suffer the wrath of God, and the seven bowls of God's wrath are the presentation of this. But we see that this passage is placed before the seven plagues are released. Therefore this call is prior to the plagues being poured out and so time to leave the city before they hit is prompted. Verse 8 looks to support this view as her plagues are seen in the future tense and yet in the narrative have already been poured out. In summary, for any true believers here in the city the call to leave before the plagues come might be understood as, 1. The invasion of the city by the troops of the kings of the earth who, "...will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire." 2. Or they refer to the seven bowls of God's wrath but the call (as described above) are to those who would be drawn from unbelief, or apostasy back to the Lord. Otherwise they will suffer with the City.

Here is part of a discussion taken from "Amazing Facts", between a caller and Doug Batchelor, Pastor of Central Adventist church in Sacramento, California. He expresses a similar view to this author:

**Pastor Doug:** Look at chapter 18 verse 4. And he says, 'I heard another voice from Heaven saying, 'Come out of her...!' God is speaking to His people saying come out of Babylon my people, 'lest you share in her sins and receive of her plagues, for her sins have reached to Heaven.' ' The seven last plagues that fall in chapters 15 and 16 are falling on Babylon and her daughters. If God's people are in Babylon, they are destroyed by the plagues. They are to come out of Babylon, but they're still in the world. But He protects them, the same way He protected Israel in the Old Testament while they were in Egypt.

**Caller:** Exactly.

**Pastor Doug:** It was at the end of the plagues that God's people went out of Egypt. It's at the end of the plagues in Revelation that Jesus comes. The last of the seven plagues is a great earthquake and Christ comes. So all through the Bible I'm compelled to believe that we better have a faith that can hang on because it's going to get tough.

**Caller:** I'm also reading that some of the people believe in the post-trib rapture: Alexander Reese, Andrew Fuller, C. Campbell Morgan, Riley, Charles Spurgeon, you know these are people that walked very closely with God and were Godly men, and they all believed that we would go through the tribulation.

**Pastor Doug:** Exactly - yeah and that's just a fraction of them. The idea of a pre-tribulation rapture is a new doctrine. If you look at the great theologians like Spurgeon, like Wesley, like Whitfield, like Luther, I mean you can go right down the line. Any of these great Bible scholars were unanimous that God's people - you know Revelation says He's coming for a church without spot or wrinkle right? How do you get out the spots and wrinkles? It's hot iron, it's hot water, it's the fiery trials that are going to purify the church.

Although this is worthy of discussion, and this author does not necessarily agree with all of the points made, it is difficult to see where God's people are prevented from suffering persecution from the world in the "great tribulation" - the definition of which is actually God's people suffering greatly in the world just prior to Christ's return.

To divide Jews from the mix and claim that only they will suffer (being converted after the rapture) and that most of the book of Revelation is not applicable to Christians who are alive at that time is extremely hard to swallow, let alone find justified in Scripture.

5-6: The plagues to come on Babylon are due to her sins "piled up as high as heaven." Again, Jeremiah 51:6-9 says,

6: "Flee from the midst of Babylon, And each of you save his life! Do not be destroyed in her punishment, For this is the LORD'S time of vengeance; He is going to render recompense to her. 7: Babylon has been a golden cup in the hand of the LORD, Intoxicating all the earth. The nations have drunk of her wine; Therefore the nations are going mad. 8: Suddenly Babylon has fallen and been broken; Wail over her! Bring balm for her pain; Perhaps she may be healed. 9: We applied healing to Babylon, but she was not healed; Forsake her and let us each go to his own country, For her judgment has reached to heaven And towers up to the very skies."

This is so similar to verses 4-6 in chapter 18, we can propose that the patterns we see in the ancient situation fit here and are patterns and problems that God has had to deal with mankind and His people about since creation.

6-7: The doubling of her payback is tantamount to making her swallow twice what she has been giving out. A parallel is in 7, that is, she is to receive torment and mourning equal to her self-glorification and immorality, especially since she boasts of being married (having support of the dragon, and the deceived merchants and kings of the earth who have committed immorality with her) and so never having to mourn as a widow. This reminds me of whoever fool it was that said, "Not even God could sink this ship."<sup>226</sup>

Also, the figure of Nebuchadnezzar has a number of similarities to the description given of the beast and the city (religion) called "Babylon the Great." In 18:7 Babylon the Great is noted as saying, " I SIT *as* A QUEEN AND I AM NOT A WIDOW, and will never see mourning." This is from Isaiah 47:7-8 describing the attitude of the ancient city of Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar. The passage also notes the treatment of the captive people of God in the city, especially the elderly. Added to this, the ruler Antiochus IV is also a model of the end time tyrant.

8: The reason for the judgment on this city is again stated. It has been stated several times for several chapters. The current narrative is still placed in time prior to the actual judgment, perhaps even before the pouring out of the seven bowls of God's wrath (see comment on verse 4a). The plagues (to come) are threefold, "pestilence and mourning and famine" and, "...she will be burned up with fire."

The first three reflect the bowls of wrath and the last the content of 17:6b which

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<sup>226</sup> This comment about the Titanic is debatable as to its authenticity.

says that the ten horns will, "... burn her up with fire."

18:9-11,

9: "And the kings of the earth, who committed acts of immorality and lived sensuously with her, will weep and lament over her when they see the smoke of her burning, 10: standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come.' 11: "And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, because no one buys their cargoes anymore—

9-11: The narrative begs the question, "Why the weeping and lamenting by the kings of the earth over the destruction of this religious/commercial power?" Well, first they made a commitment to it for personal financial gain. The wealthy harlot persuaded them that she could purchase all their goods and that they would become rich through this commerce. Now, the harlot can no longer buy anything as they see the city burn and fall into total destruction. Second, these kings of the earth and the merchants stand back from the actual destruction and smoke of the city and weep and mourn over her it says, but it is really for themselves. They may actually have been a part of her destruction as well if we see 17:16 in this light.

The judgment of the harlot/city came "in one hour" (verse 17). The rapidity of this stuns those who look on. They had been enjoying the wealth and power of the beast and the harlot for years. It seemed that nothing could stand against this immense strength. Many came to worship the beast and wondered at the power.

In 13:4 they asked the rhetorical question, ""Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?" They were so awestruck that the idea that they were not worshipping the greatest power in the universe never occurred to them. The in "one hour" poof!

So, they weep in actuality, " because no one buys their cargoes anymore— "

This entire book, including this last narrative about the beasts and Babylon the great is not written with the intent that we simply stand aloof and click out tongues at the whole thing like the kings , merchants, shipmasters, sailors and passengers do in this account (verse 17). There are serious spiritual messages and warnings for all of us. We tend to depend on our skills, jobs, culture, government and all the commerce in the world to sustain us and we in the US feel pretty comfortable

doing so without much worry. But what if this prophecy was specifically about the United States? Then how would we conduct our lives and business, both spiritually and economically and what would our attitude be in these things?

18:12-19,

12: "-cargoes of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls and fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet, and every kind of citron wood and every article of ivory and every article made from very costly wood and bronze and iron and marble, 13: and cinnamon and spice and incense and perfume and frankincense and wine and olive oil and fine flour and wheat and cattle and sheep, and cargoes of horses and chariots and slaves and human lives. 14: "The fruit you long for has gone from you, and all things that were luxurious and splendid have passed away from you and men will no longer find them. 15: "The merchants of these things, who became rich from her, will stand at a distance because of the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning, 16: saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, she who was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls; 17: for in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste!' And every shipmaster and every passenger and sailor, and as many as make their living by the sea, stood at a distance, 18: and were crying out as they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What city is like the great city?' 19: "And they threw dust on their heads and were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth, for in one hour she has been laid waste!'

12-13: They weep over the loss of revenue and the loss of the most expensive and rare commodities in the world. But like the church at Laodicea, Jesus made it clear,

"Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and *that* the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent." Revelation 3:17-19

True wealth does not consist in the things of this world. Jesus also said,

"Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not *even* when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." Luke 12:15

Sadly, they were also involved in human trafficking as verse 13 points out. Slavery, in those days, had an acceptance in many circles, but general human trafficking has never been condoned, especially when it involves children or women to be used for unspeakable purposes.

14: The statement is from the Lord to all these interested parties who look on the burning ruins. Their loss is massive and will never be recovered. Again a message not to place our confidence in human enterprises or leaders.

15: The statement here through verse 17a is to the reader. The merchants had become rich in their committing immorality with the harlot/city. They move away because they are now afraid when just a short time ago they were confident.

16: Note that the description of the city's clothing is exactly the description of the harlot's clothing (17:4). The harlot and the city are one and the same. Both a religious and a commercial entity in one, indivisible. Today, only one religion can boast that it also controls the economics under itsegis. Islam. Governments ruled by religious Mullahs and Ayatollahs controlling laws and commerce, politics and policies, and persecuting all who do not join or submit.

17-18a: Again, laid waste in "one hour." We add shipmasters, sailors, and passengers to the list of those who watch the destruction of all they had placed their faith and hope in.

This "standing" at a distance suggests that indeed all these parties have literally "distanced" themselves from the harlot/city. Is it, "too little too late?" Only the Lord knows. Perhaps among them are those who answered the call (verse 4) and returned to the Lord and now stand apart from His wrath upon Babylon the Great. Only He knows (or will know).

18b-19: Their cry, "What city is like the great city?" Reflects a focus on this city and its historic importance. It is given a much greater description in the final passage of this chapter. The term "great city" referring to the harlot named "Babylon the Great" has been discussed in the commentary, chapters 11:8 where "the great city" is definitely used of Jerusalem. (See also the commentary at 16:19;

and especially 17:5).

This author believes, with little doubt, that "Babylon the Great" refers to Jerusalem in spite of those who insist otherwise.

18:20-24,

20: "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her." 21: Then a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "So will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer. 22: "And the sound of harpists and musicians and flute-players and trumpeters will not be heard in you any longer; and no craftsman of any craft will be found in you any longer; and the sound of a mill will not be heard in you any longer; 23: and the light of a lamp will not shine in you any longer; and the voice of the bridegroom and bride will not be heard in you any longer; for your merchants were the great men of the earth, because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery. 24: "And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth."

20: The rejoicing breaks out because the prayer of the martyrs in 6:10 has been answered. God promised that vengeance was His and now he has kept His word. ' At the same time His mercy has been demonstrated by His patience and desire that all possible would come to salvation. Every opportunity and means has been employed to produce this result. Those invited to rejoice are heaven, the saints, the apostles and the prophets. Again, only one city in history has ever persecuted and killed all of these people. Jerusalem. Verse 24 again reminds us that, "...in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth." 17:6 also stated, "And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus."

What is interesting is that it is the Jews, the very people God chose to bring forth the Messiah and bring light to the Gentiles that have tried to kill God's effort to do so. Yet God succeeded anyway, because among the Abrahamic descendants of the flesh were found a remnant of those of faith whom were willing to humble themselves before God and carry out His will. These are the saints, and the

prophets and the apostles. Heaven rejoices that now their faithfulness is vindicated and God is glorified.

21-23: These verses are directed at the reader/hearer of this apocalypse. They are words of encouragement and give more support for the city being Jerusalem in the way the description is rendered. Babylon the Great will indeed be destroyed as promised and the narrative now speaks in the future tense.

Another "strong" angel is seen taking up a stone like a "millstone" (several hundred pounds) and casting it into the sea. This is a symbolic act to show the violence and brevity of the Lord's actions in destroying the city.<sup>227</sup> It is now called, "Babylon, the great city." So the terms "harlot," "Babylon the Great" and "the great city" are indeed synonymous.

The city will be destroyed and never seen again. This could refer to the religion, the actual city, the commercial empire of the beast or any or all of these. If one senses that Babylon the Great could be Jerusalem and that the actual structures of the city are destroyed not to be found any longer, one could argue that Jerusalem will always exist far into the millennium and beyond.

However, the term and idea of Jerusalem's eternal existence is not found in scripture, while the throne of David is indeed seen in that light. Jerusalem has been destroyed many times and rebuilt. In this text it says will be found no longer, meaning either it is destroyed and nothing remains (but could still be rebuilt) or that it is gone and will never be seen again, at least in the state it was before its destruction. But either way, the argument is moot. In 21:2 we read, "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband."

So a "new" Jerusalem created in heaven is to come down to earth. It could be argued that this again suggests that the old Jerusalem is obliterated or else why the

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<sup>227</sup> Jeremiah 51:60-64 may be a basis for this vision. 60: "So Jeremiah wrote in a single scroll all the calamity which would come upon Babylon, *that is*, all these words which have been written concerning Babylon. 61: Then Jeremiah said to Seraiah, "As soon as you come to Babylon, then see that you read all these words aloud, 62: and say, 'You, O LORD, have promised concerning this place to cut it off, so that there will be nothing dwelling in it, whether man or beast, but it will be a perpetual desolation.' 63: "And as soon as you finish reading this scroll, you will tie a stone to it and throw it into the middle of the Euphrates, 64: and say, 'Just so shall Babylon sink down and not rise again because of the calamity that I am going to bring upon her; and they will become exhausted.'" Thus far are the words of Jeremiah."

need for a new one? On the other hand this could simply be a vision of one among the making of all things new declared by God in 21:5.

22-23a: The city, being destroyed will not ever again hear the songs and music, or the sounds of craftsmen or grain being milled or see the light of a lamp (perhaps even including the menorah in the temple). And curiously, it will never hear the word of the bridegroom or bride again either. The bridegroom, of course, is Jesus, the bride His faithful people (including "witnesses of Jesus"- 17:6). And since Jerusalem is the only major city Jesus ever taught in, the fact that this city will never hear Him again lends support to Jerusalem being this city.

23b: Once again justification for the destruction is given in the words, "... for your merchants were the great men of the earth, because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery." Those who did business with the harlot/city were deceived by the sorcery of the harlot and though they "were" great and wealthy men for doing so, they are now destitute. The promises of false religion are no more than dust in ones hands.

24: Another key reason for here destruction is seen here. In addition to her sorcery, she is she guilty of the blood of saints and prophets, not just within her own city, but her power and influence also brought about the deaths of God's people everywhere.

Note: The Biblical narrative displays repetitive patterns throughout. These end time revelations are not really new. There has been oppression of God's people in Egypt, by the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans and others including the nations surrounding Israel after the conquest under Joshua. God's counsel to come out of evil is the same every time, and His judgments both on disobedient, corrupt and idolatrous people the same, then deliverance of His people, (especially a faithful remnant) takes place.

There is no reason to think that the many patterns and models seen in the scripture during times like this is somehow to be different. The core matter is always spiritual. If the core is evil spiritually, it presses to spread out and engulf all who would be seduced by it. It is up to those who are God's people to avoid and flee from this invasion and seduction and that warning and mandate is a central theme. It is incumbent upon God's people not to dismiss or ignore it but to keep their spiritual vision on the only true and eternal hope, God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

As we approach the climax of the age, we see that there is a considerable population still remaining on the earth. Note: 19:5-6

# THE BOOK OF REVELATION

## Chapter Nineteen

19:1-3,

1: After these things I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God;  
2: BECAUSE HIS JUDGMENTS ARE TRUE AND RIGHTEOUS; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and HE HAS AVENGED THE BLOOD OF HIS BOND-SERVANTS ON HER."  
3: And a second time they said, "Hallelujah! HER SMOKE RISES UP FOREVER AND EVER."

1-2: 18:20 noted, "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her." This celebration is now raised here as John hears the sound of a great multitude praising God and exclaiming the justice and righteousness of His judgment on the great harlot/city Babylon the Great.

"Hallelujah" – "Praise Yahweh"; "Salvation" – "rescue or deliverance to safety"; "glory" – "recognizes the greatness and majestic power of God overall"; "power" – "supreme and superior might and sovereignty over all the universe and everything in it."

This is much like the shouts of the crowd when Jesus came riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, "BLESSED IS THE KING WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" Luke 19:38

It is the shout of triumph and victory. God deserves this praise because he has kept His promise to avenge His servants who have been faithful to Him, some even to death. Their faith in Him is vindicated and they stand in praise and anticipation of the beginning of the age to come and the reward God also promised to those who love and trust Him.

3: Emphasis is reflected in the second "Hallelujah" and it is specifically for the destruction of Babylon the Great.

19:4-6,

4: And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!" 5: And a voice came from the throne, saying, "Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great." 6: Then I heard *something* like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns."

4: The celebration continues, this time led by the worship of the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures. "Amen" – "I believe, trust and confirm"

5: The voice from the throne is not likely from God as it bids, "praise to our God" so is likely from one of the twenty-four elders or four living creatures. The phrase "Praise to our God" is the same as "Hallelujah."

"Bond-servants" are those who remain faithful to their owners without compulsion even after being freed from slavery. "Fearing the Lord" is the inner sober realization of the consequences of disobeying or rebellion against God. One does not walk around in fear or terror anymore than in a normal family where the children might cower in fear all the time. But the realization exists that when disobedience occurs, discipline will ensue. The "fear" of the Lord means conducting one's life in a manner consistent with His word knowing that the consequences of not doing so will lead to turmoil and disaster, plus the Lord's will discipline (train) His beloved children the importance of walking according to His will (Hebrews 12). Not to obey the Lord, or to disregard or ignore His counsel is unwise and the consequences often unpleasant. Many of the kings of Israel and Judah found this out the hard way when they ignored or mocked the Lord's prophets who spoke truth in His name.

The invitation to join this praise is given to "all God's bondservants, small and great." This appears to be directed to remaining earthly inhabitants and/or those who have been sheltered and protected from the great day of God's wrath, now free to appear without fear as the threat of Babylon the Great is now crushed. There is a similarity to the Passover and escape from Egypt here. Where it is a heavenly multitude praising God in heaven in verses 1-3, here the multitudes of bondservants, fearing God, both small and great are invited to join in. This

certainly points to an earthly multitude, not a heavenly one as the contrast is apparent. And they all respond in verse 6.

6: Again, the sound of a great multitude of voices like many waters is symbolic of nations and the number of voices sounds like mighty peals of thunder, a massive number of people.

"For the Lord our God, the Almighty reigns." Handel took his famous phrase in the Hallelujah Chorus from here. The reign of God reflects that the age to come where the Lord reigns as king is coming to pass. We will see it in verses 15-16.

19:7-9,

7: "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." 8: It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright *and* clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. 9: Then he \*said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he \*said to me, "These are true words of God." 10: Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he \*said to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

7: This statement is probably a continuation from verse six and the multitudes praising God there. It begins, "Let us..." in the plural and is a continuation of verse 6. But it could be from the beings in the throne room of God also. The announcement is about the pending "...marriage of the Lamb."

The "marriage of the Lamb" and the "marriage supper of the Lamb" are frequent themes in the future hope of the church. These themes find their roots in the Old Testament in passages like Isaiah 54:5-6, 5: "For your husband is your Maker, Whose name is the LORD of hosts; And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel, Who is called the God of all the earth. 6: For the LORD has called you, Like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, Even like a wife of *one's* youth when she is rejected,' Says your God." And, Hosea 2:19-20, 19: "I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, In lovingkindness and in compassion, 20: And I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness. Then you will know the LORD." Also, Isaiah 62:5, "For *as* a young man marries a virgin, *So* your sons will marry you; And *as* the bridegroom rejoices

over the bride, *So* your God will rejoice over you."

In the New Testament, this metaphor continues in passages like Matthew 9:15; Matthew 22:1-14 (The parable of the wedding feast); Matthew 25:1-10 (The parable of the ten virgins); John 3:28; and Paul uses this same metaphor in II Corinthians 11:2 and Ephesians 5:25-27, 32 but here in Revelation 19-20 the metaphor is clear.

The lamb is of course, Jesus, and the bride is the "church", composed of all the faithful throughout the ages from Old Testament through New Testament eras. Some dispute this and make the "church" separate from God's true Israel, but they indeed are one and the same. Even the Greek word for church is "ekklesia" meaning those called out. It is often in conjunction with "eklektos", those "chosen" or "elect" the root meaning also being "called out." The term "bride" is a metaphor describing the intimate relationship those that belong to God have with Him. Both the faithful of the ages (God's true Israel) who are "called out", (the church) and the "bride" are one and the same.

This is the same idea used in Hebrew in the Old Testament to describe God's "chosen", especially the faithful remnant of Israel (Isaiah 10:20-22, 37:31-32, 41:8-9). No real distinction can be made between Israel as God's "wife" and the church as the "bride" of the Lamb.

In the narrative of the marriage of the Lamb, the faithful multitude is the bride. When the narrative changes to the wedding feast of the Lamb, the "bride" is missing and now "guests" are portrayed. The shifting scene is accompanied by a shifting metaphor. In reality, they are both the same entity as the bride is a personification of the faithful and the guests are also the faithful.

"Made herself ready." The bride and the bridegroom are now ready for the marriage to be followed by the marriage supper. But this has not yet taken place. This will occur at the statement of the culmination of all things in chapter 21. The bride has made herself ready. This "readiness" is seen in the faithful devotion to the bridegroom to His "betrothed", in spite of and regardless of the often negative or distressing circumstances that have come her way. That faithful devotion began with Christ initiating the relationship by giving His life. Then, Christ Himself works in it all to present the bride as ready. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:25-27,

25: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, 26: so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27: that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless."

The first four words are addressed to husbands, but the rest of the paragraph is about Christ and His sacrifice. From that sacrifice and on behalf of those who come to faith in Him He honors and prepares His bride for the wedding day. But this is not to say that the bride has little part in the process. She does, after all, make herself ready. This would be a natural outcome of a betrothed relationship preparing for the wedding. Verse 8 supports this idea.

8: "It was given to her..." a gift with which she herself clothes herself. She does not provide this for herself reminding us that works do not earn righteousness but we live righteously because it has been given to us as a gift of His grace. This clothing is seen as "fine linen, bright and clean." "Bright" is radiantly white. "Clean" is pure, without spot or wrinkle as noted in Ephesians above.

The "fine linen" is translated as symbolic of the "righteous deeds/acts of the saints." Though this is an acceptable translation in the proper context the original word leans more toward a decree of acquittal from crimes. Even if the linen is symbolic of righteous acts, the fact that it is bright and clean is definitely imputed by God. She is dressed in that which she is given and it all is a gift from God allowing her to stand in readiness for the wedding.

9: "Then he said..." In verse 10, John falls at the feet of the one speaking and it is not God but an angel. So this could be the angel in 18:1 whose glory illuminated the earth and who declared the corruption of Babylon the great and her judgment because of it. Or the angel in 17:1 who was speaking to John there and carried him away to see the vision of the harlot in the wilderness. However this is unclear.

John is commanded once again to "write." In 1:11 this command is given. Then to each of the seven churches he is commanded to write a letter. In 10:4 he is engaged in writing, but is commanded to not write down what the seven peals of thunder said. Then in 14:3 he is told to write again, but he presumably already doing so. The command here (and the two to follow in 19:9 and 21:5) seem to be an emphasis to quote something exactly and not just report what he sees or hears in

his own words. This is to be quoted exactly because, "These are the true words of God."

The bride is ready and the metaphor shifts to recognize that those who constitute the bride (righteous saints) cannot enter the wedding feast unless invited. They must be a part of the "guest list" so to speak. They are not to assume that based on some idea they have about their own worthiness they can just waltz right in. Jesus uses this same technique when He tells the parable of the kingdom of God where a king was giving a wedding feast for his son. It concludes,

"But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?' And the man was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' "For many are called, but few *are* chosen." Matthew 22:11-14

In the parable of the ten virgins and their lamps, Matthew 25:10 reads,

"And while they (*the foolish virgins*) were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut." (Italics mine)

In Matthew 7:21-23, we read, "

21: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*.  
22: "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23: "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'

These stories make it clear that we cannot gain the kingdom of God by our own works, efforts or presumptions. Yet we do have a part. First, Jesus made it clear that, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." Second, all that is done is to be credited ultimately to Him because it is done based in Him and His grace in which we have trusted for our salvation. Apart from Him "we can do nothing." (John 15:5). Third it is a combining of grace and faith that begins the work. (Romans 5:1-2, 12:3; Ephesians 2:8). And then Paul states, "*For*

*I am* confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." Pretty simple, actually. A man approaches a woman and attempts to initiate a relationship. She consents. They spend time courting and one day he asks her to marry him. She consents. What does she do next? Plans for the wedding, and readies herself for the occasion..

John is told to write down this great blessing for those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb and the assurance comes to us the reader, "These are true words of God."

It is clear that God only invites those He knows. As such they are blessed. This makes perfect sense since the invitees are also the bride. So the marriage supper (wedding feast) is being prepared, and those invited are made ready, wearing the proper clothes and the wedding ceremony is about to commence. It doesn't get any more exciting than that.

But the neither the ceremony not the banquet is ever described in Revelation perhaps so that the surprise will not be spoiled for those in anticipation. The "great supper of God" described in verses 17 and 18 do not correspond to this joyous banquet. The closest thing we have to a culmination of all this is in 21:3, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them..."

19:10,

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

10: This act of worship was spontaneous. Jews knew technically not to worship angels. Paul even noted in Colossians 2:18-19,

18: "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the *worship of the angels*, taking his stand on *visions* he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, 19: and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God." (bold italics mine)

However, on some occasions, there was the saint who was so awestruck at the

appearance of such a fantastic and majestic presence that he fell to the ground in worship. Joshua did so in Joshua 5:13-15 for example as did Daniel in Daniel 8. John was not condemned at all for this rather natural response but rather counseled as to its appropriateness because they were both equal servants of God with unique roles. We are told in the New Testament that the saints will judge angels and that men are superior to angels and that angels are under the authority of the saints.

The angel explains, "I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus..." This indicates that both the present visions and those that precede it are for the benefit of the church including all who bear the testimony/witness (same Greek word) of Jesus. Though some suggest that this could be the "testimony from Jesus, the use of the term in other places suggests it is the testimony about Jesus by His saints. This phrase has been used in 1:9, 12:17 and will be seen again in 20:24 and the word witness/testimony is seen in 6:9,11:7, and 12:11.

The angel concludes, "...worship God." The angel directs John (and indirectly the reader) to only worship God and no one or nothing else regardless of how powerful, divine, miraculous or majestic the entity may be. "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Again, from Jesus or about Jesus? The intent (either way) is that the spirit of prophecy is the basis and source of the witness. Prophecy is not so much the telling of the future as it is foretelling the consequence of a chosen direction by an individual whether in agreement with God's will or word or not. The kings of Israel and Judah were constantly faced with a prophet's declaration of their destiny and God's response to the decisions they made regarding idolatry, alliances and dealings with foreign powers and regarding the treatment of the people of their kingdom, especially the poor. Ignore God's word and will and disaster will be the consequence. Obey it and God would come to help. Again, the idea of "fearing God" or not is appropriate here. Most of these kings had no fear of God.

19:11-16,

11: And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it *is* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war.  
12: His eyes *are* a flame of fire, and on His head *are* many diadems; and He has a name written *on Him* which no one knows except Himself. 13: *He is* clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. 14: And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white

*and* clean, were following Him on white horses. 15: From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. 16: And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."

11: At last we have the promised appearance of the Lord in power and glory. John's vision is again focused on heaven. Here, "heaven" is the sky. The Greek word for heaven (ouranos) must be defined by the context as "heaven" can mean the "birds in 'heaven' (the sky) or the "stars in 'heaven' (the universe) or "God in 'heaven' (His dwelling place). Here it corresponds with the sky and agrees with many other passages where this event depicts Jesus coming in "the clouds of heaven."<sup>228</sup>

This is not the rider and horse of 6:2. The horse is symbolic of war and being white, a victorious and righteous or just war. There is no mistake as to who sits on the horse. It is Jesus. Though His name is not given, His attributes are and they are that of the Messiah, the God's anointed king. He is "faithful and true." He came once on a donkey to announce peace and opportunity to repent and be reconciled to God. He became the Lamb of God. But now He comes on a war horse, with judgment and a sword.

These are the only two animals the Scriptures record Jesus ever sat on. We could say that the riding on the donkey fulfills the Biblical prophecies regarding the coming of the One who will bring redemption and salvation to the world while the riding of the white horse fulfills the prophecies of the Messianic victory and rule of power over the nations.

The harlot has been destroyed, the religious core of the beast. But the beast (the antichrist) the dragon, and the false prophet still exist and have set their hearts and their armies in battle against the Lamb. But Jesus does not appear as a Lamb this time, but as a warrior. Isaiah 11:4-5 envisions and prefigures verses 11-16,

4. "But with righteousness He will judge the poor, And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked (see verse

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<sup>228</sup> See: Daniel 7:13; Matthew 24:30, 26:64; Mark 14:62; Acts 1:9-11; I Thessalonians 4:17; Revelation 1:7.

15). 5: Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins, And faithfulness the belt about His waist."

12-13: We see once again the "eyes as a flame of fire" on the Lord (1:14, 2:18).<sup>229</sup>

The diadem is the crown of royalty. Many diadems on His head symbolizes that He is the king of all kings, all lords and all nations. Paul notes an order and theme of these last moments of the present age in I Corinthians 15:22-25,

22: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. 23: But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, 24: then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. 25: For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet."

The name written on Him that only He knows suggests that this is an infinite, eternal name of power beyond the comprehension of any other being.

13: His robe is red with blood, but not His own this time, but with the portrait of the blood to come from His enemies, especially the armies who have come to do battle at Armageddon.

His name is the "Word of God." This is so John! Both in his gospel (chapter 1:1-14) and inferred in his first epistle (1:1) John describes Jesus as, "The word of God." This term portrays God as having creating everything with His Word made flesh whom we know as Jesus. Conversely, He also has the power to destroy it all with a word, which He does in due time.

14: Though some teach that these are raptured saints, it is more in line with consistent Biblical patterns that these are heavenly hosts of angels. They are "armies in heaven" not saints armed to do battle. Matthew 24:30-31 notes in Jesus' words,

30: "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory.

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<sup>229</sup> See comments there on 1:14, bottom of page 37, also 2:18.

31: "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other."

Then in Matthew 16:27 we read, "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS."

And in Matthew 25:31, the vision is pretty clear,

"But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne."

Paul also reiterates this in II Thessalonians 1:6-10,

6: For after all it is *only* just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7: and *to give* relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, 8: dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9: These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, 10: when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed--for our testimony to you was believed."

Angels are also seen as heavenly warriors while the saints stand firm, proclaim the truth of the gospel, love their enemies and persevere on earth against the very evil trying to destroy them, even to the point of death. Angels are seen in this fashion in II Kings 6:16-17; Jude 1:14-15; and of course many times here in Revelation.

However, this is the only place where angels are seen sitting on white horses (or saints for that matter) but as a Lamb He is seen accompanied by the saints (17:14) but as the heavenly warrior of vengeance He is accompanied by angels.

15: The sword of the Spirit is "The Word of God" according to Ephesians 6:17 and Hebrews 4:12. Here we need not see it any differently. By His word all things were created Genesis tells us, and His Word is also a sword that can strike down and destroy as easily. The nations gather with their most powerful weapons and the impetus of the dragon and his power and authority all raging in battle against

Him who sit on the white horse and all He has to do is speak and they are struck down to submission, many pouring out their blood to death (verse 21).

He will then rule the survivors as a shepherd does his sheep, but not with a wooden reed that can flex and bend, but one of iron. Those who resist Him will have their blood join the mortal flow of those whom He has crushed like grapes in the winepress. This is another aspect prophesied by Isaiah 63:3, that we discussed in 14:19.

16: This is more of a title than a name. It is first found in Revelation 17:14. It is the title of absolute rule and sovereignty over all other earthly rulers.

Psalm 136:2-3 expresses this theme,

2: "Give thanks to the God of gods, For His lovingkindness is everlasting. 3: Give thanks to the Lord of lords, For His lovingkindness is everlasting."

And in Daniel 2:47, Nebuchadnezzar testified to Daniel,

"Surely your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, since you have been able to reveal this mystery."

It is during this episode that many feel that the prophecy of Zechariah 14:1-5 and 12-13 will be fulfilled,

1: "Behold, a day is coming for the LORD when the spoil taken from you will be divided among you. 2: For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. 3: Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle. 4: In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south. 5: You will flee by the valley of My mountains, for the valley of the mountains will reach to Azel; yes, you will flee just as you fled before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD, my God, will come, *and* all the holy ones with Him!"

12: "Now this will be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the peoples who have gone to war against Jerusalem; their flesh will rot while they stand on their feet, and their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongue will rot in their mouth. 13: It will come about in that day that a great panic from the LORD will fall on them; and they will seize one another's hand, and the hand of one will be lifted against the hand of another."

Then, verses 6-11 are seen to be fulfilled in Revelation 21 and 22.

19:17-21,

17: "Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, "Come, assemble for the great supper of God, 18: so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great." 19: And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. 20: And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. 21: And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh."

17-18: An angel with a new message and appearance. He "stands in the sun (or sunlight)." This is either to illuminate him because of the clouds accompanying the appearance of Christ, or to cause the light to dim into darkness as a portent of the impending doom on the opposing forces. Either way, the angel addresses the birds flying in the sky. These, like the birds of 18:2, are carrion eaters, vultures and raptors and unclean birds but those for which God has a purpose.

The message to these birds is an invitation. One might think of Alfred Hitchcock's horror film, "The Birds" when envisioning this scene. The invitation is clear and simple, , "Come, assemble for the great supper of God, 18: so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great."

The "great supper of God" is not to be confused with the marriage supper of the Lamb. Here, God provides the supper for the vultures as He spoke to Gog in Ezekiel 39:4-5,<sup>230</sup>

4: "You will fall on the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops and the peoples who are with you; I will give you as food to every kind of predatory bird and beast of the field. 5: "You will fall on the open field; for it is I who have spoken," declares the Lord GOD."<sup>231</sup>

This "great supper" will consist of the corpses of those slain by the word of Christ as he speaks judgment upon all who come to battle against Him at his return regardless of their rank or position.

19: John makes sure that this is all of the beast remembering that the beast is empowered by the dragon and that the beast is both an empire, but here represented by its ruler whom we call, "The Antichrist." They all have assembled to make war against our Lord and the army with Him.

This begs the question, "Why do men, even when faced with overpowering evidence, choose to resist and reject the Lord?" The answer is simple. So they can have their own way. The power of self is incredible and the pride of man so entrenched that it speaks saying, "I will not submit myself to God and I will fight to the death to have my own way and do my own will." So the story of Genesis three is seen again in mankind ever since.

But there is no account of a battle. A word and they are crushed (verse 21). The only report of the battle in either testament is of the outcome. This is likely because there was really no battle at all. It is over in an instant.

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<sup>230</sup> "Gog" and "Magog" will be discussed in chapter 20.

<sup>231</sup> Ezekiel 39:17-22 goes on to read, 17: "As for you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD, 'Speak to every kind of bird and to every beast of the field, "Assemble and come, gather from every side to My sacrifice which I am going to sacrifice for you, as a great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel, that you may eat flesh and drink blood. 18: "You will eat the flesh of mighty men and drink the blood of the princes of the earth, as *though they were* rams, lambs, goats and bulls, all of them fatlings of Bashan. 19: "So you will eat fat until you are gluttoned, and drink blood until you are drunk, from My sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you. 20: "You will be gluttoned at My table with horses and charioteers, with mighty men and all the men of war," declares the Lord GOD. 21: "And I will set My glory among the nations; and all the nations will see My judgment which I have executed and My hand which I have laid on them. 22: "And the house of Israel will know that I am the LORD their God from that day onward."

20: The next item of business John relates is seizing of the beast (Antichrist) along with the false prophet.

The "false prophet is described once again perhaps to remind the readers of the deceptions they are to be aware of and not fall for. These deceptions include "signs" or wonders that amaze and cause awe as well as deceptive words of assurance that the beast was the greatest of gods and deserved to be worshipped. In fact, many of the wonders were done in the presence of the Antichrist who was attributed glory and praise for the awesome displays. Plus, it appeared that the beast had been resurrected from the dead in a counterfeit image of Christ Himself. So the false prophet was the skill for the beast.

Those sucked in, as we saw in chapter 13, were amazed at the power and worshipped the beast receiving his mark so they could prosper from their identification and relationship with the beast. They believed he was (or will be) the true Messiah.

But both are seized (it doesn't say by whom) and thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. This image is unique to Revelation but has corresponding elements in both testaments. "Brimstone" is molten Sulphur. Molten Sulphur or "brimstone" is used to describe the most terrifying, burning judgment God can pour out. It leaves desolation and a land that is uninhabitable. It can be found in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah and in fourteen other places in the Bible, seven of those in Revelation. Imagine, seven again.<sup>232</sup>

Other references to a judgment described as a burning fire can be found in the teachings of Jesus and in the writings of the apostles Paul, the writer of Hebrews, Peter and Jude. Both the Antichrist and the false prophet are destroyed as this lake is described as "the second death" in 21:8. They are never heard of again, but we also do not know how long they suffered before they were extinguished.

21: "The rest" likely applies to the remaining armies as described in verse 18 and are killed with a word from the Lord. The "great supper" now commences and unclean carrion eaters are filled with unclean meat and the result is cleansing.

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<sup>232</sup> Other references are: Deuteronomy 29:23; Job 18:15; Psalm 11:6; Isaiah 30:33 and 34:9; Ezekiel 38:22; and Luke 17:29.



# THE BOOK OF REVELATION

## Chapter Twenty

20:1-3,

1: "Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. 2: And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; 3: and he threw him into the abyss, and shut *it* and sealed *it* over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time."

1: The beast and the false prophet now disposed of, the attention is focused on the dragon. The angel described here could well be the same angel as in 9:1.<sup>233</sup> The great chain is to bind Satan. Interestingly, an simple angel with the authority (key) to do so is given this assignment. Both the key and the chain are symbolic representations of authority and power as the abyss (or bottomless pit) is also symbolic of a realm or habitat of demonic spirits completely under the control of the Lord.

Jesus commented to those who accused Him of casting out demons by the power of Satan, "If Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but he is finished! But no one can enter the strong man's house and plunder his property unless he first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder his house." Mark 3:26-27

In the present age, Jesus did that very thing, and even gave His disciples authority to do the same (Matthew 16:19). But those were individual cases. Here, as the age to come springs forth, Satan is bound and his house plundered for a thousand years.

2. The angel lays hold of the dragon and binds him for a thousand years.

For the first time and in the only place in the Scriptures, this "millennial" period appears. There has always been a controversy over what this might mean in the

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<sup>233</sup> See commentary there.

time frame of the age to come. The two main ideas from the world of theology is "amillennialism" and "premillennialism."<sup>234</sup> In simplistic terms, "Amillennialism" sees the thousand year period another way of displaying the binding of Satan at the first coming of Christ extended into the age to come. The deceased souls of believers in heaven reign with Christ there in the present kingdom of God until Christ returns and sets up an earthly rule until the new heavens and earth are created. There is no literal thousand year time when Satan is bound but is a Spiritual symbolism of the freedom from Satan's power believers enjoy and share in the reign of Christ either in time or in "heavenly places" (Ephesians2:6)

Premillennialism sees Revelation as completely eschatological and literally follows the idea that after this form of god's kingdom has fulfilled its purpose, Christ's coming in victory will be accompanied by the binding of Satan, a resurrection of the faithful and a joint rule with Christ for a thousand years ending with a releasing of Satan, a final rebellion and the last judgment. This future kingdom will then merge into the kingdom on the new heaven and earth where Christ will reign forever.

There are various approaches and differences to both of these views.

Most commentators fail, again, to recognize that we are dealing with a Jewish apocalyptic masterpiece. Whereas both views above have something to contribute, there are a few key matters to consider.

1. The book, as noted in the introduction,<sup>235</sup> is to address God's faithful and bring encouragement to them in times of suffering. Their faith and hope will be vindicated and God will keep His promises even though it seems impossible or that such a long time has passed.
2. This is a Jewish book, written with Hebrew style that is very different than the way we organize our books or think about things.
3. The book is filled with images, visions and symbols and little is as it is presented. Many visions, symbols and images are depicted in corporal and

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<sup>234</sup> Postmillennialism is not discussed as it's tenants of the kingdom of God being brought about by mankind's advancement (possibly rooted in the excitement over Darwinism) have been dismissed due to the First World War and subsequent worldwide conflicts.

<sup>235</sup> See: "BASIC APPROACH TO THE BOOK" and "FEATURES AND THEMES IN THE BOOK."

physical terms when they are invisible and spiritual. This is done so the reader can connect not so much with the images, but with the truth they convey. Many of these images are simply vehicles within which the truth is to be gleaned but not necessarily the truth themselves. We can identify with this in the parables of Jesus and the metaphors He uses to describe spiritual realities.

4. Numbers, times, periods, seasons may not be literal at all as so many Hebrew notations of this type are symbolic and at times even contrived to fit a point or pattern the writer wishes to make with his audience. For example, in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1, he concludes with, "So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations." But this does not fit the historical record of the scripture itself. It is Matthew's way of noting completion and fulfillment. Not a problem in those days and more than John's gospel is so different in so many ways because he had a different purpose in his writing. Chronological order, for example, is secondary to the message and theme.

5. This is the only place in the entire Bible where this thousand year period is mentioned. But as we have much of Revelation resting on scriptural passages of the Old Testament and realities of the life and teachings of Jesus, for this we have no real additional references.

These are a few of many considerations as we try to interpret this passage in the best way possible. One must think carefully about a strict literal interpretation before he leaps in. For example, anything noted as a "thousand" of something often means a very great number indicating power, wealth, position and so on. This was common in ancient times. Even the ages of the patriarchs can be viewed in this light even as much as each specific age has certain numeric codes as it were to add color and description to the person.

Here, a "thousand years" could have meaning outside of the literal number of years without doing damage to the intent of the scripture and fixing it literally could actually distract or even mislead the intent of the scriptures. So, care and thought must be given to such an unusual passage with no other scriptural reference to help us.

The progress of the chapters from 18 onward help us as they, rather than jumping back and recapitulating events already presented and inserting additional narrative, are sequential in nature. Chapter 18 tells of the fall and destruction of Babylon the Great. Chapter 19 relates the coming and victorious appearing of Christ, the seizing of the Beast and False prophet and their being cast into the lake of fire. Now in 20, we have the seizing of the dragon, Satan, and him being bound and cast into the abyss.

This helps us in that considering the nature of apocalyptic literature. From the introduction of this commentary we read, "Apocalyptic literature may be defined as the eschatological belief that the power of evil (Satan), who is the controlling force of a temporal and hopelessly evil age of human history in which the righteous are afflicted by his demonic and human agents, is soon to be overcome and his evil rule ended by the direct intervention of God, who is the power of good, and who thereupon will create an entirely new, perfect and eternal age under His immediate control for the everlasting enjoyment of His righteous followers from among the living and resurrected dead."

The intent of this literature then, is to assure God's faithful of His care and provision on their behalf in spite of the earthly circumstances they may have to suffer. Thus, the literalness of the "thousand year" period neither needs to be interpreted literally or figuratively. It is moot because the assurance of a great time of freedom from Satanic influence and his rule of evil is promised. The thousand years also represents a time of prosperity, peace, unity and harmony, all promised in the prophets.

The vision of Isaiah in 2:1-5 is often thought of as being fulfilled during this time:

1: "The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 2: Now it will come about that In the last days The mountain of the house of the LORD Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it. 3: And many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways And that we may walk in His paths." For the law will go forth from Zion And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. 4: And He will judge between the nations, And will render decisions for many peoples; And they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they learn war."

To focus the discussion so heavily on the thousand year designation is to miss the forest for the trees.

For example, if one thinks of it as ten years times ten years times ten years, then we have a picture of perfect righteousness and an ideal time one could understand as paradise restored. This is certainly in line with the scriptural portrait we will see in the remainder of the book.

3. Again, we have the abyss mentioned and this has been discussed in the commentary section on 9:1. This is the same abyss noted there. Satan (the dragon) is cast therein and locked away until the thousand years are completed. This is symbolic language noting the cessation of Satan's power and influence for the thousand year span. This is done so that he would not be able to "deceive the nations any longer." This causes some commentators difficulty, but in chapters 17 and 18 we saw that the nations of the earth, though under the spell of the great harlot's religion, were not all fully dedicated to "her." In fact, in 17:16, there is a rebellion against her and in 18:15, 17, they have "distanced themselves from her. Defeated and abandoned by her onetime supporters seeing she has no power against the Lamb, they now come under the rule of the King of Kings and those faithful who accompany Him after the resurrection and the "catching up" of the living faithful to meet Him in the clouds.

This also shows that the power of the harlot and the beast seems to lessen as it spreads out over the globe. The Mediterranean and mid-east are central to this activity. But not everyone seems to be struck into some zombie like state. Jesus made it clear, "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women *will be* grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left." Matthew 24:37-41

So Satan's release for a short time may well be to determine who is a "fair weather" believer and who presents a façade of faith even under the direct rule of Christ and His chosen. It could be Genesis 3 all over again. This releasing is now described and the focus returns again to the period before the thousand years.

20:4-6,

4: Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I *saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. 5: The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. 6: Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

4a: We are now back to the time immediately prior to the thousand years. Satan's activity is curtailed. The holy land is a debris filled and blood stained battlefield. The Beast and the false prophet are in the lake of fire. Nations are in chaos, but free from the threat and deception of the beast and the harlot. John's vision is now focused on thrones with people sitting on them having the power of judgment.

Who are these people? Well, first we notice in Daniel 7:9 multiple thrones, "I kept looking Until thrones were set up, And the Ancient of Days took *His* seat; His vesture *was* like white snow And the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne *was* ablaze with flames, Its wheels *were* a burning fire." Then, those on the thrones would find the clearest answer in that they are the fulfillment of the promises Jesus gave in Revelation 2:26-27, "He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, and in 3:21, "He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne," and in 5:9-10, "And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them *to be* a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth." Daniel 7:22 reads, "...the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom. And in Matthew 19:28 Jesus told His disciples, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." In I Corinthians 6:2-3, Paul notes, "...do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent *to constitute* the smallest law courts? Do you not know that we will judge angels?

How much more matters of this life?"

So from these passages we may conclude that those whom Jesus chooses will sit with Him in judgment and there will be a multitude of rulers as well.

4b. John's seeing of souls "beheaded" has no antecedent in the book. But the rest of the description harkens back to chapter 6:9-11 that states in part, "I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained..." The only place in Revelation where this kind of image is presented is in 6:9-11 and 12:11. In these two places, the martyrs are described as standing for the word of God and suffering because of their testimony. In 6:10 they cry out asking God how long it would be until He judged and avenged their blood?"

Now here, in John's vision, he sees dead souls come to life and beheaded, "because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God." This phrase links them to the martyrs previously noted. They had also not worshipped the beast nor received his mark. The context through verse six shows that the beheaded are not some special or selected group but a part of the entire complement of the first resurrection. The important thing is that they "came to life," that is, they were resurrected. That means that before this event they were not in heaven or existing somewhere else prior, with the possible exception of the "Paradise" Jesus spoke of to one thief on the cross with Him.<sup>236</sup> All this, of course, adds even more discussion to the matter. Nevertheless, John makes it crystal clear that these saints who have come to life are those included in the first resurrection. Note verse 5.

5-6: The sentence, "This is the first resurrection" ought to come at the beginning of the verse and before the actual first sentence of the verse. Verse 6 clarifies, but it could be confusing if one just focuses on this sentence order. The "first resurrection" is referring back to the souls in verse four that had come back to life. Then the rest of the dead are resurrected after the thousand year period.

In 6, John notes, "Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years."

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<sup>236</sup> This author discusses this in his article entitled, "After We Die, Then What?" This may be found online at [www.bibleclassroom.org](http://www.bibleclassroom.org)

The "second death" is important because, 1. It demonstrates that those resurrected during the second resurrection (which is implied in verse 5 but occurs during verses 11-15 of this chapter) are those ultimately thrown into the lake of fire because their deeds were not such to grant them life. So they suffer a second death after the great white throne judgment. 2. It suggests that those thrown therein may not suffer torment forever even though that is the fate of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. This idea of course goes against the grain of traditional theology, and we will explore it more later in the study.

But the first resurrected souls are given the privilege of reigning with Christ for that thousand year period. Well, what is going to happen during that thousand year period? Now we move to speculation as there is no direct link to any teachings in the Bible about this. First, the environment of this time will be different than the environment of the "new heaven and new earth" God will create after His plan for this universe is completed. There is more information we will cover when we get to that account. Second, for this millennial period, all we can do is speculate. There are nations still existing and functioning under human rule at this time. Christ and those He chooses will administrate His earthly kingdom world-wide. One would look to a time of peace, rebuilding, and teaching God's truth to the nations. There will be millions and millions of faithful restored to life and they may all have a function.

Though world government may well proceed out of a rebuilt Jerusalem (verse 9) there will be those who will not submit to it. People will have the same free will and be able to choose their direction and their allegiances much as when Christ was here in the flesh the first time. Many leaders and those who follow them will choose to follow the Lord and many will choose not to do so. We know this from verses 7-8 in this chapter. Though Satan is not allowed to deceive and influence people, they will not necessarily believe or trust in the Lord demonstrating that the real source of evil is within mankind.

The only other reference that might pertain to this is found in I Corinthians 15:21-28,

21: "For since by a man *came* death, by a man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. 22: For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. 23: But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, 24: then *comes* the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. 25:

For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. 26: The last enemy that will be abolished is death. 27: For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET. But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. 28: When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all."

20:7-10,

7: "When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, 8: and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. 9: And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. 10: And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

7: There are always those who question and doubt God's sense of justice, fairness and they judge the way things are done or not done by God. This event eliminates the finger pointing. It affirms that mankind, left to his own devices and without Satan to deceive and influence them, is now both sinful and accountable to God without excuse.

Sin is a humanly chosen reality. Paul writes, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse." (Romans 1:20) And in chapter 3, he notes there "are none righteous" and concludes, "that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God..."

Sin is in the heart of man and whether Satan is involved or not, or God for that matter, mankind is the root and cause of all sin and evil. Even with a thousand years of Christ's presence - without Satanic influence - mankind rushes to find a greater power even if it means rejecting the very source of their life and breath.

Further, man's sinfulness cannot be blamed on their environment or circumstances

as much as this world would have us think so. Paradise proves that. Change of those things such as spending all the money in the world to help the unfortunate has made little if any difference in the sin and evil man wallows in. Now, God will have shown the real truth to people and demonstrated that only in union with Him will they find justice, righteousness, peace and prosperity.

The activities of Satan prompt one to realize that though he is often seen as having great skill and power, he is basically a deceiver. He is never seen as committing and evil himself and compared to man's evil, one is hard pressed to discover in scripture any activity that begins to match the evil man himself has cast upon the world and its people. The fact that people listen to his lies and believe them and then act on them is the problem, just as in Genesis, chapter three which is not just an account of an event long ago, but the story of all of us as the use of the Hebrew makes clear. Then Satan, assuming to have unlimited knowledge and free will has limitations in both or he would have not proceeded in the manner he chose.

Paul realizes this in his comments in I Corinthians 2:6-8,

6: Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; 7: but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God predestined before the ages to our glory; 8: *the wisdom* which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory..."

Finally, we see all through the scriptures that Satan and the demons are under the authority of God, Jesus and His faithful. In a word they are cast out, they ask permission to proceed in certain activities, they are captured and released by angels, they recognize the higher authority of God, Jesus and His faithful ones and are subject to the power of the name of Jesus. Bottom line, Satan becomes a pawn and servant in God's work of redemption and salvation, actually aiding God in achieving it even though at the same time he believes he is thwarting it. Fascinating!

8-9: Satan will deceive the nations probably using the similar techniques of signs, wonders, false but attractive and exciting teaching, and political and economic manipulations and so on. The word "nations" again suggests those that are outside of the faith.

Gog and Magog are found exclusively in Ezekiel with the exception of I Chronicles 5:4 where one "Gog" is the great grandson of Samuel the prophet. His descendants were carried away by the Assyrian hoards into exile around 721 B.C.. This would put his family and future descendants east of the Euphrates River and north of Israel. In Ezekiel, "Gog" is the leader and ruler of the land of Magog, and the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal which may be territories or rulers. Ezekiel 38:2 reads, "Son of man, set your face toward Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him." The specific identity and location of these places (or rulers) is not known.<sup>237</sup> However, in Ezekiel 38 Gog, the chief ruler will assemble troops from the north and east of Israel as well as from as far south as North Africa. These are all summoned by Gog, and gathered together for an attack upon the people of God. Ezekiel 38:9 reads, "You will go up, you will come like a storm; you will be like a cloud covering the land, you and all your troops, and many peoples with you."

Then, Ezekiel 39:4-7 reads,

4: "You will fall on the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops and the peoples who are with you; I will give you as food to every kind of predatory bird and beast of the field. 5: "You will fall on the open field; for it is I who have spoken," declares the Lord GOD. 6: "And I will send fire upon Magog and those who inhabit the coastlands in safety; and they will know that I am the LORD. 7: "My holy name I will make known in the midst of My people Israel; and I will not let My holy name be profaned anymore. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel."

And,

11: "On that day I will give Gog a burial ground there in Israel, the valley of those who pass by east of the sea, and it will block off those who would pass by. So they will bury Gog there with all his horde, and they will call *it* the valley of Hamon-gog.

This is the same image John reflects on in verses 8-9. Hoards of deceived troops

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<sup>237</sup> Over the years speculation has run amuck about these names. Other than Rosh, the names match descendants of Japheth while Rosh is a descendant of Benjamin. The names in this text could be places or people. Some have tried to shoehorn Russia into "Rosh" but since the collapse of the USSR, little is heard about this. "Rosh" in Hebrew has to do with the head or headship, rule, rank or even "head" of the year, (Rosh Hashanah), thus beginning or start, etc.

will come from north, south, east and west and surround Jerusalem where the Lord and His saints are "encamped" in order to somehow remove them from power and allow Satan and his hoards to reign. But it is not to be as verse 9 simply states, "...and fire came down from heaven and devoured them."

There is no mention of an earthly temple. Those who believe that the temple will be rebuilt and the sacrificial system restored have to deal with that fact that Christ fulfilled the necessity of that system forever and that this system was abolished and replaced with His finished work. (Hebrews 7:18-28; 8:1-13; 10:1-18) Thus, all the prophecies made in the Old Testament and all the promises of the Lord in both testaments become finally fulfilled.<sup>238</sup> A temple could actually be built again on the temple mount and there are rumors of such a planned effort along with the reinstatement of the altars and the sacrificial system. But there are two major considerations to face, 1. This would be an insult to God who gave His Son to finish the work of sacrifice on behalf of all men for all time and, 2. There would be a clash with Islam over the destruction and removal of the Mosque of Omar (The Dome of the Rock) now standing in the place where the temple once stood. This would cause the eruption of a war unlike anything the world has seen to this point. Even Israel (as of this writing, 2014) would not stand for this as it is the IDF and Jerusalem police that defends the Dome from any approach or attack. Finally, one has to deal with the clear teaching of Scripture that god's people are now His temple, the body of Christ where in the His Spirit dwells.

10: The Devil is now totally removed from creation forever. He is cast into the lake of fire with the beast and false prophet to be tormented forever. This is a special punishment for these particular entities and those who receive the mark of the beast.<sup>239</sup> In the lake of fire they apparently do not suffer the second death as do their followers (2:11, and 20:14).

20:11-15,

11: "Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. 12: And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life;

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<sup>238</sup> The Expositors Bible Commentary makes a good argument against attempting to impose a chronology on the text of the book and especially here and in chapter 21. See the EBC notes on 21:1-8.

<sup>239</sup> See: 14:8

and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. 13: And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one *of them* according to their deeds. 14: Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15: And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

11a: Although many attempt to place this judgment into an unsupported theological scheme in various ways, this is clearly the final judgment of historical mankind. This series of verses are in a rather mixed order with later verses fitting better (for our clarity) in previous ones as we will see. The interest in the final judgment is intense. There is much speculation and time spent on this event and it is seen in different ways and different judgments are proposed to fit whatever eschatological scheme one adopts. However, this scene is analogous to Paul's statement in Romans 2:5-11,

5: But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, 6: who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: 7: to those who by perseverance in doing good\* seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; 8: but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. 9: *There will be* tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, 10: but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 11: For there is no partiality with God." \*We will see that this is essentially obeying the truth.

And it also corresponds with Matthew 25:31-46, and I Corinthians 15:22-28. He who sits on the throne is not identified, but based on Matthew 16:27, 19:28, 25:31; II Thessalonians 1:7-8; I Corinthians 15:24-28 and more, it obviously Christ.

11b: "...from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. This is the removal of the present universe. First, the old order is swept away to make room for the new. It is predicted in Isaiah 65:17; Matthew 24:35; II Peter 3:7-12; Hebrews 12:27; and reflected in Psalm 102:25-26. Second, this judgment is also a part of the clearing away of the old order. Chapter 21 makes this clear. The very presence of God within the physical universe cause the physical to evaporate in a flash.

12-15: The thousand years are done. Satan and his cohorts are removed. Now comes the final judgment of mankind prior to the creation of (or in conjunction with) a new heavens and a new earth. The faithful who had believed in God and His word or served Christ prior to the thousand year period are not included in this judgment. They had either been raised from the dead at Christ's coming or were transformed and lifted into His presence as He returned in the clouds and had been given eternal life. Jesus said in John 5:22-29,

22: "For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, 23: so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. 24: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. 25: "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. 26: "For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; 27: and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is *the* Son of Man. 28: "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, 29: and will come forth; those who did the good *deeds* to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil *deeds* to a resurrection of judgment."

This last verse supplies the word "deeds." But this could lead to the idea that one could be saved by works. It is better translated, "...those who (made, did or provided) the good things to a resurrection of life and those who practiced the evil things to a resurrection of judgment." The context is "honoring the Son" and "believing in Him who sent the Son," that is, living in honor to the Son. This leans more toward the heart and motive than just the simple outward act. This is not the intent nor is it a possibility in and of itself. Paul wrote quite clearly in Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." Further, verse 15 indicates that one must be written in the "book of life" to avoid being thrown into the lake of fire. And in 21:27 one cannot enter the new Jerusalem unless he or she is in "The Lamb's Book of Life."

Verse 29 of the above quotation from John fits verse 11-12 here well. It also aligns itself with Matthew 25:31-46 if one disregards the "thousand year" interval between His coming and the judgment pictured there.

So this judgment is apparently for those who died during the thousand year period and all the "non-faithful" since creation are apparently included in this judgment. The question may be raised, "Are those facing judgment in verse 12 the same people or different than those in verse 13?" We suggest that both verses speak of the same group and that verse 13 adds details to preclude questions about who is included.<sup>240</sup>

The clear implication is that the people in verse 12 are those who came to life in a second resurrection after the thousand year period was complete. Verse 6 notes a "first resurrection" and says that, "The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed." This must be to what John is pointing. The "thousand years" is now completed and here they stand before the throne. Two sets of books are opened, one set called "the books" and another single volume called "The book of life."

All the dead who are raised to judgment are confronted by what is written in the larger set of the books of their deeds. Even though they may have done good works or gone to church and even done good deeds in Jesus' name, this did not qualify them to remain in the book of life of the Lamb.<sup>241</sup> We refer to Matthew 7:21-23 where Jesus listens to all the good deeds of those on that day then proclaims, "I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS."

This fits with verse 15. If one's deeds include believing in the One whom God has sent (John 6:29) then his or her name will be found in the book of life. The "book of life" here is not called "The Lamb's book of Life" but that appears to be the intent. The book of life generally refers to the record of all persons ever born (or perhaps even conceived) and then there are those blotted out leaving the remaining faithful as the Lamb's Book of life. Though not specified as such here, perhaps the intent is to see the "books" as one set depicting the works of all mankind, and the "Book of Life" as that of the saved, making it the same as the Lamb's Book of Life" (as in 21:27).

"Death and Hades" are then destroyed. This relates to everything associated with death. "Hades" is the grave. So there is no more death after this, only life. In just a

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<sup>240</sup> Verses 12-15 could have been written in an order that would be clearer to the reader. One must remember that in those days while writing, if an author forgets a detail or needs to add something to a previous thought, he cannot simply erase and rewrite the paragraph. So sometimes we have additional material added that is out of sequence.

<sup>241</sup> Further discussion about the book of life and the Lamb's Book of Life and so on is found in the commentary on chapter 3, verse 3b.

few verses we read, "...and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."(21:4) Paul noted in I Corinthians 15:53-57,

53: "For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54: But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. 55: "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" 56: The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; 57: but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

The "lake of fire" seems to have two functions. One is to torment Satan, the beast the false prophet and those who have received the mark of the beast (14:8-11) and the other is to destroy death and all others thrown into it. In the first sense it is the place of eternal torment for Satan and his cohorts, and in the other it is called the second death and is a place of destruction. The "second death" is first seen in chapter 2, verse 11 in the letter to the "angel" of the church at Smyrna. It is not mentioned specifically outside Revelation and neither is the "lake of fire." However, the intent of these images is alluded to in several New Testament passages such as Matthew 3:12; 13:37-43, 18:8-9; 25:41; John 15:6; II Thessalonians 1:9.

In the Old Testament the image of the burning of the wicked and enemies of God is spoken of frequently and it corresponds with the pagan and idolatrous horror of sacrificing children to Molech by burning them to death at a shrine in the Valley of Hinnom. This shrine was called Topheth or the "place of burning." Josiah the kings destroyed it but his son Jehoiakim reinstated it.<sup>242</sup>

The term "second death" suggests the cessation of life. The debate over the eternal fate of the wicked is never ending as some feel all will be tormented forever and others believe they will be annihilated to extinction. There are arguments for each of these views, no question.<sup>243</sup>

Chapter 20 flows into chapter 21 and the context is consistent and sequential.

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<sup>242</sup> See also Deuteronomy 12:31; II Kings 17:17; Ezekiel 16:20 and more. Isaiah 30:33 sees God using this image as a picture of judgment on those who commit such acts and Jeremiah 7:31-34 also reflects this idea and corresponds to images in Revelation 19:17-18 and chapter 20. In Jeremiah 19, he is commanded to go to Topheth and prophesy against the place and Judah's participation there. There are many corresponding images that fit here as well.

<sup>243</sup> See this author's work on the subject on line at: [www.bibleclassroom.org](http://www.bibleclassroom.org) entitled, "Hell - Study On"

# THE BOOK OF REVELATION

## Chapter Twenty One

### Introduction:

As we move into the last two chapters of the book, we see a phenomenon where the spiritual becomes the paramount and substantial reality and the physical and temporal an ancillary matter. This, of course is evident throughout the book, but in these last two chapters John and the reader see all things from a spiritual point of view rather than from an earthly one. The physical universe and old order has passed away and the new has come. But it is combined with a “city” that is of spirit and spiritual.

We always try to make spiritual images and visions into literal, earthly ones. It is the way we are made, so to speak. So the images of the heavenly city, which are both spiritual and symbolic, are difficult not to see as physical. It is one of the challenges of the book and the apocalyptic style John must employ. Yet it must be done and it is not always easy. But serious errors in the intent of the message of the book will be made if care is not taken in this area. In the vision of the heavenly city we have an incredible contrast with what man has attempted to build (mostly to his own glory) with what God can do. But in this vision, the magnitude of the presence of God is emphasized as well as the provision He has made for those who are His.

Then we have an unusual phenomenon. Outside of the city are people. Who are they and where do they come from? The challenge of these two chapters is both difficult and interesting. But woven into this is a clear evangelistic message for the readers of all ages. A definite decision must be made as to whether to accept the invitation or reject it. Time is running out. The book is concluding. There is a final appeal and invitation to become a part of the glory and majesty of an eternal relationship with God. It must not be ignored as the consequences are disastrous.

21:1-7,

1: Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea. 2: And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride

adorned for her husband. 3: And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, 4: and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." 5: And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He \*said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true. 6: Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. 7: He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son."

1-5: Isaiah 65:17-19 corresponds to verses 1-4 here,

17: "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind. 18: "But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; For behold, I create Jerusalem *for* rejoicing And her people *for* gladness. 19: "I will also rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people; And there will no longer be heard in her the voice of weeping and the sound of crying."

The old system passed away in 20:11. The promise of a heavenly paradise as the residence of the faithful is fulfilled. Man is never seen in the scriptures as residing in some mystical heaven somewhere doing who knows what. We have paradise restored much as in the garden experience in Genesis except that it is a spiritual reality in the setting of a new earth and new heavens created by God.

Some see a refurbished planet and remodeled universe. But Peter notes,

10: "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. 11: Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12: looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! 13: But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells." II Peter 3:10-13

This does not sound like a refurbishment to me.

"No longer any sea." . This does not necessarily mean that there will be no oceans in the new earth. The image of the "sea" may be understood as where the abyss is and terrible plagues and evil horrors reside. There will be no threat of this ever again. The complete separation of the old order from the new is emphasized in this image.

2-4: In the new heavens and earth, God provides a new Jerusalem to be described in detail in verses 9 and following. The use of the appellation "holy city" for Jerusalem occurs first in Isaiah 48:2 and 52:1. The term is also used in Nehemiah 11:1, 8; Daniel 9:24; Matthew 4:5 and 27:53. Here it is described as coming down from heaven, not the saints ascending to it. It is described as like a "bride." That is, it has never been inhabited before and is like a virgin as well as beautiful like a bride in a wedding dress. With it comes the tabernacle of God, His dwelling place. The purpose of the vision is to note that the relationship between God and His saints is about to begin anew. It is also to demonstrate to readers (or listeners) the magnificence of what the faithful are promised so that any who are yet to believe in Jesus as the true messiah might be persuaded to do so.

God is seen to come to His own in this vision and dwell among them, "and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them." The writer of Hebrews foresaw this when he wrote regarding the ancient faithful, "But as it is, they desire a better *country*, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them." (11:6)

The promise of this restored intimate relationship begins in Genesis 17:7,

"I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you."<sup>244</sup>

The intimacy is especially seen in verse 7, "... and I will be his God and he will be My son."

Some see this "bride" of a city as the church itself coming down to the new earth to have spiritual presence thereon. But chapter 22 has several verses about those who are God's bond servants entering the city and enjoying the delights thereof.

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<sup>244</sup> See also: Jeremiah 31:33, 32:38; Zechariah 8:8, 13:9; II Corinthians 6:18 etc.

A loud voice sounds from the throne. This is not God, but probably one of the "announcing angels" or one of the four living creatures as we have seen so often.<sup>245</sup> Verse 3 is a final fulfillment and reflection of the promise made to God's people through Zechariah the prophet. Zechariah prophesied to the returned exiles after the Babylonian captivity. Now under Persian rule, Cyrus the Great allowed the Jews to return to their own land and even aided in financing the rebuilding of the walls of the city and the temple. Here is the word of the Lord to Zechariah to proclaim to the people from chapter 8:3-8,

3: "Thus says the LORD, 'I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts *will be called* the Holy Mountain.' 4: "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Old men and old women will again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each man with his staff in his hand because of age. 5: 'And the streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls playing in its streets.' 6: "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'If it is too difficult in the sight of the remnant of this people in those days, will it also be too difficult in My sight?' declares the LORD of hosts. 7: "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Behold, I am going to save My people from the land of the east and from the land of the west; 8: and I will bring them *back* and they will live in the midst of Jerusalem; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God in truth and righteousness.'"

Verse 8 above is notably similar to Revelation 21:3.

4a: He will "wipe away every tear..." is the fulfillment of Isaiah 65:19, "I will also rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people; And there will no longer be heard in her The voice of weeping and the sound of crying."

4b: "... and there will no longer be *any* death;..." Death is the great and unconquerable enemy. It was instituted when mankind sought to elevate himself to the position of God. From Isaiah 25:8 we read,

"He will swallow up death for all time, And the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces, And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth; For the LORD has spoken."

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<sup>245</sup> See: 1:10; 5:2,12; 6:1; 6:6-7; 10:3-4, 8; 11:12; 14:2,7,9, 13, 15, 18; 16:1,17; 18:2,4; 19:5,17 etc.

Paul wrote of this in I Corinthians 15:25-26, 54-57,

25: "For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. 26: The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

54: But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. 55: "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" 56: The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; 57: but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

In 20:14, death and the grave were thrown into the lake of fire signifying the culmination of the power of these final enemies. the new heavens and the new earth will have no death.

4:c "...the first things have passed away" reflects Isaiah 65:17, "And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind."

5: Now, God Himself speaks from the throne. To write down words of God is a bold thing for a Jew to do and John could be seized and stoned if the contemporary Jews saw fit to do so. So his recording of this adds authenticity to the work. Here, God declares that He "makes all things new." A fulfillment of Isaiah 42:9, "Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them" and Isaiah 66:22, "For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before me, says the LORD; so shall your descendants and your name remain."

God concludes with the assurance of this newness yet to come, " Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true."

In Romans 8:19-21 Paul declares,

19: "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; 20: for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; 21: because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God."

The ultimate salvation not only includes the faithful of God but the creation as well. All things new is a great hope and wonderful surprise for those who are His. Paul was aware that the Lord foresaw a newness not just in the creation, but in the body of the believer as well. In I Corinthians 15:42-44 Paul writes,

42: "So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. 43: It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. 44: it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual *body*." And in II Corinthians 5:16-17,

16: "From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer. 17: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come."

6a: God continues to speak from His throne and announces that, "It is done." Not "finished" in the normal sense of the word "done" as in Jesus last words from the cross. But actually the word here reflects a new birth, the completion of a pregnancy and the beginning of a new life. Jesus noted in Mark 13:8,

"For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will also be famines. These things are merely the beginning of birth pangs."

And in a discussion with His disciples in John 16:16-22, we read,

16: "A little while, and you will no longer see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me." 17: Some of His disciples then said to one another, "What is this thing He is telling us, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'; and, 'because I go to the Father'?" 18: So they were saying, "What is this that He says, 'A little while'? We do not know what He is talking about." 19: Jesus knew that they wished to question Him, and He said to them, "Are you deliberating together about this, that I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me'? 20: "Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy. 21: "Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she

no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a child has been born into the world. 22: "Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you."

6b: "I am the Alpha and the Omega..." We now conclude where we began. At the beginning of the book (1:8) we had God saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega," and now at the end of it He repeats the phrase. He will do so again in 22:13 including the phrase, "... the beginning and the end."<sup>246</sup>

6c: "I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost." We now have a parenthetical section from 6c-8. This is a specific message to the reader in his own time. We have an invitation that seen in a chronological order would make no sense as the end has been declared and the judgment complete with the old order passed away and the new having come. So here, we see an evangelical element as the book begins to come to a close. This explanation is well supported by the similar message in 22:11-17 that is, without a doubt, directed to the reader/listener.

This invitation is to all who thirst. This is the image of a spiritual thirst. For example, in Jesus discussion with the woman at the well in John 4, we have these excerpts,

4:10: Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." 11: She \*said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water? 12: "You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?" 13: Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; 14: but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

And in John 7:37-39,

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<sup>246</sup> See 1:8 for a discussion of these phrases.

37: "Now on the last day, the great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. 38 "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" 39: But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified."

7: This spiritual "water" is given without cost, that is the price has been paid and all who thirst (or seek for it) will receive it freely, but must be one who overcomes (prevails or is victorious). This indicates, as in the seven letters, a constant trust and confidence in Christ even in the face of persecution and death. "Thirst" is a metaphor for "faith." The result is an intimate and personal relationship with the Creator.

To be an "heir" is a frequent theme in the New Testament. Paul makes note of this in Romans 8:16-17,

16: "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 17: and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*."

And in Galatians 3:29 and 4:6-7,

3:29, "And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise."

4:6-7, 6: "Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' 7: Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God."

And in Titus 3:5-7

5: "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, 6: whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7: so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life."

And Hebrews 11:7 reiterates,

7: "By faith Noah, being warned *by God* about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith."

21:8

21:8 "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part *will be* in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

There is a definite timeless message here for all the world to heed. This list is likely not a complete list of every possible person that will participate in the lake of fire, but pretty well summarizes the main categories. It lists categories that reflect the breaking of the Law of God in a callous and deliberate manner. The "cowardly" stand in contrast to those "who overcome" in verse 7. They are those afraid to align themselves to Christ for fear of personal persecution or death. they may be those of which the term "apostasy" describes. John 15:6 has Jesus saying, "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned." The "unbelieving" are those who have rejected Christ or shown their true lack of faith by seeking their own safety at the expense of denying Him. Both terms "cowardly" and "unbelieving" are two ways of saying the same thing and stand as a parallelism.

"Abominable" are those whose lives "stink to high heaven" and rather than reflect the holiness of Christ, insult Him and His righteousness by their conduct. Everything they do is a deliberate act to disobey the word of God and its righteous standards.

"Murderers" are those who intentionally kill another person for some personal motive. This is not the same as taking a life in war or as a government official engaged in law enforcement activities.

"Immoral persons" points to specific sexual practices especially fornication and adultery. This of course is another violation of God's Law.

"Sorcerers" are those who seek the guidance of spirits or demons, often with the aid of some hallucinates.

"Idolaters" are those who have chosen to worship dead and worthless gods or goddesses and their images, a direct violation of the first two commandments.

"Liars" or deceivers align themselves with the doctrine of demons and the lies of the evil one. These are deliberate actions to lead people to disbelief in God and His truth.

“...their part *will be* in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” There will be no access to the new Jerusalem wherein God dwells with His people. They will suffer “the second death.” Again, here is the dilemma. While the devil, the false prophet, the beast and all who have received his mark will be tormented forever in the lake of fire and brimstone,<sup>247</sup> all others suffer the “second death” that appears to be the cessation of life.

#### THE FOURTH MAJOR VISION - 21:9-22:5

21:9-21,

9: Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." 10: And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, 11: having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper. 12: It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names *were* written on them, which are *the names* of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. 13: *There were* three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west. 14: And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them *were* the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. 15: The one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gates and its wall. 16: The city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal. 17: And he measured its wall, seventy-two yards, *according to* human measurements,

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<sup>247</sup> See 14:8

which are *also* angelic *measurements*. 18: The material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. 19: The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; 20: the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoptase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst. 21: And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

9: In 21:2, John sees the heavenly city coming down to the new earth, "made ready as a bride adorned for her husband" and notes that God will now dwell with men. This is so like the Garden of Eden restored (especially as we move into chapter 22) and in such contrast to the kingdom of the beast. But this is a spiritual reality, not a corporeal or temporal reality.

He doesn't describe the city in detail until now. One of the angels who had poured out a bowl of God's wrath speaks to John and invites him to come and see "...the bride, the wife of the Lamb." This phrase picks up the vision from verse 2.

10a: He is, for the fourth time carried away "in the spirit."<sup>248</sup> He is transported in the spirit to a "great and high mountain." This image is similar to that of Ezekiel 40:2 where the prophet says, "In the visions of God He brought me into the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain, and on it to the south *there was* a structure like a city." Perhaps there is the idea that John and Ezekiel are in a corresponding spiritual ecstasy and both see a great city and temple, Ezekiel one of the earth and John the new one coming down from heaven to the new earth. Both take measurements and the accounts have great similarities. He then sees clearly and with definition the vision of verse 2 a city coming down from God.

10b: John now resumes the vision first written in verse 2. The Greek passage translated, "...descending out of heaven from God" is exactly the same in verses 2 and 10. This helps us in two ways. First we have some support that the passage in between is indeed parenthetical and a message for the readers/hearers and second, that this resumption is speaking of the same vision as interrupted at verse 2.

11a: John now begins to describe the holy city, new Jerusalem in detail. First as it

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<sup>248</sup> Also in 1:10, 4:2, and 17:3.

descends from God it has the "glory of God." There is no question that this city is not made with human hands. Hebrews makes note of this in 9:11, "But when Christ appeared *as* a high priest of the good things to come, *He entered* through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation;..." The contrast with the description of the "harlot's city" in 17:1-5 cannot be ignored. The splendor of the city of the harlot is nothing compared to the stunning glory of this image from heaven. Paul wrote in Romans 8:18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

Paul also reflects the spiritual nature of what God does as opposed to man when he comments in Colossians 2:11, "and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; ..."

We now begin to see a spiritual kingdom and presence in the midst of the new earth.

11b: Crystal clear like Jasper is possibly a either actually crystal or a diamond or diamond like stone. Diamonds were generally unknown in New Testament times, the first discovered in India about 400 years before Christ. Crystals were known. So it is difficult to know if this is what John is describing as a crystal clear Jasper Like stone which is normally red or other colors. If indeed a diamond like brilliance, he may well have described it as a clear Jasper stone. However, in verse 18 he describes it as pure gold in a glass or crystal like form, unknown to mankind. The entire city gleamed with the brilliance of God's glory.

12-13: Now we come to a "measuring" of the city and a detailed description of the Vision. The purpose of this image is to magnify the magnificence and spiritual magnitude of what God has prepared for those who love Him. The measurements are astounding for an earthly structure, but we remember it is not earthly, but spiritual and from God's heaven.

First, from verse 16, we see that the city is in the shape of a cube. Around it is a great and high wall. On each side there are three gates, each guarded by an angel and each having the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. We do not have a list of the names and so we are not sure of the disposition of Ephraim and Manasseh, the sons of Joseph. The lists of the twelve tribes in scripture differ in

order and in name.<sup>249</sup>

But in Ezekiel 40:1-3, the prophet writes,

1: “In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was taken, on that same day the hand of the LORD was upon me and He brought me there. 2: In the visions of God He brought me into the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain, and on it to the south *there was* a structure like a city. 3: So He brought me there; and behold, there was a man whose appearance was like the appearance of bronze, with a line of flax and a measuring rod in his hand; and he was standing in the gateway.”

Ezekiel’s vision included a city and a wall with three gates on each side and he names each tribe’s name inscribed thereon. This is found in chapter 48:30-34. The correspondence with John’s vision is very obvious. However, the point of the names on the gates looks to symbolize that it is through Israel that access is granted to the presence of God. That is, the God of Israel is the only one and true God and only by faith in Him is there hope of life eternal.

14: There were three foundation stones on each side of this wall, each with a name of one of the twelve apostles on it. From verse 16 we cannot know whether the city was 1,500 miles long on each side and equally as tall, or if that is the total circumference, each side then being 375 miles long and the city equally as tall. If the former, then the foundation stones would each be 500 miles in length, and if the latter, 125 miles long. These of course are symbolic/spiritual numbers. The Greek uses the measurement of “twelve thousand stadia” which makes sense in terms of Biblical numbers and symbolism. A stadia is the measure of an ancient athletic field or hippodrome and is about 660 feet in length. The number twelve speaks of the righteous and divine government of God.

Each stone had the name of one of the twelve apostles engraved on it. We are not given the names. Is Judas represented? Or did the selection of Matthias in Acts 1 replace him? However, he was never mentioned again. Or was Paul added in? We don’t know. But the point is that the apostles of Christ preached a message that is the foundation for faith. The promises of the God of Israel are fulfilled in and by Christ and only through faith in Him does one enter the true Israel of God and eternal life.

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<sup>249</sup> See the discussion about this in the commentary of chapter 7, verses four and following.

15: Ezekiel 40:3 quoted above is again reflected in this verse. The angel is the same as the one in verse 9, one who held one of the seven bowls of God's wrath. He holds a gold measuring rod with which to measure the city. He will proceed to measure the city, the gates and the wall. There is also a similar vision in Zechariah 2:1-5.

The purpose of this measuring is to display the magnificence of God and that which He creates and provides. This city would be impossible for human hands to build. So it is unlike any other specifications given to men by which the earthly temple or city was built. The size alone indicates that what is impossible with man is possible with God. This is one of the spiritual/symbolic ideas we are to get from these visions. Others might include the fulfillment of God's word, His protection of those who are His and their rewards as well.

16-17: The measurements of the city are so massive that whether the height is 1,500 miles or 375 miles, it would reach into outer space. The international space station (ISS) is only about 225 miles above the earth in orbit. At 1,500 miles the city would be seven times further away from the earth than the ISS.

The cube shape of the city reflects the "Holy of Holies" which was also built in a cubic shape and its size is described in I Kings 6:19-20,

19: "Then he prepared an inner sanctuary within the house in order to place there the ark of the covenant of the LORD. 20: The inner sanctuary *was* twenty cubits in length, twenty cubits in width, and twenty cubits in height, and he overlaid it with pure gold. He also overlaid the altar with cedar."

This makes the Holy of Holies roughly about thirty feet in length, width and height.

Then the angel measures the wall around the city and finds it to be 144 cubits or Twelve cubits squared. This would be around 210-215 feet. This measurement is odd considering the size of the city. If it is the height of the wall it seems quite low compared to the city. Some commentators wonder if the measurement is of thickness. But that is speculation. Height is most acceptable, even at this disproportionate measurement. The NASB translation, "*according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements*" is better translated, "Measured by the angel in human measurements." The wall of any city would be shorter than many of the interior structures, its primary purpose keeping

undesirables out or for defense, not a likely purpose here.

The twelve cubits squared would symbolize the perfect and righteous aspect of the wall and the city disallowing any unrighteousness, sin or corruption within as we shall see shortly. It also represents the domain and rule of the Almighty.

18-20: John continues with more detail about the wall. It is a wall of jasper and there is no color mentioned. Jasper also is used to describe the crystal gleam of the city in verse 11.

A pure gold glass like element is how John sees the city's construction. He is apparently able to see through the structure to some degree and the construction seems like transparent gold. There is no such element found on earth.

The foundation stones mentioned in verse 14 are each adorned with a different precious stone. These are quite similar to the tribal stones described on pages 137-138 of this commentary that are found on the breastplate of the high priest. In other words, each tribe is dedicated a foundation stone and each foundation stone is adorned with a precious stone possibly represented on the breastplate of the high priest for that tribe.

21: Each gate was a huge pearl as tall as the wall and perhaps rising into a tower. Within each pearl gate was the opening to the city guarded by an angel (verse 12). The streets were of the same transparent gold as the city. The value of this fabulous gold has little in this context as the saints will be walking on it. It is beneath their feet and shows the value God places on His people versus this incredible and special gold that would normally take our breath away. Again, this is a symbolic and a spiritual reality, not a physical or earthly one.

Isaiah 54 has some intriguing thoughts that correspond with portions of Revelation 21 and 22. Following the chapter of the suffering servant, we have a picture of restoration and future security and beauty. For example, in 54:5-7 we read,

5: "For your husband is your Maker, Whose name is the LORD of hosts; And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel, Who is called the God of all the earth.  
6: "For the LORD has called you, Like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, Even like a wife of *one's* youth when she is rejected," Says your God. 7: "For a brief moment I forsook you, But with great compassion I will gather you."

And,

8: "In an outburst of anger I hid My face from you for a moment, But with everlasting lovingkindness I will have compassion on you," Says the LORD your Redeemer. 9: "For this is like the days of Noah to Me, When I swore that the waters of Noah Would not flood the earth again; So I have sworn that I will not be angry with you Nor will I rebuke you. 10: "For the mountains may be removed and the hills may shake, But My lovingkindness will not be removed from you, And My covenant of peace will not be shaken," Says the LORD who has compassion on you. 11: "O afflicted one, storm-tossed, *and* not comforted, Behold, I will set your stones in antimony, And your foundations I will lay in sapphires. 12: "Moreover, I will make your battlements of rubies, And your gates of crystal, And your entire wall of precious stones. 13: "All your sons will be taught of the LORD; And the well-being of your sons will be great. 14: "In righteousness you will be established; You will be far from oppression, for you will not fear; And from terror, for it will not come near you."

21:22-23,

22: I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23: And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp *is* the Lamb.

22: Regarding the idea that there needs to be a rebuilt temple prior to Christ's return, see the comments at 20:10, page 401-402. There is no need of a temple and here God and the Lamb are the temple of the city. This portrays the intimate relationship of God and the Lamb and their people. Though the wedding feast is never described, the closest thing we have to a culmination of all this is here in 21:3, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them..."  
I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. Jer. 31:33.

23: There is no need of any outside source for illuminating the city. God's glory is more than sufficient. Isaiah, chapter 60 finds corresponding descriptions of this and following verses. In 60:19 the prophet writes, "No longer will you have the sun for light by day, Nor for brightness will the moon give you light; But you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, And your God for your glory."

The lamp of the city being the Lamb may well be seen as light as a metaphor for truth. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life." John 8:12 And, "There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man." John 1:9

21:24-27

24: "The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. 25: In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; 26: and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; 27: and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life."

24-27: Now here we have an enigma. If there is a new heavens and a new earth, and all the unfaithful have been eliminated and the saints now are part of the eternal city of God, who then are these nations and where do they come from? What is the significance of this startling vision? Let's examine some of the views.

First, if taken as a literal, chronological event, then some think that this vision goes back to and represents the millennial period and beyond where the rule of the saints of God as well as God and Christ on earth is symbolized in this vision over the unregenerate nations that inhabit the refurbished or recreated earth. These nations and their kings live outside the city and are impacted by the presence of the city and their honor and glory are submitted to that of God. This view sees the fulfillment of Isaiah chapter 60 (portions quoted below). There is no question about the correspondence of this chapter with much of Revelation 21-22.

Second, the city is not a dwelling place at all but is a people, the people of God or the church (thus the city is described as a bride) who are symbolized in the city image but have been on the earth since the Day of Pentecost impacting the world with the gospel, and as people are saved they are allowed to enter the "city." This accounts for the great size of the city, its glory and its structure being built upon the tribes and apostles. We have not a view of the future, but of the present. This is exhibited by 21:25-27 according to this view.

Third, in the creation of the new heavens and the new earth, God also created a new race of humanity. In other words, we have a new cycle of creation wherein the story of Genesis, mankind and following is now beginning again. Though the

faithful saints enjoy an eternity in the presence of God, the new world once again begins with Paradise and the story of mankind's temptation, sin, redemption and salvation. The holy city represents God's spiritual presence in this new age as it does in the Bible. Support for this is drawn from 22:1-5.

Fourth, the vision is simply a final message to both the faithful and the unbelievers and displays the glory of the one and the tragedy of the other. Directed to the readers, it is to encourage the faithful and convict and motivate those who are yet to believe to do so. It really has little to do with the historical or chronological reality of the end of this age and the age to come.

Fifth, it simply represents the fulfillment of God's promises to his faithful. For example, in Zechariah 2:10-11,

10: "Sing for joy and be glad, O daughter of Zion; for behold I am coming and I will dwell in your midst," declares the LORD. 11: "Many nations will join themselves to the LORD in that day and will become My people. Then I will dwell in your midst, and you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you."

And in Isaiah 60:3-5; 11-12; 19-22,

3: "Nations will come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising. 4: "Lift up your eyes round about and see; They all gather together, they come to you. Your sons will come from afar, And your daughters will be carried in the arms. 5": "Then you will see and be radiant, And your heart will thrill and rejoice; Because the abundance of the sea will be turned to you, The wealth of the nations will come to you.

11: "Your gates will be open continually; They will not be closed day or night, So that *men* may bring to you the wealth of the nations, With their kings led in procession. 12: "For the nation and the kingdom which will not serve you will perish, And the nations will be utterly ruined.

19: "No longer will you have the sun for light by day, Nor for brightness will the moon give you light; But you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, And your God for your glory. 20: "Your sun will no longer set, Nor will your moon wane; For you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, And the days of your mourning will be over. 21: "Then all your people *will be* righteous;

They will possess the land forever, The branch of My planting, The work of My hands, That I may be glorified. 22: "The smallest one will become a clan, And the least one a mighty nation. I, the LORD, will hasten it in its time."

And so on.

Considering that apocalyptic literature is concerned with the way things will be in contrast to the way things are perhaps it is best to see all this in this way, first spiritually before we see it in a temporal or historical framework. Bottom line, the book drives home the importance of patient, persevering and overcoming faith in the Lord regardless and in spite of all the "apparent" reasons we or others may have to persuading us to the contrary. The consequences of faithfulness or of unbelief and apostasy are made clear. Clear warnings are regularly made throughout the book against being led astray by false teachers who would turn people from the Lord and His provision for salvation through faith in His son Jesus.

Each of the above ideas (and others not mentioned) has its attractions and detractions. There may be elements of several intended in the image. For me, like many others, I call myself a "pan-millennialist" recognizing that regardless of which view I take of things, in Christ it will all "pan out" okay in the end. But the ideas aside, we again have a clear message of the identity of those who will walk in this city and those who will not. The desire of God is that "none will perish, but that all will come to repentance." (II Peter 3:9) Once again here is a message to the readers prompting them to ponder their own spiritual destiny.

25: "...its gates will never be closed..." is a conditional statement and applies to the kings and nations of verses 24 and 26. It does not apply to the entities of verse 27 or of 22:11-15.

Regardless of where one places this in the overall scheme of things, these final four verses tell us that the "city" will be light to the nations, and due to their being no night in the city, the gates are perpetually open.

The nations that bring their glory and honor into the city must be written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Yet at the same time there is a guarded prohibition that no one else can enter. Again, this is one of the oddest images in the book considering that the setting is a new heavens and a new earth and that the final judgments have been rendered. One would expect that God's saints would now be ushered into

paradise to ever be with the lord and that would be that. But that is only a part of the picture as we see in the upcoming chapter. Still, the evangelistic thread is there for the reader.

Verse 27 can be seen as, once again, a warning and a message to provoke thought in those who have yet to recognize Jesus as God's true Messiah and their Lord and Savior. In other words, verse 27 is an editorial and evangelistic comment and not necessarily a description of an evil environment on the new earth. In other words, the city becomes an image of the fulfillment of God's promises to His people and a picture of what salvation ultimately entails and is set in this image to entice, in the present day, men and women to come to faith and be written in the Lamb's Book of Life. I tend to see it in this way especially as we journey through chapter 22.

# THE BOOK OF REVELATION

## Chapter Twenty Two

22:1-5

1: Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, 2: in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve *kinds of* fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 3: There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; 4: they will see His face, and His name *will be* on their foreheads. 5: And there will no longer be *any* night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.

1-2: The first five verses are a continuation of chapter 21. The river of the water of life flows from the throne of God and the Lamb. As we noted in 21:6, Jesus often spoke of the water of life only He could give. This was first mentioned by Jeremiah the prophet in 2:13 and 17:13,

"For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns That can hold no water. (2:13)

“O LORD, the hope of Israel, All who forsake You will be put to shame. Those who turn away on earth will be written down, Because they have forsaken the fountain of living water, even the LORD.” (17:13)

John 4:10-14, and 7:38 Jesus speaks in these same terms referring to Himself.

The river of the water of life from God and the Lamb flows down the main center street of the city. The street then, is divided by the river. On each side of the river may be either a tree of life or many trees of life, but probably twelve on each side, each bearing a different and fresh crop of fruit each month. Then, outside the trees the street continues. The trees of life gain their water from the river of life and those who walk the streets of gold may pluck the fruit in that is in season.

The first vision John experiences in chapter 1 is an image taken from the Menorah (seven branched lampstand) that once stood in the temple. The Tree of Life is also represented by the Menorah and has many similarities to our entire vision of the heavenly city and all its aspects. For example, the Menorah was made of gold. There were no windows in the temple so the menorah was its only light to shine in the darkness. The oil lamps were lit every evening and not allowed to go out until daybreak. The Menorah had a center shaft or trunk with three “branches” on each side totaling seven “trunks” each supporting an oil lamp at the top. The word “branch” is the same as the word “reed”, “cane” or “rod” and each was decorated with almond shaped cups, bulbs (fruit), flowers.

Since ancient times, the Menorah has been seen as a symbol of the tree of life and therefore of God Himself. Not that it is an image of God, but a reminder of who God is and what He provides. In chapters 21 and 22 of Revelation, we may have yet another symbolic and spiritual image of the entire divine power and presence represented by the city and tree of life. This is indeed the center of everything as far as the truth and hope of mankind are concerned.

Again, we have nations in the vision and the leaves (not the fruit) of the trees are used to make medicine “to heal the nations.” All this, of course, is symbolic and spiritual but the setting is upon a new heavens and a new earth. There seems to be this spiritual core in the midst of a new physical universe. Perhaps the city is invisible in that it represents a spiritual center, indeed the presence of God and the immortals within a new creation. The fruit, like in the Garden of Eden is now available to the reborn and spiritually created citizens, but not to physical and temporal beings dwelling upon the earth. The leaves could represent the word of God sent out to the new world, or truth of where the ultimate healing comes from. This of course is speculation. But without a clarification, we are left with speculation.

Regardless, the vision corresponds with the vision of Ezekiel 7:12 which, speaking of Jerusalem says,

"By the river on its bank, on one side and on the other, will grow all *kinds of* trees for food. Their leaves will not wither and their fruit will not fail. They will bear every month because their water flows from the sanctuary, and their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing."

3-4: From Zechariah 14:11 "... People will live in it, and there will no longer be a curse, for Jerusalem will dwell in security." God's bond servants will see the very face of God, and these are identified with those mentioned by Jesus in 3:12-13 and in 14:1 who have His name written on their foreheads,

12: "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name. 13: He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

And in 14:1,

14:1 "Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb *was* standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads."

[Note: There are those teachers that insist that since the church is not mentioned again after 3:14, that this is an indication of the church being "raptured." The remaining chapters then are directed, I suppose, to Jews. But then these teachers have no problem attributing chapters 21 and 22 to the church though it is not still mentioned. Other than trying to fit a theological preconception, there is no justification for this hacking up the scriptures willy-nilly as I see it. There is no question that those who have God's name on their foreheads are the same as those referenced in 3:12-13 and 14:1 and there is no question that 3:12-13 are written to the church. The lack of the word "church" is not a basis for the theological structure so many insist on. This inconsistency is revealing.]

The "curse" is gone. What is this curse? First, a curse is found in Genesis where the ground, rather than supply abundance, is cursed so that man must labor in sweat just to survive. The futility of this as it soaks away one's life is to be seen in contrast to the provision of God, now removed. Second, this pictures the displeasure of God with man. Isaiah 24:5-7 reads,

5: "The earth is also polluted by its inhabitants, for they transgressed laws, violated statutes, broke the everlasting covenant. 6: Therefore, a curse devours the earth, and those who live in it are held guilty. Therefore, the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men are left. 7: The new wine mourns, The vine decays, All the merry-hearted sigh."

Third, Deuteronomy, chapter 27 lists the curses upon all who fail to obey the statutes of God and the chapter concludes with, "Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them." And all the people shall say, "Amen." Paul quotes this in Galatians 3:10 and proclaims that Christ has removed this curse from all the redeemed.

The word "cursed" basically means removed from God and any form of hope. The bondservants of God will be in an intimate relationship with God and are composed of spirit themselves. We know that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" and that "no man can look upon the face of God and live." (I Corinthians 15:50 and Exodus 33:20, I Timothy 6:16)

5: A reprise of 21:23. Zechariah 14:6-11 is also reflected here.

6: "In that day there will be no light; the luminaries will dwindle. 7: For it will be a unique day which is known to the LORD, neither day nor night, but it will come about that at evening time there will be light. 8: And in that day living waters will flow out of Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and the other half toward the western sea; it will be in summer as well as in winter. 9: And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be *the only* one, and His name *the only* one. 10: All the land will be changed into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem; but Jerusalem will rise and remain on its site from Benjamin's Gate as far as the place of the First Gate to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king's wine presses. 11: People will live in it, and there will no longer be a curse, for Jerusalem will dwell in security."

The visions are now completed with the words of promise to God's bond-servants, "and they will reign forever and ever." All that is left now are the final instructions to John and His readers.

22:6-17; 18-21 - The conclusion, and the final messages to the reader/hearer.

6: And he said to me, "These words are faithful and true"; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must soon take place. 7: "And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book." 8: I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. 9: But he

\*said to me, "Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God. 10: And he \*said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. 11: Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and the one who is holy, still keep himself holy. 12: "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. 13: I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. 14: Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. 15: Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying. 16: I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star." 17: The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.

6: A reprise of 21:5. John adds that these words are now from the same angel and that John is among those prophets in whom the Lord, "the God of the spirits of the prophets" has also used to communicate to God's bond servants "the things which must soon take place." (See verse 9)

The word "prophecy" does not only mean a view of the future. In nearly every case a prophecy is based on the consequences of the decision of a leader or person who must choose between two or more paths, one usually involving worldly, political, or economic influences and the other a path from God announced by God through His prophet. If one chooses other than God's counsel, the promise is disaster. This book demonstrates clearly and frequently the choices and gives ample illustrations of those who made the wrong ones and those who made the right ones and the consequences of each.

7: There is an urgency expressed here in Jesus words, "Look, I am coming soon" and there is the promise of blessing to those who "heed" the words of the prophecy of the book. To heed is to "keep near and dear" the message of this book in one's heart and soul. Therefore it is critical that one does not miss the message to the heart and soul and make the choice to cling to the Lord in spite of challenges to the contrary. Teachers of this book better get that rather than make out of it a theological and intellectual exercise to tickle the ears of the people.

His coming soon or quickly is a phrase used five times in Revelation and the phrase, “the things which must soon take place” is used once in the first chapter and once in the last chapter.

8-9: John has no need to identify himself, the early church knew him well. Once again he either reiterates his falling down in worship of the speaking angel (19:10) or he is somehow compelled to do so again. I lean toward the former as he speaks in the past tense in verse 8. He had not just heard from an angel but the voice of the Lord and did not fall in worship. So I believe he is once again reflecting on the overwhelming and awesome experience of being chosen to receive this vision and to receive the true words of God. The great chorus of heavenly praise in chapter 19 seems to have made a great impact. Plus, the response of the angel is nearly identical.

10: The instruction “not to seal up the prophetic words of the book” means not to write them down and keep them until instructed to reveal them, but to do so immediately. This is in contrast to 10:4 where John was told to “keep secret what the seven thunders said” and not to write it down.

11-13: Again a warning. Though this appears as some sort of decree, or even as a mandate to remain in one’s spiritual or moral state, or that at the end things “everything will be fixed and unchanging,”<sup>250</sup> we may see this unusual phrase in other ways. 1. It is actually a challenge to the very people he speaks of, and in the light of the next verse (12) regarding Christ’s soon return in reward (and judgment) it may be intended as a wakeup call, especially considering the invitation to come while there is time in verses 14 and 17. 2. It reflects several passages of scripture pointing out the hardness of man’s heart and their failure to understand His word or His ways such as in; Deuteronomy 29:4, Isaiah 6:9-10, 44:18; Jeremiah 5:21; Daniel 12:9-10 and so on. 3. Simply sarcasm almost daring the unrighteous to seriously consider the ramifications of their position.

Jesus promise to return “quickly” has been discussed in the commentaries of 3:11a and 11:14 as has the “Alpha and Omega” phrase in 1:4,8 and 17b.

14: A figure of speech harkening back to 7:17, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in

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<sup>250</sup> Albert Barnes, notes on the Bible, Revelation 22:11, , E-sword on line.

the blood of the Lamb.”<sup>251</sup> Corresponding terms are “those who have washed their robes”, “those in the Lamb’s book of Life”, those who have the seal of God on their foreheads”, “God’s bond-servants”, “the bride of Christ”, “the body of Christ”, “the called out ones”, “the elect” and many more terms designating God’s faithful. These all have the “right” to the Tree of Life (eternal life) and access to the presence of God and the Lamb. The reference to the “tree of life” in Genesis 3 is unmistakable. Now, the means to take of this tree is given and there is no prohibition.<sup>252</sup>

15: Again, a message to those in the present day, regardless of the day when this was or is read. None of the described will ever enter the presence of God. This corresponds to the challenge of verse 11. The “dogs” are a metaphor for the unclean and filthy who engage in perverse sexual practices (from Deuteronomy 23:18) and Paul applies the term to the Judaisers. The list is similar to that found in 21:8. In both places it demands the attention of the reader/listener.

16: A reference to the churches with which the book began attests to its unity as so many places do. The phrase, “I am the root, etc.” testifies to the deity of Christ, His rightful inheritance to the throne of David and thus God’s true and anointed Messiah, (Isaiah 11:1), and the bright and morning star ( See commentary on 2:28).

### JOHN’S EPILOGUE

It looks to be that from verse 17 onward we have John’s appended conclusion or epilogue. Most of it seems to be in his own voice accompanied by the supporting testimony of the Lord in verse 20.

17: A definite but final invitation for the readers/hearers of all ages. It is given first by the Spirit of God through all of God’s people and through the one who “hears.” This “one who hears” may be John himself or anyone who hears and is believing. The invitation given in 21:6 is repeated, “And let the one who is thirsty

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<sup>251</sup> Older translations and versions or updated ones such as the NKJV translate this as “Blessed are those who keep His commandments.” The textual support for this has been discarded due to its late date in the manuscript record as it did not appear until the tenth century A.D.

<sup>252</sup> It is fascinating that in Genesis, chapter 2, there is no prohibition to taking the fruit of the tree of life, only of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Man chooses knowledge of good and evil in order to be like God ignoring God’s warning against doing so on penalty of death. So they choose it anyway and forfeit life. Then the tree of life is no longer available to them until they repent, return and place their faith and trust in the Lord once again. Here it is assured that access to such who “wash their robes” will be granted.

come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.” The water of life is Jesus. The price to take thereof has been paid and all that remains is repentance, confession of need and faith in the One who supplies freely.

The prophet Zephaniah prefigures this message,

1: “Gather yourselves together, yes, gather, O nation without shame, 2: Before the decree takes effect-- The day passes like the chaff-- Before the burning anger of the LORD comes upon you, Before the day of the LORD'S anger comes upon you. 3: Seek the LORD, All you humble of the earth Who have carried out His ordinances; Seek righteousness, seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden In the day of the LORD'S anger.” 2:1-3

22:18-21

18: I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; 19: and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book. 20: He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. 21: The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.”

18-19: John is warning that his message and prophecy not be distorted or misrepresented. It is not the issues of disagreements among those who sincerely wish to gain the true message of the book, but to those who would discount the truth of the personage and role of the Lamb and the importance of the message to be faithful to Him and His God and overcome in the perseverance of one's faith regardless of the circumstances of life.

The warning is specifically aimed at any who would try and deceive the sheep of God's field and turn them from devotion to the Lamb to another god which is tantamount to idolatry. The warning is reflective of Deuteronomy 4:2, "You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.” Verses 14-19 of this chapter in Deuteronomy speak of the special displeasure of God regarding idolatry.

Those who either lead others into idolatry or turn to false gods will not only come under the possibility of the terrible plagues of God's wrath, but be denied access to the tree of life. The point is not that they will lose their salvation, but that turning to idolatry indicates that they were not committed to Christ and God's truth in the first place. It is not the place of anyone to judge the truth, worthiness or divine origin of the book. Quite the contrary, it is the truth that judges men's hearts and minds as well as the focus of their devotion. Those that are unsure and open to changing their commitment are not those who are truly God's people.

20: To underscore the point, John states that Jesus bears witness to all of it and promises once again that He is "coming quickly." But a divine delay to allow many to come to the water of life does not dispel the urgency for many to deeply consider their standing before God. It must not be a standing of religious works in which a person thinks he can boast, but in humble and total submission to the only one who can eradicate those works, and save him, and give him the Spirit led works that glorify God and not himself.

John, having gone through the persecution of the faithful at the hands of the Romans, is eager to see his savior again. He prays, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." This is the Greek version of the well-known Aramaic phrase "Maranatha" Paul employs in I Corinthians 16:22.

And it wasn't long before John was ushered into paradise to be in His presence. In that sense, Jesus always comes quickly as life is so fleeting. We think of Stephen who, at his stoning was able, before he died to testify that, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

Paul, in the glorious conclusion of Romans, chapter 8 writes,

38: "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39: nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

21: John's benediction, "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen." It is fitting that John ends with a reminder of the grace of our Lord Jesus. Jesus is so open and willing that all come to Him and drink of the living water. He displays His desire in Matthew 23:37 when he cries out to the holy city, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often

I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.” And in his last words John extends the grace of the Lord Jesus to all who read or hear his work, whether believers or non-believers.

It is impressed upon all readers and listeners that they be willing.

### **AFTERWORD**

The intent of the Book of Revelation is not to exercise one’s mental capacity to figure out mysteries and puzzles nor is it to determine chronologies, events, timetables, a history of the end times, nor is it here to help God’s people to determine the timing of Christ’s return or even events leading up to His return in any specific manner, nor to support preconceived ideas or theological concepts.

It is not to be a playground for amateur “prophets” or prophetic teachers to find support for their own misguided ideas. As it says in Deuteronomy 18:17-22,

17: "The LORD said to me, 'They have spoken well. 18: 'I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. 19: 'It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him. 20: 'But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.' 21: "You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' 22: "When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.”

The intent is that the Bible not be a textbook of study, but a life giving serum to the bloodstream of one’s existence. It is not for the reader to say, “Wow, that was interesting” and then forget about it and go and watch the game. Unless God’s word takes root, grows and bears fruit, the study thereof may be futile.

The intent and purpose of any of God's word is to effect a person's heart and create the necessary work to bring that person to faith, or to a more confident faith, an understanding mind, and a growth toward a closeness with God and His son.

Bottom line, it is intended as a spiritual lesson, that is a fortification of the soul, and an enhancement to our faith and hope.

## APPENDIX

EXCURSUS I - The "Day of The Lord" and "the Great Tribulation" - Page 156

EXCURSUS II - "The "Son of Man". What does this term mean as Jesus applied it to himself? Pages 440-451

EXCURSUS III - Revelation 3:10, Looking at "Testing" Pages 441-455

EXCURSUS IV - Testing, from God or? Page 456-469

OUTLINE OF THE SEVEN SEALED SCROLL - Pages 470-471

JEWISH ESCHATOLOGICAL CHART – Page 472

THE GREAT HARLOT AND BABYLON THE GREAT COMPARISON  
CHART – Page 473

THE IDENTITY OF A CHILD FROM A JEWISH MOTHER – Page 474-476

SOME ARTICLES OPPOSING THE "PRETRIBULATION RAPTURE"  
THEORY

1. Michael Cordner, Northwestern theological Seminary, Pages 477-491
2. Anthony Buzzard, author and professor on the faculty of Atlanta Bible College, Pages 492-493
3. Oswald J. Smith – Pages 494-499
4. Corrie Ten boom – Pages 500-504.
5. Dr. Ernest L. Martin, David Sielaff – Pages 505-509
6. Ruth Bell Graham – Page 510
7. FAMOUS RAPTURE WATCHERS – Addendum by Dave MacPherson, Pages 511-516

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND CREDITS – Page 517

## EXCURSUS II

### THE “SON OF MAN”. WHAT DOES THIS TERM MEAN AS JESUS APPLIED IT TO HIMSELF?

It is incumbent upon us to figure out where these things are written about “the Son of Man” and “Elijah”. Did the Jews ever apply these writings to the expected Messiah and Elijah? How was it possible for the disciples to answer this question? Further, Jesus’ question was not “Where” is it written (οπου), but “how” (πως) is it written, (or, “in what way”) and this question is only found in Mark. The manner in which this question is asked may indicate that there is no direct reference to a passage answering the question in Jesus mind, but that some thinking about how one arrives at this answer is required. This fits well with what is actually required in the search for the answer.

The solution to these questions is not easy to come by and Jesus’ use of the term was as confusing to His hearers as it is to us. The reason for this is the odd way He applied it to Himself. On the one hand, He used it as it is used in Daniel 7:13, as Daniel notes, “I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. "And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed.” This idea is reflected by Jesus when He said in Mark 8:38 (and in many other places) "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." In Acts 7:55-56 it tells us of Stephen as he concludes his witness, “But being full of the Holy Spirit, He gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." He clearly designates Jesus in this role. Eusebius, quotes Hegesippus regarding James, the brother of Jesus crying out at the time of his martyrdom, “Why do you ask me about the Son of Man since He sits in heaven at the right hand of the mighty power, and shall come on the clouds of heaven”.

On the other hand, He used it of Himself as in Mark 8:31, “And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again”, and in Mark 9:31, “For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, "The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later”, and again in Luke 18:31-34, “Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. "For He will be handed over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again." But the disciples understood none of these things, and *the meaning of* this statement was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said.”

These two ideas clashed in the thinking of the disciples, and so His question about how it is written that the “Son of Man” should suffer and be treated with contempt. Jesus is stating quite clearly in good Jewish fashion that in Himself is the personification and fulfillment of all the term “Son of Man” entails. We need to look closely to find an exact Old Testament reference to the “Son of Man” suffering many things and treated with contempt if we are to understand how to answer His question to the disciples.

Finally, the Greek does not tell us if Jesus is using the term as “Son of Adam”, or “Son of Man” (שׂוֹן אָדָם), (eesh) or both. The LXX gives us no help as it translates both as “ανθρωπος” (“anthropos”- Greek for “man”). But investigation will show that He likely intended the meaning, “son of adam”.

Outside of Jesus’ use in the gospels, the term “Son of Man” is found some 90 times in Ezekiel, and three times in Daniel, once in Numbers (23:19); in Job 25:6, 35:8; Psalm 80:17, 144:3, 146:3, Isaiah 51:12, 56:2, in Jeremiah 49:18, 33 and more. But the suffering “Messiah” is linked more closely to Isaiah 52-53, and to passages like Psalm 22. These passages were seen in the early church, after Christ’s death and resurrection, as Messianic, applying to Jesus. We’ll come back to these later.

In Ezekiel, the term בֶּן־אָדָם (ben-adam) is used most frequently and used as God’s address to Ezekiel. When the term “man” is used apart from the address to Ezekiel and apart from the term “son of man”, the word שׂוֹן אָדָם, (eesh) is used. In the use of “son of man” in Ezekiel, it appears to simply indicate Ezekiel as simply a descendent of Adam, weak and in sin as he is contrasted with, and set before the glorious Creator. 1:28-2:1, “As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so *was* the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such *was* the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw *it*, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking.

Then He said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet that I may speak with you!" Is Jesus identifying with humanity in this fashion through use of the term “Son of man”? Perhaps. In Numbers 23:19, we read, "God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" Here, man is “eesh” and “son of man” is “adam”. In Job 25:6, Bildad says, “How much less man, *that* maggot, And the son of man, *that* worm!" Here, man is “vyna” (enosh- a form of “eesh” indicating man or mankind) and son of man is again “adam”. So one begins to see that there is a picture forming linking the two into one image. Job 35:8 gives us a fine contrast and more of the idea that Jesus could be linking the two together in one image. Elihu speaks, "Your wickedness is for a man like yourself, And your righteousness is for a son of man." But, we still need to find the idea of suffering.

Psalm 80:17 says, "Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand, Upon the son of man whom you made strong for Yourself." Again, the Hebrew is used as before. "Man" is "eesh" and "son of man" is "adam". The context of the entire Psalm bears examining. Israel is spoken of as a "vine" (verses 8-15a) in an allegory and then personified as "the son whom Thou hast strengthened for Thyself" (in verse 15b), and finally as the "son of man" (adam) in verse 17. This is reminiscent of Jesus metaphor, "I am the vine" in John 15. These terms and others, describing Israel are rampant throughout the Old Testament and often used by New Testament persons and writers as well. In Psalm 80, we find the term "son of man" in the context of suffering. Further, it is plain in the New Testament, that Jesus is the personification of Israel, in all that Israel is as well as what Israel was supposed to be. (Note Matthew's use of Hosea 11:1, for example, "When Israel *was* a youth I loved him, And out of Egypt I called My son". Matthew applies it to Jesus in his gospel, 2:14-15, "So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. He remained there until the death of Herod. *This was* to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON." It was the suffering of Israel in Egypt that prompted them to cry out to God for deliverance. And God heard them and responded.

Further, let us not forget that Israel became the given name of Jacob and the a singular term for the 12 sons of "Israel" later seen as the tribes of "Israel" then finally, the land upon which they settled was called "Israel" as it is today. So the word "Israel" is used in many ways, but became a collective noun, a personification, a designation of both a tribal family and a of person. The Hebrew language does this because terms often have plurality because of the Hebrew notion of the "solidarity" of the family or the race or the people. Even today, at Passover, the words, "when we were in Egypt" are used showing the solidarity of a people without regard to individuality, independence or time as we are used to describing ourselves.

Few will debate the role of "Israel" as the suffering servant. This leads us to Isaiah. But first, Psalm 144, verses 3 and 4 the terms are reversed. In a question, answered later in the Psalm, David asks, "O LORD, what is man (adam), that You take knowledge of him? Or the son of man (enosh), that You think of him? (4) Man (adam) is like a mere breath; His days are like a passing shadow. David, in this psalm, identifies with the "son of man" in this psalm, and the "son of man" is singular as now "adam" is plural in a personification form of the collective noun expressed in English as "man"- plural. Verse 7 confirms this, "...Stretch forth Your hand from on high; Rescue me and deliver me out of great waters, Out of the hand of aliens...". Psalm 146:3-4 gives us further insight, "Do not trust in princes, In mortal man, (ben-adam) in whom there is no salvation. His spirit departs, he returns to the earth; In that very day his thoughts perish." "Adam" here is once again plural the antecedent being "princes" in the parallelism, and the term, "mortal man" is "son of man" in the Hebrew linking suffering and mortality to the term Jesus in identifying Himself.

Now, we come to Isaiah. The verses in Jeremiah referenced above speak of a "son of man" (adam), and refer to the destruction of Edom and Hazor in which "a son of man" will never reside again. In Isaiah, however, we come to the conclusion of our search with further confirmation of our direction and hermeneutic. In Isaiah 51, the prophet looks ahead to the future

of Israel (and Judah) after the destruction Assyria brought upon Israel in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B. C., and Babylon upon Judah in the 6<sup>th</sup>. In an exhortation to hope and faith in the God of Israel, Isaiah prays (verses 10-13),

“Was it not You who dried up the sea, The waters of the great deep; Who made the depths of the sea a pathway For the redeemed to cross over? So the ransomed of the LORD will return And come with joyful shouting to Zion, And everlasting joy *will be* on their heads. They will obtain gladness and joy, And sorrow and sighing will flee away. "I, even I, am He who comforts you. Who are you that you are afraid of man who dies And of the son of man who is made like grass, That you have forgotten the LORD your Maker, Who stretched out the heavens And laid the foundations of the earth, ...”

Here, both the terms “man” (enosh) and “son of man” (adam) are parallel and seen suffering death. The same is true in 56:1-2, both the terms “man” (enosh) and “son of man” (adam) are seen as one and the same, “Thus says the LORD, "Preserve justice and do righteousness, For My salvation is about to come And My righteousness to be revealed. "How blessed is the man who does this, And the son of man who takes hold of it; Who keeps from profaning the sabbath, And keeps his hand from doing any evil.”

Jesus applied the term “son of man” to himself. In this study, we have seen that He incorporates the Biblical dual images in the use of this term and challenges His disciples to figure it out. All they understand is the apocalyptic and eschatological use of the term as it applies to the “Messiah”. So, we come to Isaiah 52:13-53:12, where the term “son of man” is not used. However, the images and application we have looked at to apply.

52:13-15, “Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted. Just as many were astonished at you, *My people*, So His appearance was marred more than any man And His form more than the sons of men. Thus He will sprinkle many nations, Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him; For what had not been told them they will see, And what they had not heard they will understand.”

53:1-3, “Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no *stately* form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.”

53:4-5, “Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.”

53:6-7, “All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth.”

53:8-11, “By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke *was due*? His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth. But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting *Him* to grief; If He would render Himself *as* a guilt offering, He will see *His* offspring, He will prolong *His* days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see *it and* be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities.”

53:12, “Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.

So, here we have the central passage illustrating the suffering of the Messiah as quoted or alluded to in the New Testament as fulfilled by Jesus suffering and death. John 12:37-38 quotes Isaiah 53:1, as does Romans 10:16-17; Jesus uses the word “scourged” in Mark 10:34 and Luke 18:33, but it is not exactly the same word used in Isaiah 53:5 “scourged” in the LXX. Still the allusion to Isaiah 53 seems apparent. Matthew 8:16-17 quotes 53:4, Hebrews 9:28 alludes to 53:5, and Paul, in Romans 4:25 makes an unmistakable reference to Isaiah 53:4-5. Paul alludes to this also in I Corinthians 15:3. I Peter 2:24-25 reference 53:5-6; Acts 8:32-35 quotes 53:7-8 as Philip taught the Ethiopian eunuch; I Peter 2:22-24 quotes 53:9 and alludes to verses 7 and 5 of Isaiah 53; II Corinthians 5:21 reflects 53:11; and Luke 22:37 quotes 53:12 as does Mark 15:27-28, to name some of the references.

Did they understand that Isaiah 53 was Messianic because this was a teaching of the rabbi’s prior to Jesus appearance? Or did they interpret Isaiah 53 to be Messianic after the suffering and death of Jesus, seeing it clearly fulfilled in Him? Or was it both?

Unable to find rabbinic teaching about this passage prior to Jesus appearance, (at this time) there is evidence of Isaiah 53 being taught as Messianic by Jewish Rabbis and scholars after His coming. This would indicate that they had difficulty breaking with previous tradition. Only in later centuries did they begin to hedge on this interpretation. (see documentation)

We are told in Acts 5:33-42 that Gamaliel, a respected teacher the Jews and head of the school of Hillel the Elder (perhaps his grandfather) gave sage advise to the council regarding the spread of the gospel and that the council heeded his advise. In 22:1-1-3, Paul, when arrested stood before the people and noted he was taught by Gamaliel. What did Gamaliel and the school of Hillel believe about Isaiah 53? Gamaliel is quoted often in the Mishnah, the rabbinic commentary on the Torah, and he was given the highest rabbinic title of respect, “Rabboni”, a title given to Jesus in John 20:16 by Mary Magdalene. A disputed medieval document stating that Gamaliel embraced Christianity around 70 A.D. near his death, has no other support.

Josephus (37 A.D.-95 A.D.) makes no reference to Isaiah 53 specifically, or to Hillel or Gamaliel, but does note the following about Christ in the disputed passage in Antiquities XIII, III:

“Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was the Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again after the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day”.

His reference to the prophets does not name Isaiah specifically, but one could hardly mention the prophetic fulfillment regarding Jesus’ death without having a mind to Isaiah 53 or to some other passage indicating that the Messiah would be put to death.

The following references include quotations from ancient sources. Brief definitions are necessary:

Targum – The Aramaic translation of the scriptural books, as delivered orally in the synagogue during the period of the second temple and later (6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. after the return from Babylon) in accordance with a generally accepted but by no means fixed tradition of interpretation. The written Targums now extant were written around the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. in Palestine and Babylonia and

Are, for the most part, renderings of the traditional.

Talmud – The written interpretations of Biblical stories and accounts both in Hebrew and Aramaic including the making of bylaws, and the adding to the store of wise counsel, covering a period of nearly a thousand years from the time of Ezra to the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D..

Midrash – The earliest method of teaching the oral law, in the form of commentary. Explanations of rabbinical notes and commentaries on the scriptures. Used from the time of Ezra well into the first century A.D.. Rejected by the Sadducees who stood firm on the written text when it opposed the oral tradition. Both Shammai and Hillel were the last of a succession of “great teachers” employing the Midrash as well as other methods of teaching until their deaths near the end of the first century A.D..

Mishna – The first part of the Talmud, containing traditional oral interpretations of scriptural ordinances, compiled by rabbis around 200 A.D..

Yalkut – A collection of Midrashim published in 1687, which quotes older and accredited writings from at least the 12<sup>th</sup> century and perhaps prior.

On the next page, we have a document from the appendix, “The Scriptures Messianically Applied In Rabbinic Writings” from Edersheim’s “The Life And Times of Jesus The Messiah”.

We also have copies from Rabbinical commentaries following that.

clause of *verse 2* is one of the passages quoted in the Midrash on Lamentations (see *Is. xi. 12*).

APP.

IX

The well-known Evangelic declaration in *Is. lii. 7* is thus commented upon in Yalkut (vol. ii. p. 53 c): In the hour when the Holy One, blessed be His Name, redeems Israel, three days before Messiah comes Elijah, and stands upon the mountains of Israel, and weeps and mourns for them, and says to them: Behold the land of Israel, how long shall you stand in a dry and desolate land? And his voice is heard from the world's end to the world's end, and after that it is said to them: Peace has come to the world, peace has come to the world, as it is said: How beautiful upon the mountains, &c. And when the wicked hear it, they rejoice, and they say one to the other: Peace has come to us. On the second day he shall stand upon the mountains of Israel, and shall say: Good has come to the world, good has come to the world, as it is written: That bringeth good tidings of good. On the third day he shall come and stand upon the mountains of Israel, and say: Salvation has come to the world, salvation has come to the world, as it is written: That publisheth salvation.

Similarly, this passage is quoted in Yalkut on Ps. cxxi. 1. See also our remarks on Cant. ii. 13.

*Verse 8* is one of the passages referred to in the Midrash on Lamentations quoted above, and frequently in other places as Messianic.

*Verse 12* is Messianically applied in Shemoth R. 15 and 19.

*Verse 13* is applied in the Targum expressly to the Messiah. On the words 'He shall be exalted and extolled' we read in Yalkut ii. (Par. 338, p. 53 c, lines 7 &c. from the bottom): He shall be higher than Abraham, to whom applies Gen. xiv. 22; higher than Moses, of whom Num. xi. 12 is predicated; higher than the ministering angels, of whom Ezek. i. 18 is said. But to Him there applies this in Zech. iv. 7: 'Who art thou, O great mountain?' 'And He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities, and the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed.' R. Huna says, in the name of R. Acha: All sufferings are divided into three parts; one part goes to David and the Patriarchs, another to the generation of the rebellion (rebellious Israel), and the third to the King Messiah, as it is written (Ps. ii. 7), 'Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion.' Then follows a curious quotation from the Midrash on Samuel, in which the Messiah indicates that His dwelling is on Mount Zion, and that guilt is connected with the destruction of its walls.

In regard to *Is. liii.* we remember, that the Messianic name of 'Leprous' (Sanh. 98 b) is expressly based upon it. *Is. liii. 10* is applied in the Targum on the passage to the Kingdom of the Messiah.

*Verse 5* is Messianically interpreted in the Midrash on Samuel (ed. Lemberg, p. 45 a, last line), where it is said that all sufferings are divided into three parts, one of which the Messiah bore—a remark which is brought into connection with Ruth ii. 14. (See our comments on that passage.)

*Is. liv. 2* is expected to be fulfilled in Messianic times (Vayyikra R. 10).

*Is. liv. 5.* In Shemoth R. 15 this is expressly applied to Messianic days.

*Is. liv. 11* is repeatedly applied to the Messianic glory, as, for example, in Shemoth R. 15. (See our comments on Ex. xii. 2.)

So is *verse 13*, as in Yalkut (vol. i. p. 78 c); in the Midrash on Ps. xxi. 1; and in other passages.

*Is. lv. 12* is referred to Messianic times, as in the Midrash on Ps. xiii.

## *Isaiah 53:How Do the Rabbis Interpret This?*

**Rabbi Moses Alshech(1508-1600)** says:

"Our Rabbis with one voice accept and affirm the opinion that the prophet is speaking of the Messiah, and we shall ourselves also adhere to the same view."

**Abrabanel (1437-1508)** said earlier:

"This is also the opinion of our own learned men in the majority of their Midrashim."

**Rabbi Yafeth Ben Ali ( second half of the 10th Century):**

"As for myself, I am inclined to regard it as alluding to the Messiah."

**Abraham Farissol ( 1451- 1526)** says:

"In this chapter there seem to be considerable resemblances and allusions to the work of the Christian Messiah and to the events which are asserted to have happened to Him, so that no other prophecy is to be found the gist and subject of which can be so immediately applied to Him."

**Targum Jonathan ( 4th Century )** gives the introduction on Isa. 52:13:

"Behold, my servant the Messiah..."

**Gersonides (1288-1344)** on Deut. 18:18:

"In fact Messiah is such a prophet, as it is stated in the Midrasch on the verse,'Behold, my servant shall prosper...' (Isa. 52:13)."

**Midrash Tanchuma:**

"He was more exalted than Abraham, more extolled than Mose, higher than the archangels" (Isa.52:13).

**Yalkut Schimeon ( ascribed to Rabbi Simeon Kara, 12th Century )** says on Zech.4:7:

"He ( the king Messiah ) is greater than the patriarchs, as it is said, 'My servant shall be high, and lifted up, and lofty exceedingly' (Isa. 52:13)."

**Maimonides (1135-1204)** wrote to Rabbi Jacob Alfajumi:

"Likewise said Isaiah that He (Messiah) would appear without acknowledging a father or mother: 'He grew up before him as a tender plant and as a root out of a dry ground' etc. (Isa.53:2)."

**Tanchuma:**

"Rabbi Nachman says: ,The Word MAN in the passage, 'Every man a head of the house of his father' (Num.1,4), refers to the Messiah, the son of David, as it is written, 'Behold the man whose name is Zemach'(the Branch) where Jonathan interprets,'Behold the man Messiah' (Zech.6:12); and so it is said,'A

man of pains and known to sickness' (Isa.53:3)."

**Talmud Sanhedrin (98b):**

"Messiah ...what is his name? The Rabbis say, 'The leprous one'; those of the house of the Rabbi (Jehuda Hanassi, the author of the Mishna, 135-200) say: 'Cholaja' (The sickly), for it says, 'Surely he has borne our sicknesses' etc. (Isa.53,4)."

**Pesiqta Rabbati (ca.845) on Isa. 61,10:**

"The world-fathers (patriarchs) will one day in the month of Nisan arise and say to (the Messiah): 'Ephraim, our righteous Anointed, although we are your grandparents, yet you are greater than we, for you have borne the sins of our children, as it says: 'But surely he has borne our sicknesses and carried our pains; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But he was pierced because of our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was laid upon him and through his wounds we are healed'(Isa.53,4-5)."

**Rabbi Simeon Ben Jochai (2.Century), Zohar., part II, page 212a and III, page 218a, Amsterdam Ed.):**

"There is in the garden of Eden a palace called : 'The palace of the sons of sickness, <, this palace the Messiah enters, and summons every sickness, every pain, and every chastisement of Israel: they all come and rest upon Him. And were it not that He had thus lightened them off Israel, and taken them upon Himself, there had been no man able to bear Israels chastisement for the transgression of the law; this is that which is written, 'Surely our sicknesses he has carried' Isa.53,4).- As they tell Him (the Messiah) of the misery of Israel in their captivity, and of those wicked ones among them who are not attentive to know their Lord, He lifts up His voice and weeps for their wickedness; and so it is written, 'He was wounded for our transgressions' (Isa.53,5). Midrash (on Ruth 2,14): "He is speaking of the King Messiah - 'Come hither', i.e.">Draw near to the throne<; 'eat of the bread', i.e.>, The bread of the kingdom.' This refers to the chastisements<, as it is said, 'But he was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities' (Isa.53,5). Rabbi Elijah de Vidas (16.Century) :

"The meaning of 'He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities' is, that since the Messiah bears our iniquities which produce the effect of His being bruised, it follows that whoever will not admit that Messiah thus suffers for our iniquities must endure and suffer for them himself."

**Siphre:**

"Rabbi Jose the Galilean said, 'Come and learn the merits of the King Messiah and the reward of the Just - from the first man who received but one commandment, a prohibition, and transgressed it. Consider how many deaths were inflicted upon himself, upon his own generation, and upon those who followed them, till the end of all generations. Which attribute is greater, the attribute of goodness, or the attribute of vengeance?'- He answered, 'The attribute of goodness is greater, and the attribute of vengeance is the less.' - 'How much more then, will the King Messiah, who endures affliction and pains for the transgressions (as it is written, 'He was wounded,'etc.), justify all

generations. This is the meaning of the word, 'And the LORD made the iniquity of us all to meet upon Him' (Isa.53:6)."

**Rabbi Eleazer Kalir (9.Century)** wrote the following Musaf Prayer:

"Our righteous Messiah has departed from us. Horror has seized us and we have no one to justify us. He has borne our transgressions and the yoke of our iniquities, and is wounded because of our transgressions. He bore our sins upon His shoulders that we may find pardon for our iniquity. We shall be healed by His wounds, at the time when the Eternal will recreate Him a new creature. Oh bring Him up from the circle of the earth, raise Him up from Seir, that we may hear Him the second time."

**Rabbi Moses, 'The Preacher'(11. Century)** wrote in his commentary on Genesis (page 660):

"From the beginning God has made a covenant with the Messiah and told Him, 'My righteous Messiah, those who are entrusted to you, their sins will bring you into a heavy yoke'. And He answered, 'I gladly accept all these agonies in order that not one of Israel should be lost.' Immediately, the Messiah accepted all agonies with love, as it is written: 'He was oppressed and he was afflicted'."

**Pesiqta (on Isa. 61:10):**

"Great oppressions were laid upon You, as it says: 'By oppression and judgement he was taken away; but who considered in his time, that he was cut off out of the land of the living, that he was stricken because of the sins of our children' (Isa.53:8), as it says:'But the LORD has laid on him the guild of us all'(Isa.53:6)."

Summarizing the issue and its resolution:

When Jesus asked His disciples "How" is it written of the Son of Man that He will suffer many things and be treated with contempt?", we must ask,

- 1) Was the question reasonable?
- 2) Was it answerable?
- 3) If the disciples didn't know, was the answer even obtainable?
- 4) Were resources available with which to find the answer?
- 5) Did others have knowledge with which to answer the question that the disciples did not?
- 6) Can we think Jesus' thoughts after Him in terms of what He was thinking about?

One of the accusations critics level at the church, whether early on or late in history is that the “church” reads back into the gospel narration the things it wants to underscore, even if they were not originally there. Is there evidence to contradict this assumption?

Let’s examine the situation and answer questions 5 and 6 first. The text in Mark 9:9 that, “As they were coming down from the mountain, He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man rose from the dead. They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant. They asked Him, saying, "*Why is it* that the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"

Peter, James and John reveal that their education and what they were taught apparently came from the Scribes. Growing up in Capernaum, they would have had access to schooling in the synagogue, but not necessarily access to the scrolls of the scripture themselves. These copies were rare and provided, by hand written copy, solely to teachers and officials of the Jewish community. What the disciples knew about the scriptures came through a second hand resource. Since the return from the Babylonian exile, the scribes were capable teachers. Their intent was not to distort the scriptures but interpret them to their students in a fashion that would help their pupils hold a steadfast faith in the God of Israel. The Markan text suggests that they taught the people, so often under foreign domination and rule, that God would bring forth a Messiah to deliver, once and for all, His people from the oppressor. In this regard, they may have described this “Anointed One” this “Son of Man” (as Daniel 7 names Him) solely in terms of His glorious revealing and glorious domination over the oppressors, establishing His rule and reign forever, delivering His people. Thus, hope was constantly instilled in the people of Israel over the centuries and the disciples of Jesus looked to Him for this fulfillment.

The text also suggests that Jesus had a much broader understanding of this term “son of man” and challenged His disciples to consider not “where it was written” but “how” (in what manner, or in what way) it was written about the suffering and contempt the “Son of Man” would suffer. If this is true, then what was He thinking of?

We know that the understanding Jesus had (as we have studied above – assuming we have thought Jesus’ thoughts after Him) was available both in the scriptures and in the understanding of the scribes in Israel. In fact, studies show that the early scribes from the time of Ezra in the Midrashim, The Targum, and The Talmud saw Messianic prophesies everywhere. As long as there was hope for an oppressed people, the oppression was bearable because of God’s promises of Messianic deliverance, replete in the Old Testament as the scribes pointed out. But there is evidence that they saw Him as a suffering deliverer as well. The rabbinic commentaries early in the first century demonstrate this, and Philip makes this understanding known to the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts chapter 8:25-35. The text bears reproducing here:

“So, when they had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, and were preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans. But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Get up and go south to the road that descends from

Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert *road*.) So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot." Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: "HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER; AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT, SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH. "IN HUMILIATION HIS JUDGMENT WAS TAKEN AWAY; WHO WILL RELATE HIS GENERATION? FOR HIS LIFE IS REMOVED FROM THE EARTH." The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please *tell me*, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?" Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him."

We also see in the New Testament, dozens of references not only to Isaiah 53 but also to other Old Testament passages attributing the terms "Son of Man", "Messiah", "Suffering Servant", "Israel", and others to Jesus. In using this term, Jesus incorporated the entire description of all that this entailed and incorporated it as well in His own being. As He descended the mountain with Peter, James and John, He must have enjoyed their struggle in answering this question. But in a more serious vein, He, since the encounter at Caesarea Philippi, was preparing them for what lay ahead, so they could understand and believe the whole truth God had revealed to His people through the centuries. As we know now, they finally got it because it is revealed in their writings and supported by the teaching of the very Scribes and Pharisees that called for the death of Jesus Himself (as well as their predecessors and successors).

Therefore, questions 1-4 above can be answered in the affirmative. The disciples were just totally unaware of the abundance of information the scriptures provided about the "Son of Man" outside of the passage in Daniel 7 and the commentary thereon. Not all the Christian era rabbinic commentators support the Messianic application of Isaiah 53 to be sure and there has been debate between the various schools of thought from that time to this. But what we do have is a consistent thread of rabbinic thought from the time of Ezra onward that sees Isaiah 53 (and other passages like Psalm 22) as clearly Messianic.

*END OF EXCURSUS*

## EXCURSUS III

### Revelation 3:10, Looking at "Testing"

The word "test" and "testing" are the same, from "πειράζω" (pay-rahd-zoh) and also translated "tempt", "tempted", "trial" or "trials." The context wherein these terms are used is very important as it is a common and general term not having within itself a specific context. The basic concept of the word comes from the mining and smelting industry where the process of treating ore brings out the fine and precious metal. It is not to damage the ore or destroy it, but to purify and reveal its value and worth. Job 23:10 give us this picture, "But He knows the way I take; *When* He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold." The Hebrew word here is "bah-chan." The English translation "test" or "tried" is unfortunate as the word means to "examine", "assay" as in metallurgy or to "determine true value."

However, the purpose and goal of the "testing" depends on who is suffering the testing and from whom, and why. This is important – again the context.

The "whom" causing the "testing", "temptation" or "trial" can be one of three entities, either God, Satan or the world. We will touch on all three and two peoples involved in undergoing this "testing". The two peoples are God's people and those who are not God's people, especially, in special instances, those who hate and rebel against God and His people.

Taking God's people first, the most common use and understanding of "testing" in the Bible is that which comes from other people as we have consistently seen in Revelation. "Persecution" is a general term we can use and this can range from ridicule to execution, disinheritance to beatings, and imprisonment to torture. All these are frequently seen in the Bible against God's people. These trials or tests are from earthly sources. In this context James says,

"Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various *trials*, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." James 1:2-4 (Bold italics mine).

Peter also reflects this very idea,

"In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various *trials*, so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;" I Peter 1:6-7

Jesus Himself said, "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have *tribulation*, but take courage; I have overcome the world." John 16:33<sup>253</sup>

The purpose of these tribulations thrust upon God's people, in these contexts, is to punish, cause recantation of one's faith, or simply destroy the person so persecuted. Bottom line, eliminate Christ and His message from off the face of the earth by eliminating all His people, and, in doing so, the entire truth of God's plan of salvation, including especially, the distasteful idea of repentance and faith in order to be assured of eternal life.

Next, Satan is seen as setting up temptations or tests against God's people, but not against those who are, like Him, opposed to the truth and to God and His Messiah. And, He does not personally inflict physical harm in these "testings" or "temptations" against God's people but rather is seen as motivating other people to do this.

For example, we have Judas who betrayed Christ because, "Satan entered into Judas who was called Iscariot, belonging to the number of the twelve." Luke 22:3. In Acts 5:3 we have Peter saying to Ananias, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back *some* of the price of the land?" And Peter notes, "Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. I Peter 5:8-9

These are not necessarily physical battles, but as Paul says, "Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the

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<sup>253</sup> Other passages reflecting this worldly persecution are: Matthew 5:10-12; Matthew 24:9, 21; Acts 14:22, 20:19; Romans 5:3; 8:17-18; II Corinthians 4:7-11, 11:23-27; Philippians 1:29; I Thessalonians 1:6; James 1:12; I Peter 4:13-16; Hebrews 11:35-38; Revelation 1:9; 2:10; 13:5-10.

powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*". Ephesians 6:11-12

The closest Satan comes to a physical presence is seen in the temptation of Jesus, and in demon possession. However, Jesus voluntarily submitted to the testing so as to experience all that man must go through. "He became like us", we are taught and was tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin."<sup>254</sup> As far as demon possession goes, we will not take time for that here.<sup>255</sup>

The point is that Satan can bring about testing or temptation, but more often than not it is through the lying voice of false prophets and teachers, or through the appeal to one's own fleshly desires as James notes in 1:13-16,

13: "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. 14: But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15: Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. 16: Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren."

But rather,

"17: Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow."

Paul concurs in I Corinthians 7:5,

"Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control."

But surely someone will ask, what about God testing Abraham? And other places where God is noted as testing someone? A fair question. Let us note first that there is nowhere in the New Testament where God is said to have tested, tempted or brought trials on even one of His people or children. The only exception is the

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<sup>254</sup> Hebrews 4:15

<sup>255</sup> See this author's work on "Satan, God and the Problem of Evil" for more on this subject.

note about Abraham being "tested" found in Hebrews 11:17. Even there, the author is reluctant to use "πειράζω" ("payrahdzoh") in the phrase, "God 'tested' Abraham" as Genesis 22 does. The reason is that the Greek word doesn't quite fit the Hebrew word used in Genesis 22.<sup>256</sup>

Unlike the Greek which has basically one word (pay-rahdz-zoh) translated several ways, the Hebrew has several words all translated by the word "test" in the English. The nuances are important in that when God is spoken of in the English Bible as "testing" someone, the intent of the Hebrew can be quite different than what we normally think. This is unfortunate.

What we think of as a "test" or "testing" is not what is normally intended when we read that God is testing someone in the Old Testament. Depending on the context, God generally does not do what we think this means to His own people just as James and Paul note.<sup>257</sup>

Both "tempt" and "test" are from the same root word in the original. The "hour of testing" will be brought upon the "world." It will be to, "test those who dwell on the earth." The phrase uses the definite article "The" before "hour of testing" indicating that the readers knew to what this was referring.

The question is of course, to what does this "hour of testing" refer and what does it mean that God will "keep" the church from it? See the commentary at 3:10.

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<sup>256</sup> See the Appendix for more on "Testing", From God or?"

## EXCURSUS IV

### TESTING, FROM GOD OR?

From a three part teaching series.

#### GOD “TESTING” US – SESSION I

##### Related questions

1. Does God do this and if so, how do we know, what does this mean exactly? And if it is from God, what is the nature of this testing, and why does he do it, (purpose)

2. Is suffering actually a “test” from God? Is it proper to assume or say that “God is testing me or you?”

We will take a few sessions on this. It’s a big subject. But first let me interpose that just because we find ourselves in a difficult position, under stress or facing a difficult challenge, does not mean that this is a test from God. In fact, it is unlikely that the circumstances of life we often think of as a testing time is a testing time from God at all. First, there is no real Biblical basis for this kind of thinking, and second, if it was a testing from God, how could we possibly know? We will see the foolishness of this kind of thinking as we study the scripture itself. The problem is that this is, again, one of those common phrases Christians use without thinking. Well meaning though they might be in using a phrase like, “God is testing you or me”, it shows an ignorance of the truth.

Normal struggles with life are not tests from God. We will look at what actually comprised a test from God, and whether God under the New Covenant for us in Christ God even does this or not. A lot of this may fall within Paul’s counsel given in II Cor. 13:5-6, 5; “Test yourselves *to see* if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you--unless indeed you fail the test? 6: But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test.”

So before we assume that God is testing us or someone else, maybe we ought to understand what this really is all about. Much of this is simply, once again, what we have been taught to believe and say. If we are in this camp, perhaps these sessions will help. Proverbs 17:28, “Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise; When he closes his lips, he is *considered* prudent.”

The first occasion where the phrase in English is used is Genesis 22:1. Now, it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." The story of Abraham's sadness in being commanded to offer Isaac's life up to God is told. The story is important but we can't deal with it right now. What God was doing is noted by the Hebrew word translated "tested". The word used for "tested" here is a common Hebrew primitive root word "nah-sah". נָסָה The word is translated in various ways depending on the context and whether the translator has had his morning coffee or not. It can be translated: "to test"; "to try" (as in "you are trying my patience"); "to prove"; "to tempt"; "to venture out" and so on.

But translations don't help us understand what this actually means. So we must go to the Hebrew characters themselves to see the picture of what this is all about and the context in which the word is used so we can begin to understand the nature of God's "testing" and what it involves, why, and to whom it is applied and why. So we journey for just a minute into the fascinating field of etymology – the origin of words. This is actually one of my pleasures, and for me it is vital to proper Biblical interpretation.

Hebrew, like many ancient eastern languages, is derived from pictographs. Each character letter has a picture or concept attached to it and as Hebrew developed, the combination of those characters became the basis of the intent and meaning of the words. Chinese is a good example of this. Chinese characters are combinations of smaller characters combined to produce a pictorial meaning. Western civilization long since abandoned this system and came to use the alphabet phonetically not pictographically. Most of the world is moving in that direction. So we have difficulty seeing the pictures in ancient eastern written script let alone in the English translations based in the western manner of written literature. In fact we don't see it at all.

"Nasah" is the predominate word translated "testing" in the Old Testament. Because this is my favorite thing in the whole world, allow me to have some fun. Here are the Hebrew letters that make up the word "nasah". (נָסָה) It reads right to left and the letters are pronounced "nun", "samek", "heh". The Heh is the pictograph for "window". Originally it looked like this: (See below) The Samek is a pictograph for "fish". It originally looked like this: (See below) The "Nun" is a pictograph for "snake" or "serpent". It originally looked like this: (See below)

By the way, Joshua was the son of \_\_\_\_\_? Nun is an Egyptian god for whom Joshua's father was named. This Egyptian god seems to be the lord of the watery chaos, or the serpent of the deep. The Phoenicians simply used the name as that of a snake or serpent and their ancient pictograph was (above). Ancient Hebrew is an adaptation of ancient Phoenician and the symbol for "nun" was the same but as time passed it became the modern form we see now.

The idea is that looking out a window and into the water, you see the way of the fish, and the way of the serpent. These represent your choices and your choice represents your heart, motive, as well as the consequence of your choice in your future. You will choose one or the other.

The window represents your future based on your choice. The snake represents evil (the temptation in the Garden for example) and the fish represents the way of good. Why, I'm not sure. But it is interesting that one of the most ancient symbols for Christianity was the fish. I really don't think that relates directly.

The point that the Hebrew conveys in the word "nasah" can be described in many ways. I think, for our purpose, it could best be described as a person standing at a fork in the road or at a crossroads. He or she can amble about indecisively but soon, certain circumstances will prompt him or her to make a choice. The choice made will reveal the true nature of the person, i.e. what is at the core of his heart and motive for what he or she does. The choice is the issue. In the simple ancient manner, the test is whether good or evil will be chosen and thus reveal the heart of the chooser. So God is simply examining the heart and motive. God never tests or tempts one to evil, ever. So if you are caught up in a battle against ungodliness, it isn't from God.

God's point in doing any "testing" of any person is to build them up, not to tear them down. God will prove to the person tested that they are irrevocably committed to Him and thus usable in His cause. They will persevere and not falter. They will never deny Him for any reason. Thus they will be a person of courage, obedience, and consistent faith in times that try men's souls. They will not be among those whom "fall away from the faith" or be apart of the "great apostasy" as the New Testament notes in many places including the words of Jesus. They will be the true believers, the real disciples, those who have taken up the cross and

followed after Him. It is likely they will never know whether what they have gone through is a test from God.

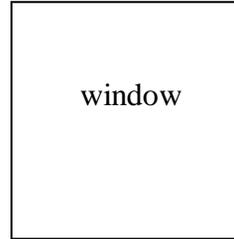
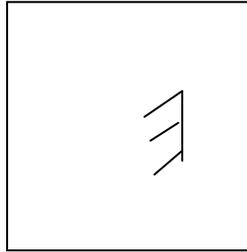
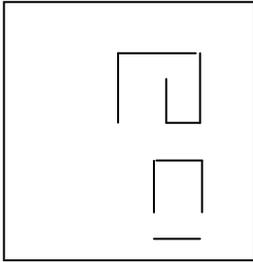
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Egyptian

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Meaning

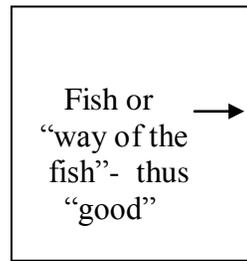
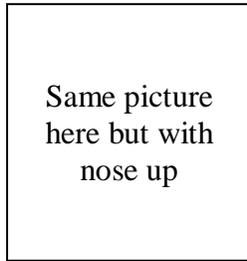
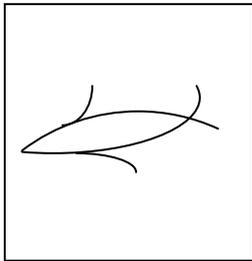
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(top is house with window  
bottom is just window)

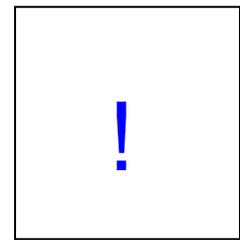
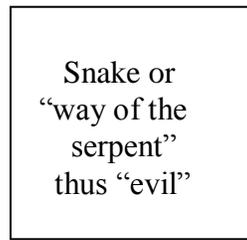
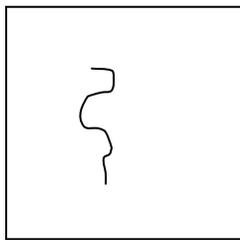
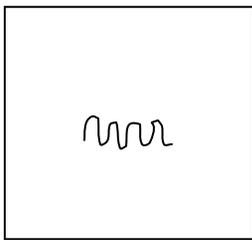
(window – sun rays  
through window or  
seeing through window)

ו



Possibly because  
the fish seeks to  
run from or  
escape the serpent

ו



"water" or the water  
god called "noon".  
A water snake or serpent

snake

"nun" at the  
end of a word  
(formal style)

## GOD “TESTING” US – SESSION II

### Related questions

1. Does God do this and if so, how do we know, what does this mean exactly? And if it is from God, what is the nature of this testing, and why does he do it, (purpose)

2. Is suffering actually a “test” from God? Is it proper to assume or say that “God is testing me or you?”

We answered some of this last week. Let’s review briefly.

Let’s remember that just because we find ourselves in a difficult position, under stress or

facing a difficult challenge, does not mean that this is a test from God. In fact, it is unlikely that the circumstances of life we often think of as a testing time is not a testing

time from God at all. First, there is no real Biblical basis for this kind of thinking, and

second, if it was a testing from God, how could we possibly know? The problem is that

this is, again, one of those common phrases Christians use without thinking. Well meaning though they might be in using a phrase like, “God is testing you or me”, it shows an ignorance of the truth. Normal struggles with life are not tests from God.

So

before we assume that God is testing us or someone else, we do need to understand what this really is all about. Much of this is simply, once again, what we have been

taught to believe and say.

David and Amy Dollin said it best last week regarding comments they have received about David’s deployment to the middle east. People told them this was a test from God. Their response was brief. First, God is not in the business of putting stumbling blocks in their way as some sort of test. Second, how could we, who cannot fully know the mind, ways and thoughts of God presume to tell others that what they are experiencing in a test from God?

They are correct.

We continued last week examining the etymology of the Hebrew word “test” or “tempt” – “Nasah”. Looking at the ancient pictographic basis we discovered that

the word describes a person looking through a window at a body of water in which live a snake and a fish. The window is a view to their future and that future is determined by the choice they make. Their choice will be either the way of the snake or the way of the fish. The snake represents “evil” and the fish “good”. Where God fits in is that He is watching to see what choice is made. The choice will reveal the true motive of the heart and mind. The only choices God is interested in are those that reflect a faith and trust in Him – or not. The snake is after the fish. It would appear that the snake is more cunning, more powerful and has a great advantage over the fish. Will the fish have the instinct to flee the snake? Or will the choice be to choose the side of the powerful and invincible snake?

I think, for our purpose, it could best be described as a person standing at a fork in the road or at a crossroads. He or she can amble about indecisively but soon, certain circumstances will prompt him or her to make a choice. The choice made will reveal the true nature of the person, i.e. what is at the core of his heart and motive for what he or she does. The choice is the issue. In the simple ancient manner, the test is whether good or evil will be chosen and thus reveal the heart of the chooser. So God is simply examining the heart and motive. God never tests or tempts one to evil, ever. So if you are caught up in a battle against ungodliness, it isn't from God.

That is what the word for “testing” or “tempting” involves. We also discussed quite thoroughly last week that to draw the conclusion or make the statement that “God is testing me or you” does not fit in with the parameters of scripture. Let's clarify further.

Let's look at more Biblical examples where this word is used. The Old Testament contains a total of eleven places where this word is used. There is another word translated “test” that has a different meaning but emphasizes the intensity with which God peers into the heart and motive. Sadly, the translators can't post the differences because our language is inadequate to represent the words accurately.

Someone last week asked about the story of Abraham and Isaac. This is the first place “Nasah” is used. It is found in Genesis 22:1. We know the story.

1. “Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 2. He said, "Take now your son, your only son,

whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you."

Now this seems on the surface a strange, if not evil and cruel thing for God to do. We will not digress into a lengthy discussion why this test makes sense even to Abraham, but it is the intent of what God is doing that is important not for God's sake - as He knew what Abraham would do (a very important point) - but for Abraham and Isaac's sake and for the sake of all who would be his descendants by faith to this day...and the reason why they had cause to believe in God.

Now this story is often used as a model of "God's testing". "Well", people say when they think God is testing them "God tested Abraham". However, let's be clear about why this account must not be used as the generic pattern of, "why my life is so screwed up". God is not in the business of "screwing up our lives". If he wanted to do that, how long would He have to wait until we are done screwing up our lives or the lives of others to get started? So, first, the Abrahamic account is unique. How many of us have ever had God speak to us in the direct manner God spoke to Abraham over a period of 80 years or so? Sometimes God simply sat down with Abraham in the personages of three men sharing bread, curds and milk discussing the upcoming birth of Abraham's first son (Abraham being over 99 years old and Sarah over 75). They also spoke about the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah and Abraham's nephew Lot and his family and so on. Second, How many of us have had God tells us that the salvation of the world depended on our faith? There are very few places where God Himself had to intervene in such a powerful and personal way for the sake of the salvation of the world. Abraham, Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob, Moses, Mary and Joseph. Some of you can add others I'm sure. But I'm not sure any of us are as critically important in God's redemptive plan as these. And of these, there was no one greater importance than Abraham. To assume that because your car battery went dead and you were caught in a state of frustration was some "test from God" is really foolish in this light isn't it?

Third, God absolutely knew what Abraham would do when faced with this challenge. Abraham had done fairly well over the last fifty years, but he had also faltered more than once. He needed to know that the God who had brought Him to this point was different than the pagan gods that surrounded him. But more so, Isaac had to know. So, Abraham was pressed to a choice. He was at the crossroads. His choice was to obey God. His choice resulted in your salvation and mine. The test was life or death, not just for Isaac but for you and me.

Fourth, God had already prepared an out for Abraham, but only if he thoroughly trusted God. (This is a wonderful and vital theme in the scripture from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22. I thought about doing it this morning, but will wait a while. It is another of those picture lessons I think you will enjoy.) And Abraham came through. (Heavenly vision)

It is one thing to say, “I believe in God”. That’s easy. Most of the world believes in “God”. But it is another thing to say this when your the promise God made to you about your children seems to have failed or after twenty-five or thirty-years of waiting and wondering. Then have your world collapse around you, your children killed, and so on...would it be so easy to say, “I believe in God”?

One of the meanings of the other word for testing is “to watch” or to “see”. We’ll look at that in a future lesson. But the testing of Abraham involved whether Abraham would choose the way of the serpent or the way of God when the stakes for the test were life and death. Isaac’s, yours and mine. After Abraham, there was really no other time God “tested” anyone in such a manner. That time was the foundation of all times, and Abraham was the only one whose faith had to be solid if you and I were to be saved and know the reason why we could trust in this God, the God of Abraham and be able to distinguish this God from all the false gods. The only reason for a test from God is that the stakes are so incredibly high. A dead car battery doesn’t qualify. Neither does anything else we likely face. But, we will look closer at more verses next week.

### GOD “TESTING” US - SESSION III.

After our discussions about whether our suffering or trying circumstances are somehow a way of God testing us, I think we can say with little doubt, that suffering, pain, hurt, or trying circumstances are not a test from God. We’ll look at why in this study using James and Peter to help us. So turn to James 1, and I Peter 1.

The problem I have is that there is so much Biblical material on this that it would take months to study it all. So I may leave you with a lot of questions. Then, even though we set aside Abraham’s test from God as a model or rational for thinking we are being tested by God, there are many other passages we would have to study

to see if what I am suggesting is actually true. Christians are fond of saying, “But what about this or that?”

It would be a grueling process to examine each objection and give it the time it deserves. So I will recommend that you thoroughly study this yourself within the context of the text and then, if you have thoughts about it, I would be happy to discuss them with you.

But in the meantime, we will look at some key passages over the next few lessons and let it go at that. We will not be in this discussion at Church in the Desert next weekend.

Now, let’s look at James chapter 1. I want to go to verses 21 and 22 for a moment to see why James says what he says.

21: Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. 22: But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.”

James’ conclusion here follows his remarks to the Christians to whom he is writing. We will see that to this point, (which we will examine in a moment), we know that these Christians are involved in convoluted thinking including a misunderstanding of God and “testing” or “temptation”. They also seem to be out of sorts when others prosper and they remain in humble circumstances. Maybe they had some sort of “name it and claim it” or “prosperity gospel” preaching then too. They were figuring that God had let them down I suppose. On top of that, some seem to have fallen into lustful practices, ungodliness and emotional outbursts all of which they were leaving at God’s doorstep. So James is basically chastising Christians who whine about their circumstances and are essentially useless to God’s work in the kingdom. They seem to whine and moan and wonder about why “God has done this to them” or excuse their failure to stand firm in the faith by claiming that God has incapacitated them in some way. Sounds like some modern Christians doesn’t it?

It is true that they are being persecuted and some of it is due to their actual faith in Christ. Most to whom James writes are Jewish believers in Christ and this has caused a strong conflict amongst the traditional Jews where they live. Yet, James is basically disgusted at their weakness and whining excuses about why their lives

are such a mess. They are double minded and James sets out to describe what a single minded person actually looks like.

James 1:1-4, 1: James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings. 2: Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various *trials*, 3: knowing that the *testing* of your faith produces endurance. 4: And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

These verses are often applied to Christians struggling through some difficult times. First, let me suggest that when the struggles we face are the same as that any non-believer these are not “testings” of our faith. The testing of one’s faith, like that of Abraham, is a specific challenge to our actual faith in God through our relationship with Jesus Christ. In other words, those without faith in Christ who suffer negative circumstance are not being tested in regards to their faith, are they? Why? Because they don’t have any! Thus, the testing of our faith really only comes when the challenge is to either choose to retain our faith in Christ and not deny Him or deny Christ and breathe more easily...that is for now. That’s testing of our faith. This is what James is talking about. Let’s see if we can support this.

The word “trials” in verse one is the actual word for “test” or “tempt”, ([πειρασμός](#)) from ([πειράζω](#)). Peter uses the same word in 1:6 in the first epistle. Please turn there now. I Peter 1:6, 6: “In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various *trials*...” ([πειρασμός](#)) from ([πειράζω](#)). Well, what do these trials consist of? The word “trials” is from the same word used when Jesus was taken up into the mountains to be tempted or tested by the Devil. As you recall, each challenge to Jesus was pinpointed on whether Jesus would maintain a consistent faith and trust in God and His word. Again, like we have already studied, the issue and challenge was to Jesus’ choices and the choices revealed the truth about Jesus’ faith, heart and desire in matters of trusting God. Jesus was not tested in the matter of which job He should hold if He ever got out of the mess he was in. Jesus was not challenged to choose what team would win the game. Thus He was not upset when His choice and prayer for His favorite team did not come to pass and thus wonder where God was in all of it.

Anyway, Peter notes the severity of this test in verse 7. 7; “so that the *proof* of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though *tested*

by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;...”

The word “tested” is not a good translation. But a good one is not possible in English. The word here is quite different than “trials” (tested) in verse 6. Actually, the word “proof” at the start of the verse and the word “tested” are the same word. (Δοκιμιον) from (δόκιμος). “Proof” is better. It actually means the process of exercising one’s faith against a challenge to it. This makes the verse much clearer.

Now James uses the exact same word sequence. In verse 2, “*trials*” is the attack on one’s faith, and “*testing*” in verse 3 is the exercise of one’s faith through the attack. 2: “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various *trials (or challenges to your Christianity)*, 3: knowing that the *testing (exercising)* of your faith produces endurance.” “Endurance” is better than “patience”. This word (ὑπομένω) means to stand or bear up under. Steadfastness, perseverance, continuing on no matter what is the idea here.

For the Jews to whom James was writing the cost of faith in and discipleship to Christ was often the loss of all family. This could include being ostracized, cut off, disowned, disinherited, imprisoned or even executed. This is true testing of our faith. It is the testing of our faith that produces patience or endurance. Not the testing of our patience that produces faith.

A true story that has always stuck with Donna and me was when we heard a testimony by the Continental Singers. While visiting underground churches in Communist Russia under Khrushchev the pastor of one church told the Americans how sorry he and his flock were for them because they had never had the opportunity to know the true strength of Christ in their lives because their faith had never been tested as theirs had. Many of their number had been arrested for being Christians, and some imprisoned and even executed. They promised to pray for the American singers.

Remember that story the next time the AC goes out and the thought crosses your mind that God is somehow testing you. James is also addressing this kind of faulty thinking.

5-8, 5: “But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6: But he must ask in

faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. 7: For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, 8: *being* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

It is the foolish thinking have been addressing for nearly nine months now that causes Christians to be double minded, unable to be constant or single minded in his devotion to God. That is why, dear friends, we studied Job and are following up with the questions related to suffering and distress. Job is one of the key “Wisdom Books” in scripture, one few delve into. I might add, that after the lengthy study in the Book of Job, not once is it ever said there or anywhere else in the Bible that God tested Job. Also, in the book, Satan is never called the “Tempter” or the “Tester”. The book is all about our responses to suffering and what they should be. It indeed challenges whether we are double minded or not.

So when James talks about the importance of wisdom, he is not talking about whether we can wisely choose between buying a Chevy or a Toyota, or whether we should buy or rent a house. It’s a little more intense than that. The wisdom the Bible talks about is grasping what God is wanting us to understand regarding what His purpose is in our lives in the midst of trial. God wants to accomplish something in our heart and mind. This is much more of a priority than our financial portfolio, investment choices, sexual temptations and so on. The understanding of the heart as it begins to grasp God’s point of view becomes the source for our choices and the reason why we live our lives the way we do. Actual persecution because of our faith in Christ will do more for our spiritual growth and strength, perseverance and endurance than anything else. But the persecution itself isn’t from God.

Unfortunately, for us in this country, we have yet to face such a persecution as did the Christians living under the brutality of Communism, or even those of James’ day. Therefore we do not have a very good idea of how strong our faith is of its ability to endure, do we. So the persecuted pray for us!

James continues,

1:12-13, 12: Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him. 13: Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.”

First, the word “approved” in verse 12 is the same exact word as “testing” in verse 2.

Now you see the point about translation I made. In 13, the word “tempt” and “test” are the exact same word. The translators changed the English here to reflect what they thought would be a better understanding since the context is evil. We think of temptation as associated with the tempter. So we understand the need to be cautious. But the words are identical. So Christians simply assume that God is “testing” them when there is some objectionable aspect to whatever they are experiencing. Not true, at all.

This was one excuse employed by those to whom James was writing to justify their sin and corruption. Phrases like, “The Devil made me do it”, or “I am being tested by God” were used to explain why some of these Christians couldn’t rise above their ungodliness. Paul said it this way to the Galatians 6:7-8, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. 8: For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”

So for those of you who are the “woe is me” people stuck in ungodliness wondering where God is in all of it, maybe Paul and James, utilizing the sword of the word of God, the actual truth, have struck you where you really are. Excuses are out. God expects holiness and not excuses. Any ungodliness you are engaged in is not some test from God. God is not in your ungodliness at all. If He were, you would not be continuing in it, would you?

So James makes it clear. 14: “But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15: Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. 16: Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. 17: Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.”

In other words, God did not bring this into your life. He only brings goodness. But it is blocked out by persistent and willful wallowing in the muck. Here is what God has actually done,

18: “In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures. 19: *This* you know, my

beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak *and* slow to anger; 20: for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. 21: Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. 22: But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.”

This is where we began. James’ point here is that his readers are not to assume that they have fulfilled God’s will by going to church and listening to the pastor. This is a self delusion. God’s people are to do God’s work in their environment, and all the excuses they can muster and challenges they face are not God’s way of “testing” them or preventing them from persevering. God is not trying to impede His work. It is we who are the impediments, not God.

Finally, when comes then time that your faith is really tested you will know it. But the test will not be from God. But rest assured He greatly desires you to stand firm and bear the testimony of Christ to any who would seek to destroy His name. Note how Peter closes his first epistle,

5:8-12, 8: “Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 9: But resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. 10: After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you. 11: To Him *be* dominion forever and ever. Amen. 12: Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard *him*), I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!”

**OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF "SEVENS"**  
**AND STRUCTURE OF THE SEVEN SEALED SCROLL**

I. Introduction to the vision. Prologue, Greetings and Doxology and vision of Jesus among the seven lampstands. 1:1-20

II. The seven letters to the seven churches 2:1-3:22

1. Ephesus 2:1-7
2. Smyrna 2:8-11
3. Pergamum 2:12-17
4. Thyatira 2:18-29
5. Sardis 3:1-6
6. Philadelphia 3:7-13
7. Laodicea 3:14-22

III. Interlude: The heavenly scenes, A. God in the heavenly temple. B. The Lamb and the Scroll. 4:1-5:10 Anticipation: Praises to the Lamb for power and dominion forever 5:11-14

IV. The seven sealed scroll 6:1ff.

1. White horseman – False Christs. (Possible worldwide proclamation of gospel, but less likely) 6:1-2
2. Red horseman – War 6:3-4
3. Black Horseman – Famine 6:5-6
4. Pale horseman – death 6:7-8
5. Martyrs – persecution and slaying of God's faithful. 6:9-11
6. Heavenly signs and great earthquake. 6:12-17

Anticipation: Recognition of God and Christ appearing in judgment. 6:16-17

V. Interlude: A. Sealing of the 144,000. B. Great multitude of slain faithful. 7:1-14 C.

Anticipation: The future blessings under the rule of God and the Lamb. 7:15-17 D. Breaking of the seventh seal and silence in heaven. 8:1 E. Angelic casting of fiery bowl to earth 8:2-8:5

7. Seven angelic trumpet plagues 8:6-16:21
  1. Fiery hail mixed with blood destroying 1/3 of the earth, trees and grass. 8:7
  2. Great burning mountain thrown into the sea destroying 1/3 of the oceans, sea life and shipping. 8:8-9
  3. Great star (Wormwood) falls on 1/3 fresh water turning it bitter and many die from drinking it. 8:10-11
  4. Heavenly bodies struck, 1/3 of sun, moon and stars are darkened.

Announcement of three woes to follow. 8:12-13

5. The first "woe." "Locust" plague released from "bottomless pit" and ravage people with pain who have not the mark of God on their foreheads. 9:1-12
6. The second "woe." Great army from east (200,000,000) kills 1/3 of all who do not have the mark of God on their foreheads. 9:13-21

VI. Interlude: A. The angel and the little scroll. B. The two witnesses. C. The Beast from the Abyss. 10:1-11:14

7. Loud voices and **a major interlude** before the final "woe" (seven bowls of God's wrath) A. Announcement in anticipation of the rule of God and Christ. B. Sign of the woman. C. Sign of the dragon. D. War in heaven. E. The Beast from the sea. F. The Beast from the earth G. The Lamb and the 144,000 on Mount Zion. H. Three angelic announcements in mid-heaven. I. The reaping. J. Song of the victors. K. Seven angels prepare the final outpouring of God's wrath. 11:15-15:8

The seven bowls of God's wrath poured out. 16:1-17:13

1. Malignant sores 16:1-2
2. The sea turned to blood, all sea life dies. 16:3
3. All fresh water turned to blood. 16:4-7
4. The Sun scorches men with fire 16:8-9
5. Torment on the throne and kingdom of the Beast and those therein. 16:10-11
6. The Euphrates dried up and preparation for Armageddon. 16:12-14

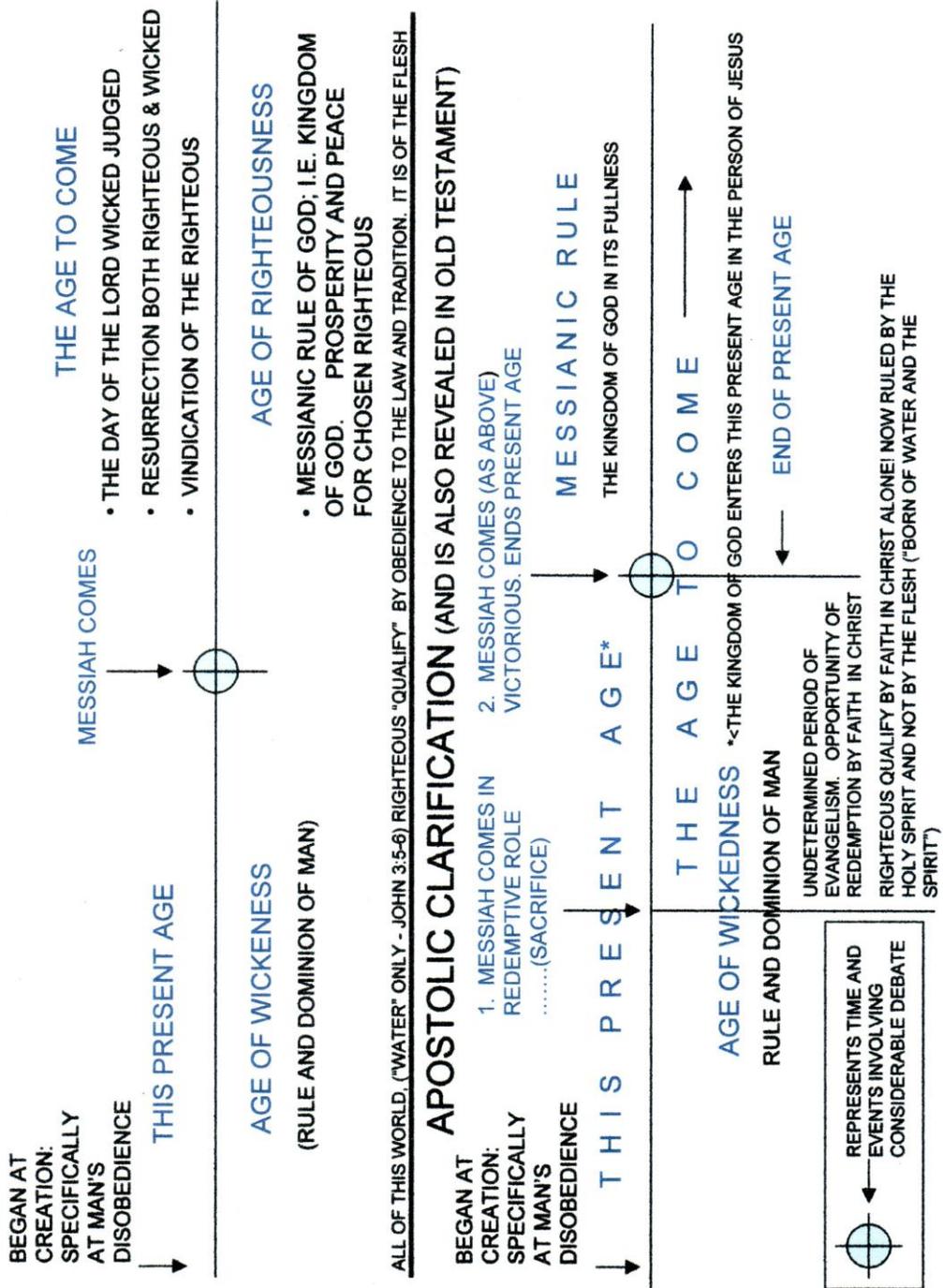
Anticipation: Christ's announcement of His soon appearing. 16:15

7. Massive earthquake and judgment on Babylon. 16:17-17:13

VII. A. Victory shouts and songs. B. Marriage Supper of The Lamb. C. Return and victory parade of Christ. D. Judgment of the Beast and False prophet. E. Millennial reign, Satan imprisoned. F. Satan released and then thrown into the Lake of fire forever. G. Great White throne judgment. H. The new heaven and new earth. I. The New Jerusalem. J. The river and tree of life [Paradise (Eden) restored]. K. Promise by Christ to come quickly. L. Conclusion of the book. 17:14-22:21

# Jewish Eschatology Chart

## JEWISH ESCHATOLOGY



## THE GREAT HARLOT

[Revelation, Chapters 14 (verse 8), 17-18]

## BABYLON THE GREAT

Woman in purple and scarlet with a gold cup and riding the  
beast.



The "great city" (18:10) Throne of the beast (16:10)

Her name: "Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and of  
the abominations of the earth." (17:5)



Commits immorality with the nations and their kings. The  
essence of idolatry: (2:14, 2:20, 14:8, 17:2-4, 18:3, 18:9, 19:2)

### SITS ON:

1. "Scarlet beast" →
  2. "Many waters" →
  3. "Seven mountains" →
- All  
synonymous

1. "The beast of the sea (& abyss) (11:7, 13:1, 17:8) End time  
empire of the "Antichrist" having seven heads and ten horns.
2. "People, multitudes, nations, tongues" (17:15)
3. Seven kings (or kingdoms), five have fallen, one is, one yet  
to come and the beast is the eighth. (17:9-11)

She is the demonically inspired and empowered spiritual  
religious seductress of the ages from the beginning of time  
whose end time impact is the basis for a political system that  
affects the earth and stands vehemently against God and His  
Christ while at the same time countering God and His  
Christ including the resurrection. Then convincing much of  
the world through amazing signs and wonders that this is the  
real Messiah, many succumb to worship the beast and its  
image and receive its mark. (Revelation 13-18)

There has never been such a vast political system empowered  
and driven by a spiritual/religious power to this day with the  
possible exception of Islam. Then, in this light, on the holy  
place of the temple in Jerusalem is the Mosque of Omar, "The  
Dome of the Rock" sitting there for nearly 1,400 years. With  
the image of the beast (the abomination of desolation) set up  
in the holy place (Matthew 24:15), the immorality of idolatry  
will become the religious focus of much of the world and the  
wealth and power of this system will seduce the kings thereof.

The ten horns (kings, kingdoms) are rulers/nations, but not like  
the seven above. These ten comprise the beast's empire (a  
compilation of all the Biblical ancient empires into one final  
monster), but it (they) rebel against both the beast (antichrist)  
and the harlot (religion of the false prophet). (17:16-17)

The preponderance of evidence in Revelation points to  
Jerusalem as the "great city", "throne of the beast", "Babylon  
the Great" and "The Great Harlot" in spite of those who would  
try and see her as Rome. (See commentary for details  
supporting this hypothesis)

There is no possible way to set these kingdoms into a historical  
framework because one is yet to come and the beast's kingdom  
is an eighth and because nothing easily fits in without  
manipulation of history or the facts. Plus, in apocalyptic  
literature and Jewish symbolism, the number seven represents  
not just a sequence of events ending in rest and fulfillment, but  
an unknown time of a series of events until they are completed  
- and end in rest and fulfillment.

## **THE IDENTITY OF A CHILD FROM A JEWISH MOTHER**

I. From: "Ask the Rabbi", Jewishanswers.org.

*Judaism defines as a Jew any person born to a Jewish Mother. The status of the Father is not considered, which is very humbling to the Fathers. But how, when Judaism being a Patriarchal society, in which the men are the head of the family, and the Father's name and inheritance – money pass on to the children can this be managed? The grown child will be recognized by his Father's name and family and not the Mother's. If the child's father and Family is non – Jew, how can the child be separated from that and be declared one of Jewish community?*

Hi,

Thanks for asking this question. A person's status as a Jew is completely dependant on the mother. A person could convert, but there is no such thing as "half Jewish." I understand that this could be humbling for the father, but it should not be. As you stated, the child receives other things from the father.

The bottom line is that this issue defines one of the most interesting questions about Jewish belief in our modern society. That question is, "How are men and women different?" I am not going to go into that question now because that is not what you asked. However, suffice it to say that just like men are physically different they are spiritually different as well. The spiritual reality of a woman in many ways allows her to connect to the Highest Power easier than a man. Men need reminders to stay on focus, while women are more naturally good hearted. (This is a generalization, but even the statistics show that women commit violent crimes at a much lower rate than men do.) There are many instances where aspects of the Divine are mentioned using the feminine, not the masculine, gender. Hebrew is a gender based language, so words are either masculine or feminine.

The point is that men have many positive traits as spiritual beings, but the spiritual connection to a person's roots goes through the person who is closest to that connection, the mother. Men, according to Jewish law, have more obligations than women do. Why? The same reason. Men need more reminders. We need to be constantly reminded to do the right thing.

One more thing. A child is the compilation of the mother and the father. Both parents have the ability to educate and give to a child. There is a three way partnership there; the mother, the father, and G-d.

Finally, the last part of your question was of patrilineal heritage. If a child's mother is Jewish and their father is not, they are Jewish. There is no way for that child to ever convert out of Judaism. That is impossible. If a person is a Jew, they die a Jew. Can they be part of their father's heritage? A person is always free to choose their path of spiritual practice. The Jewish tradition teaches us that our Torah is a guide book for living. Combining that with another tradition does not complement that guide book. It simply detracts from its power. Judaism teaches us that it is not spiritually healthy for a Jew to marry a non-Jew. Such a union is not supported within Torah law. If one chooses to be in that situation we can only hope and pray that the children do not

throw away their Jewish heritage. Their parents are the ones who are supposed to infuse that heritage in their children. Refusing to make that critical decision in their lives often leads the children to have either no religious life or little spiritual development as they get older.

Be Well,  
Rabbi Gershon Litt

## II. Who is a Jew?

From: Judaism 101 online, "who is a Jew"

A Jew is any person whose mother was a Jew or any person who has gone through the formal process of conversion to Judaism.

It is important to note that being a Jew has nothing to do with what you believe or what you do. A person born to non-Jewish parents who has not undergone the formal process of conversion but who believes everything that Orthodox Jews believe and observes every law and custom of Judaism is still a non-Jew, even in the eyes of the most liberal movements of Judaism, and a person born to a Jewish mother who is an atheist and never practices the Jewish religion is still a Jew, even in the eyes of the ultra-Orthodox. In this sense, Judaism is more like a nationality than like other religions, and being Jewish is like a citizenship. See What Is Judaism?

This has been established since the earliest days of Judaism. In the Torah, you will see many references to "the strangers who dwell among you" or "righteous proselytes" or "righteous strangers." These are various classifications of non-Jews who lived among Jews, adopting some or all of the beliefs and practices of Judaism without going through the formal process of conversion and becoming Jews. Once a person has converted to Judaism, he is not referred to by any special term; he is as much a Jew as anyone born Jewish.

Although all Jewish movements agree on these general principles, there are occasional disputes as to whether a particular individual is a Jew. Most of these disputes fall into one of two categories.

First, traditional Judaism maintains that a person is a Jew if his mother is a Jew, regardless of who his father is. The liberal movements, on the other hand, allow Jewish status to pass through the mother or the father if the child identifies as Jewish. For example, according to the Reform movement, former Phillies catcher Mike Lieberthal, who had a Jewish father but chooses not to be identified as Jewish, would not be Jewish according to the Reform movement, but former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, who had a Jewish father and adopted a Jewish identity as an adult, would be considered Jewish. See their position here). On the other hand, the child of a Christian father and a Jewish mother who does not publicly identify himself as Jewish would be considered Jewish according to the Orthodox movement, but not according to the Reform movement. The matter becomes even more complicated, because the status of that interfaith child's children also comes into question.

Second, the more traditional movements do not always acknowledge the validity of conversions by the more liberal movements. A more liberal movement might not follow the procedures required by the more traditional movement, thereby invalidating the conversion. For example, Orthodoxy requires acceptance of the yoke of Torah (observance of Jewish law as Orthodoxy understands it), while other movements would not teach the same laws that Orthodoxy does and might not require observance. The Conservative movement requires circumcision and immersion in a mikvah, which is not always required in Reform conversions.

## II. About Matrilineal Descent

The Torah does not specifically state anywhere that matrilineal descent should be used; however, there are several passages in the Torah where it is understood that the child of a Jewish woman and a non-Jewish man is a Jew, and several other passages where it is understood that the child of a non-Jewish woman and a Jewish man is not a Jew.

In Deuteronomy 7:1-5, in expressing the prohibition against intermarriage, G-d says "he [i.e., the non-Jewish male spouse] will cause your child to turn away from Me and they will worship the gods of others." No such concern is expressed about the child of a non-Jewish female spouse. From this, we infer that the child of a non-Jewish male spouse is Jewish (and can therefore be turned away from Judaism), but the child of a non-Jewish female spouse is not Jewish (and therefore turning away is not an issue).

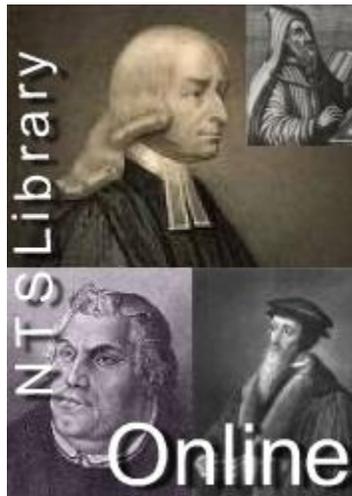
Leviticus 24:10 speaks of the son of an Israelite woman and an Egyptian man as being "among the community of Israel" (i.e., a Jew).

On the other hand, in Ezra 10:2-3, the Jews returning to Israel vowed to put aside their non-Jewish wives and the children born to those wives. They could not have put aside those children if those children were Jews.

Several people have written to me asking about King David: was he a Jew, given that one of his female ancestors, Ruth, was not a Jew? This conclusion is based on two faulty premises: first of all, Ruth was a Jew, and even if she wasn't, that would not affect David's status as a Jew. Ruth converted to Judaism before marrying Boaz and bearing Obed. See Ruth 1:16, where Ruth states her intention to convert. After Ruth converted, she was a Jew, and all of her children born after the conversion were Jewish as well. But even if Ruth were not Jewish at the time Obed was born, that would not affect King David's status as a Jew, because Ruth is an ancestor of David's father, not of David's mother, and David's Jewish status is determined by his mother.

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Scriptural references: Deuteronomy 7:1-4; Exodus 34:16; Leviticus 24:10; Joshua 23:12-13; Judges 3:6-7; Ruth 1:16; Ezra 9:2, 10:2-3; Nehemiah 13:23-27.

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### The Rapture of the Church

by **Michael Cordner**

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## Introduction

In interpreting the prophetic teachings of the Scriptures, it is almost universally acknowledged by the Evangelical Church that at the close of this age, there will be a period of great tribulation, at which time the Church on earth will be raptured (or taken to heaven without suffering physical death) to be forever with the Lord, joining all those saints who have died in previous times. For almost 150 years now, the Church has debated just **when** the rapture will take place, before or after the Great Tribulation. In the present day Evangelical Church, the most commonly held belief is in a Pre-Tribulation rapture; however, very few Christians know anything of the history and background of this doctrine or of the foundation of the Post-Tribulation viewpoint.

It is the purpose of this paper to very briefly present something of this missing information and to compare and comment on the evidence. Thus, it is hoped to afford the reader an opportunity to consider the almost totally ignored "other side" of this issue. If the Pre-Tribulation view is correct, then the Great Tribulation is purely of academic interest to the Christian, and the whole issue is of little consequence. If, however, the Post-Tribulation view is correct, then the issue becomes of vital importance, as it means the Church has yet to enter the most extensive period of intense persecution and tribulation in its entire history. If the Church is going to face the onslaught of the Antichrist, and an all-out attempt to utterly destroy true Christianity, then we must be prepared! The Post-Tribulationist can afford to be wrong, but not the Pre-Tribulationist! His conscience should demand that he be very sure of his view.

## HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

Pre-Tribulationism was unknown to the early Church; in fact, no one has been able to show that this particular doctrine was held by any of the church Fathers or Biblical scholars before the early nineteenth century. It apparently originated at this time during a great revival of interest in Biblical prophecy. In 1830, a young Scottish woman named Margaret McDonald claimed to have received a "revelation" that Christians would be raptured before the Great Tribulation. Shortly after this, the idea spread to London where it aroused much interest. In further "revelations" during this period, dates for the rapture were variously fixed between 1835 and 1847!

Pre-Tribulationism was first taught publicly at a series of prophetic meetings in Powerscourt House, Ireland. Here Plymouth Brethren organizer John Darby took hold of the idea and made it an essential element of his teachings, giving rise to what is now known as Darbyism, or Dispensationalism. (For a full account see "The

Unbelievable Pre-Trib Origin" by Dave MacPherson.) However, not all of the Brethren accepted this teaching. It was rejected and opposed by such well known members as George Mueller and Samuel P. Tregelles (both of whom broke with the Brethren movement because of it). Among other men who opposed this "novel two-phased-second coming" teaching as being un-Scriptural was the Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon. In spite of the opposition of such men, this doctrine crossed denominational lines to spread throughout England. The greatest growth of this teaching, however, has been in the twentieth century mainly through the Modern Dispensational teachings of the Scofield Reference Bible.

The reader may be interested to know where some of the well known and influential church leaders and theologians have stood on this issue. As previously stated, in examining the teachings and writings from the first 1900 years of Christianity, we can find no Pre-Tribulation doctrine, or interpretation of the Scriptures! Consider for a moment some of the people of whom we are speaking: Polycarp, Barnabas, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Charles and John Wesley, Matthew Henry, William Tyndale, John Wycliffe, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, John Knox, and Charles Finney.

In more recent and present times, a few of the men who have rejected Pre-Tribulationism include: George Mueller, Samuel P. Tregelles, Charles Spurgeon, William Booth, G. Campbell Morgan, W.E. Blackstone (who changed from a leading Pre-Tribulation proponent), H.H. Halley, A.B. Simpson, C.T. Studd, Leon Morris, Oswald J. Smith, Francis Schaeffer, Peter Marshall, J.B. Phillips, A.W. Pink, Paul S. Rees. and C.S. Lovett.

Some of the well known and influential Pre-Tribulationists include: J.N. Darby, E.S. English, H.A. Ironside, J.D. Pentecost, J.R. Rice, C.I. Scofield, H.C. Thiessen. R.A. Torrey, and J.F. Walvoord.

While such a list does not, of course, prove or disprove any doctrine, it does illustrate that Pre-Tribulationism is a new doctrine, unknown by the church until the last century, and that this doctrine has not had universal acceptance.

## THE TEACHINGS OF SCRIPTURE

The most reliable way to learn of the prophetic truths concerning the end of this age is to study the "straight" teachings of the Bible--completely unrationalized by the interpretations, reference notes, and additions of men. Such a study will reveal the following points:

(1) Christians will go through the Great Tribulation:

In the Olivet Discourse, given in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21, Jesus presents to us a very simple, clear, and detailed account of what is going to happen in the final times. He tells the believers (the 'elect') who will be living in those times that they will go through the Tribulation, and proceeds to give them instructions for it (e.g. Matthew 24:9-26). We are told, in fact, that for the sake of the 'elect', the days of the Tribulation will be cut short (e.g., Matthew 24:22). Pre-Tribulationists do great violence to the meaning of the word 'elect' in this passage of Scripture to make it fit their doctrine. They claim that the 'elect' here refers to a Jewish remnant that will be saved during the Tribulation--a meaning that is not given (or claimed for) any of the other usages of the word in the New Testament, where in reference to the church, it is accepted without question as meaning the members of the body of Christ without distinction. This special interpretation of 'elect' is clearly against the Biblical teaching of such passages as Romans 10:12;

*"For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek (i.e., Gentile): for the same lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him. "*

and Galatians 3:18;

*"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. "*

See also Romans 2:28, 29, and Colossians 3:11.

In Revelation, we also read of the saints who go through the Great Tribulation:

*"And I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the word of God, and which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads or on their hands." Rev. 20:4 "And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus." Rev. 17:6*

See also Rev. 7:9-14 .(2) Jesus describes only one 'rapture' and tells us when it will be.

In the Olivet Discourse, only one rapture is described and Jesus tells us clearly when this will take place:

*"Immediately after the tribulation of those days . . . He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds" (or "the uttermost parts of the earth").* Matt. 24:29-31, also Mark 13:24-27.

This is very clearly the one and only rapture described during the entire discourse. A Pre-Tribulation rapture is notably absent. In reading through the three Gospel accounts of the Olivet Discourse, **with all its explanation and detail** (Matt. 24:17-20, 23, 24, for example), **it is surely unbelievable that Jesus would omit any reference whatsoever to such a momentous event as the removal of His entire Church from the face of the earth!** Furthermore, Jesus made a clear statement during His discourse that precludes the possibility that He omitted any item of major importance. In Mark 13:23, He says;

*"But take ye heed: behold I have foretold you **all things**;"* (or as the New American Standard Bible translates it: *"...I have told you **everything** in advance."*)

Do we not imply then that our Lord was lying if we insist on an extra rapture of which He made absolutely no mention?

(3) Paul also tells us when the rapture will take place.

The teachings of the apostle Paul are in perfect accord with those of Jesus concerning the timing of the rapture. In I Corinthians 15:52, we read that we will be translated

*"in the twinkling of an eye"* and that this will take place *"at the last trump"* .

The book of Revelation tells us there will be seven trumpets sounded, and it can be clearly seen that the seventh (or **last**) is **after** the Tribulation. (Note the "great sound of a trumpet" announcing the Post Tribulation rapture of Matt. 24:31, and also referred to in describing the rapture in I Thessalonians 4:16-18).

In II Thes. 2:1-4, Paul talks again about the rapture ("our gathering together unto Him") and says:

*"Let no man deceive you by any means: that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition ."* II Thes. 1:3(4) Summary of passages that specifically give the timing of the rapture.

The translation of the living saints (the rapture) is mentioned categorically only six times in the New Testament. The timing of the rapture is given in four of these passages, namely:

Matthew 24:29-31 - ("immediately **after** the Tribulation")

Mark 13:24-27 - ("**after** that Tribulation")

I Corinthians 15:51-52 - ("at the **last** trump")

II Thessalonians 2:1-3 - ("shall not come **until** the man of sin is revealed")

The other two passages do not describe any timing: I Thessalonians 4:14-17 and John 14:1-4.

(5) Raptured saints will include martyrs from the Tribulation.

The Bible tells us that there will be two resurrections; the first resurrection is of the just unto life, and the second resurrection is of the unjust unto damnation (John 5:28, 29; Luke 14:14; Acts 25:14). We learn from I Cor. 15:51, 52, and I Thessalonians 4:16, 17 that the first resurrection and the rapture occur together when the dead in Christ shall be raised, given incorruptible bodies and translated into the clouds to meet the Lord, along with those who are alive in Christ. Consider now Revelation 20:4-6, where the apostle John tells us that those who are raised at the first resurrection will reign with Christ for 1000 years, and they will **include** those saints beheaded during the Tribulation (for not worshiping the beast, or receiving his mark). Note this is clearly said to be the **first** resurrection (so there can be no preceding ones) and it **includes** those who were martyred during the Tribulation.

Very clearly then, if the first resurrection and the rapture occur simultaneously, and includes martyrs from the Tribulation, then the rapture/first resurrection must take place **after** the Great Tribulation! (George Mueller would ask in regards to the rapture, "Can there be any resurrection before the first one; and can there be another trump after this last one?" If not, then obviously, the rapture has been pinpointed in time.)

The Pre-Tribulation position on this matter is very unconvincing, putting one resurrection of the just before the Tribulation (to allow for a Pre-Tribulation rapture), then another one after the Tribulation (to account for Matt. 24:29-31 and Rev. 20:4, 5), and then calling them **both** the "first resurrection"! (To comply with Rev. 20:5b) This explanation can be seen in the Scofield Reference Bible notes on I Cor. 15:52, and completely ignores the fact that when the Scriptures refer to the "first resurrection", it always uses the singular form, not the plural.

## AN EXAMINATION OF THE PRE-TRIBULATION VIEW

The Bible unmistakably states there will be a rapture after the Tribulation. This fact is not disputed. A serious problem arises, however, when one looks for any passage of Scripture that describes a rapture and unmistakably places it **before** the Tribulation. There are none to be found. This fact is also beyond dispute. The honest inquirer will quickly find that the Pre-Tribulation case depends entirely on **inference**. All the Scriptural passages used by Pre-Tribulationists to "prove" their case have to be interpreted to **infer** a Pre-Tribulation rapture--none of them positively describe such a rapture. (John Walvoord said on p. 148 of the first printing of "The Rapture Question" that Pre-Tribulationism is **not** "an explicit teaching of Scripture", a devastating admission for a leading Pre-Tribulation teacher! Later editions delete this admission!)

**Let us briefly examine some of the "proof texts" and main points that form the foundation of the Pre-Tribulation case.**

(1) In Revelation 3:10, Jesus says that:

*"Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."*

There is nothing in the language of this passage that demands we believe that we will be kept from the hour of trial by bodily removal, or a rapture. This is indicated by the fact that the same Greek words for "keep thee from" are used by Jesus in John 17:15 when praying for His disciples, that God would "keep them from" evil. The Lord was not praying that we be removed from the world (in fact, He prayed specifically that we **not** be removed), but that we be kept from the power of evil (while living in its presence). See also Galatians 1:4. The same idea is expressed in the Lord's Prayer when we pray "deliver us from evil" in Matt. 6:13. (The Greek is a little different here, meaning literally "rescue us from evil".) In praying this, we do not ask to be physically removed from evil (as world dwellers we can't be), but we ask for power to live **through** it! The Bible abounds in proof that we can trust our wonderful God for **deliverance through any** tribulation. (Read Psalm 91, also Isaiah 43:2, Daniel 3:3-29, and 6:16-23)

(2) In Luke 21:36, we read:

*"Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be counted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man."*

Here we must ask to what does the phrase "all these things" apply. Let us examine this verse in context. In verses 25-28, Jesus speaks of the signs immediately preceding His second coming in glory. Men at this time will be filled with fear and distress over "the things which are coming on the earth" (verse 26). The context here makes it clear that this fear is caused by the expectation of God's divine judgement, "for the powers of heaven shall be shaken". The second coming of Christ, when He returns in glory, will be accompanied by judgment and punishment and restitution (I Thessalonians 1:7-10; Acts 3:20, 21). This, however, is not to be feared by the Church, for to us He has given the encouragement, "Now when these things begin to take place, look up and lift your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh" (verse 28). "The things to come" then clearly describe the events associated with the return of our Lord in glory, so feared by men, and **not** to the Tribulation.(3) In I Thessalonians, we read:

*"... even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come" (1:10) "For God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ" (5:9)*

Again, these passages say nothing about a rapture, only that the Church will not be subject to God's wrath. The wrath of God does **not** refer to the Tribulation (which is the sufferings resulting from the wrath of the ungodly against each other and against the true Church), but refers to the final judgment of God upon the wicked. In Romans 2:5, we read of:

*"... the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."*

In Matthew 24:29-30, we read of the great heavenly signs that take place just **after** the Tribulation that precede the glorious second coming of Christ. In Revelation 6:13-17, we read again of these signs and the terrible fear of the ungodly who want to hide --

*"... from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"*

The unconverted will not be ready for this day of wrath and judgment. Only those who have obtained "salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ".

(4) Another commonly quoted "proof" text considered to be referring to a secret Pre-Tribulation rapture is Matt. 24:40-41:

*"Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken and the other left."*

This passage says nothing about a rapture, or who will be taken. The Bible, however, does not leave us in darkness as to what is going on here, Jesus gives us an **exact** meaning. In Matt.13:24-30, He gave the parable of the wheat and the tares (or weeds), and in verses 36-42, He gave the interpretation.

In this parable, starting with verse 24, we read that the Kingdom of God is likened to a man who sowed good seed in his field; and when he slept, an enemy came and planted tares (or weeds) among the good seed (or wheat), so that both weeds and wheat sprang up together. The servants of the householder asked him where the tares had come from, and he replied that an enemy had done this. The servants then asked if they should not gather up the tares, but the householder said to leave them, lest the wheat be rooted up with them. They were both to be left until the harvest time when the reapers would first gather the tares, to be tied into bundles for burning, and then the wheat would be gathered into the barn.

In His interpretation of this parable, starting in verse 37, Jesus says:

*"He that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; and the reapers are the angels." (verses 37-39)*

We see that Christians and non-Christians will live alongside one another in the present age until the end of the world, when the tares are gathered and burned.

*"As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be at the end of this world. 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." (verses 40-42)*

Let us go back to verse 30 in the parable for a moment, and see how it re-reads now that we have the key.

*"Let both (the saved and the unsaved) grow together until the harvest (at the end of this world) and in the time of harvest I (Jesus) will say to the reapers (the angels), Gather ye together **first** the tares (the children of the wicked one, or the unsaved) and bind them in bundles to burn them (in the furnace of fire where there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth): but gather the wheat (the children of the kingdom or the saved) into my barn."*

Further on, in verse 49, we read, by way of summary:

*"So shall it be at the end of the age; the angels shall come forth and **take the wicked from among the righteous.**"* (NAS) Jesus makes it very plain--**first** the unsaved will be gathered, **then** the saved!

The Pre-Tribulation position on this point simply refutes the words of Jesus. In the Scofield Reference Bible notes on verse 24, we read: "The parable of the wheat and tares is not a description of the world, but of that which professes to be the kingdom"; and then in the notes on verse 30, "At the end of this age the tares are set apart for burning, but first the wheat is gathered into the barn." However, Jesus says, "The field **is** the world" (verse 38) and "**So** shall it be in the end of the world" (verse 40); also, "Gather ye together **first** the tares" (verse 30).(5) Pre-Tribulationists also use the Old Testament to "prove" their case by the presentation of certain analogies. Special significance is placed on the translation of Enoch before the judgment of the Flood and the deliverance of Lot before the destruction of Sodom. Both are said to be "types of the Church" raptured to heaven without dying before the Tribulation. Noah who remained through the flood is said to be a "type of Israel" in the Tribulation. Why Noah would not make just as good a "type of the Church" being preserved through the Tribulation is not explained. Why could we not apply the "type of the Church" label to the Israelites that were wonderfully preserved through the plagues of Egypt, or to the three Hebrews who were preserved through Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace?

(6) Concerning the imminency of His return, Pre-Tribulationists believe the Bible teaches that the Lord could come at any moment, and could have done so at any point in Church history. This, in itself, is considered sufficient reason by many for holding to the Pre-Tribulation view. A great deal can be said on this point--we will just look at it briefly.

The rapture was not considered to be imminent in the sense of "any moment" by the apostles. Paul expected martyrdom, not rapture (II Timothy 4:6-8). He also said specifically that the rapture was **not** imminent (II Thessalonians 2:1-2). Peter knew that he would grow old and die (Jesus told him in John 21:18-19). All the apostles knew that the gospel must **first** be preached to every nation--to the uttermost parts of the earth. (Nearly 2000 years later, this still hasn't been done!)

Jesus Himself did not teach He was coming back at any moment. The parables of the Virgins and of the Talents in Matthew 25 show how we are to use the intervening time before the return of Christ. Verse 5 tells us the "bridegroom tarried". In verse 19, we read, "**After a long time**, the lord of those servants cometh."

Jesus also gave us signs and conditions that He said must come to pass before the Tribulation. The conditions of Matthew 24:15-21; Mark 13:10, 14-19, most certainly

remain to be fulfilled. Paul likewise taught that the apostasy and the Antichrist **must** take place **before** the rapture (II Thessalonians 2:1-3). Jesus tells us that **when** we see all these things come to pass, that the end is near. (Matthew 24:32-33; Mark 13:28-30; Luke 21:28, 31)

(7) Another claim made by Pre-Tribulationists is that the thought of an imminent, any moment rapture is an incentive for holy living; take away the Pre-Tribulation rapture, and you have removed this incentive, and Christians would find great difficulty in leading holy lives. The late Dr. M.R. DeHaan, popular radio Bible teacher for many years, made the following comment on radio, and also in his booklet "This Same Jesus" (Nov. 1962): "To place anything, any event, before our Lord's return is a terrible sin which will be severely judged. To state that anything must still happen before our Lord could come back is to destroy the imminency and power of the second coming; it takes away the incentive for holiness, for service, and for patience..."

However, piety that is motivated by anything other than supreme love of God and a singleness of purpose to serve and please Him, can never be called holiness. This right motivating purpose in life will bring forth the same blessed, victorious holy living, whether we expect His return next week, next month, or next century. Piety stemming from a fear of being caught "off base" when He returns, is not holiness, but hypocrisy.

(8) Some leading Pre-Tribulationists (notably Hal Lindsey and J.F. Walvoord) consider a period of time between the rapture and the second coming to be essential in order to make provision for the re-population of the earth with mortals for the Millennium. Hal Lindsey, in his popular book "The Late Great Planet Earth" (2 million copies in 2 years), considers this the strongest case for the Pre-Tribulation position! On page 143 he writes, "Here is the chief reason why we believe the rapture occurs before the Tribulation...If the rapture took place at the same time as the second coming, there would be no mortals left who would be believers; therefore, there would be no one left to go into the Kingdom and repopulate the earth." In answer to this, consider (i) At the revelation of Christ, a remnant of Jews will repent and be saved. These mortal Jews will apparently be around to populate the millennium (Zechariah 12-14), as indicated by Lindsey himself on page 54. (ii) At the revelation of Christ, there will be an entire generation of children who have not reached the age of accountability. They will certainly not be cast into hell, and they will not be raptured--that is clearly and specifically for the saints. They must enter the millennium as mortals.

(9) It has been claimed by Pre-Tribulationists that it is a terrible reflection on God's character to suggest He would allow His precious Church to suffer through the

Tribulation. If so, then God is already indicted for allowing countless thousands of His precious saints to suffer the most agonizing deaths for His Name in the past, and even in the present day. God had no rapture for them! Perhaps the excuse is offered that they were not in the "Great Tribulation". Did this lessen their suffering any? Suffering can be no more intense than to cause death. The personal sufferings in the Great Tribulation cannot be any more intense than in the past (although the extent of such suffering certainly will be). After all, is there more intense suffering yet than to be burned alive, sawn into pieces, torn apart by wild animals, or any of the other diabolical forms of death suffered by martyred Christians?

The church of the Western World enjoys unprecedented ease and prosperity, with little idea what persecution really means, in spite of its great prevalence in other parts of the world. It has been estimated that more Christians have so far been martyred in the twentieth century than in all of the preceding years of the Christian era. How can we believe that we shall all be raptured out of harms way, removed by God to escape a time of testing (even unto death) that He has allowed countless others to suffer, even up to and including this very day? Are we so much better than they? It is surely inconsistent to believe that God allows Christians to suffer persecution and martyrdom as individuals and in groups of individuals, but not if the group gets big enough to include the whole church. It is also inconsistent if our teaching allows there to be a day in glory when those martyred saints from bygone times, who have counted it an unspeakable privilege to suffer and die for the name of Jesus, will join in fellowship with a raptured church that has considered it an unquestioned right to escape such a fate!

There is a consistent teaching throughout the New Testament that prepares God's children for suffering, and tells us that it is blessed to suffer for His sake. Nowhere are Christians told they can expect to escape tribulation.

*"Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad." Matt. 5:11-12 (See also Luke 6:22, 23)*

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

It is believed by many sincere Christians that any deviation from the popular PreTribulation teaching is un-Scriptural, and liberal (that is, a turning away from the historical fundamental viewpoint). Such a belief, however, will simply not stand up when viewed in the light of Biblical and historical fact. Scripture clearly defines only one translation, or rapture of the saints, and unmistakably places it after the Great Tribulation. A Pre-Tribulation rapture is nowhere described in Scripture, and the

whole doctrine must depend on inferences which close examination will not substantiate. Further, the short history of Pre-Tribulationism denies it the stature of an historical, fundamental doctrine. In this regard, E.F. Sanders of Wheaton College has written: "Search the pages of Church history and literature, and you will not find one mention of the Lord coming **before** the Tribulation until after 1800. **No one** has ever cited any literature, writings, or quotes to the contrary! The implications of this truth are serious. **If** the Pre-Tribulation doctrine were true, it would mean that it was hidden from the church for 19 centuries. Not one of the brilliant theologians or Bible teachers of the pre-1830 period were able to find a Pre-Tribulation rapture and coming of the Lord on the pages of Holy Scripture---an incredulous improbability to say the least!"

There are at least two reasons why this issue deserves serious consideration.

Firstly, Pre-Tribulationism could be unwittingly contributing to the growth of the worldly, apostate church. This doctrine, when taught alongside the now commonly preached gospel of cheap-grace and easy-believism gives an easy-come-easy-go concept of Christianity that makes it palatable to the self-seeking who are more than willing to "accept Jesus" if it isn't going to cost them anything. This doctrine could also be a major reason why Christians have involved themselves so little in the 'worldly' issues of politics and the deteriorating national and world situation. A doctrine that will remove us from the scene when the situation gets **really** bad takes away a lot of incentive to do something about it.

Secondly, a time of great spiritual confusion and devastation would result if a Pre-Tribulation believing Church finds itself entering the Great Tribulation. It does not take much imagination to picture the shock, the doubt, the falling away of faith and love, the bitterness and confusion that could result. Certainly, the effectiveness of personal witness and ministry would be drastically impaired, and His precious name would not be glorified the way it could or should be. We have had a prelude to this in recent times with accounts of the spiritual devastation that resulted when the unprepared, Pre-Tribulation believing Evangelical Church in Russia thought the end-time had come when they were all but wiped out by the Bolsheviks after the 1917 Revolution. The glorious effect of intense persecution on a prepared, Post-Tribulation believing church in the same circumstances can be read in the Foreword to missionary H.A. Baker's book "Through Tribulation", as he recounts what happened to his church in China in 1948.

Finally, the rapture question should not be applied as a test of orthodoxy, neither should it be a question on which Christian fellowship depends. However, Pre-Tribulationists are hereby exhorted in love to prayerfully study and consider the Post-Tribulation case, that we may all be prepared, if that time should come to us, to

bring Him great glory through persecution and suffering, and become more closely conformed to His wonderful image.

*"For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake." (Philippians 1:29) "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also, with exceeding joy." (I Peter 4:12-13) "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." (Romans 8:35-37)*

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# THE RAPTURE — WHEN?

by Anthony Buzzard

We all believe in the "rapture" — the event by which living Christians will be caught up into the air ("raptured") to meet Christ as He descends to the earth at His Coming (I Thess. 4:13-18). However, in the 1830s a brand new view of the Second Coming arose. It was suggested by some of the Brethren (Plymouth Brethren) that the Second Coming will happen in two distinct stages:

- 1) Christ will arrive to take away (rapture) the church for seven years.
- 2) Christ will arrive seven years later with the church to punish the world and set up the Kingdom of God on earth.

From the start this new view of the Second Coming caused sharp division. Over the past 150 years it has created a great deal of conflict. The chief exponents of the so-called "pre-tribulation rapture" are the faculty of Dallas Theological Seminary. The teaching has spread into many American fundamentalist churches.

A number of scholars have written books to refute the pre-trib rapture which they were taught as children. Since the question has to do with God's timetable, it is important. We are urged to speak with one mind on these issues (1 Cor. 1:10).

When the pre-trib rapture was introduced into the Brethren movement in England in the last century, it must not be supposed that all the Brethren accepted the new views. The following extract from the writings of George Muller, the "apostle" of faith and founder of orphanages in England, is significant. Asked shortly before his death whether Christians are to expect our Lord's return at any moment, or whether certain events must be fulfilled before He comes [again](#), Muller replied as follows:

"I know that on this subject there is great diversity of judgment, and I do not wish to force on other persons the light I have myself. The subject, however, is not new to me; for having been a careful, diligent [student](#) of the Bible for fifty years, my mind has long been settled on this point, and I have not the shadow of a doubt about it. The Scriptures declare plainly that the Lord Jesus will not come until the Apostasy shall have taken place and the Man of Sin (the Antichrist) shall have been revealed, as seen in II Thess. 2:1-5. Many other portions of the word of God distinctly teach that certain events are to be fulfilled before the Return of the Lord Jesus Christ" (cited in *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, by Alexander Reese, Grand Rapids: International Publications, p. 27).

A leading London preacher, G. Campbell Morgan, the "Dwight Moody" of England, was asked the following question during a course of public lectures:

"After your long study and extensive expositions of the Bible, Dr. Morgan, do you find any [warrant](#) for the distinctions which many Bible teachers draw between the second coming of the Lord for his own (The Rapture) and the coming of the Lord with his own (The Revelation), with a time period of three and a half or seven years between these two events?"

"Emphatically not!" Dr. Morgan replied. "I know that view very well, for in earlier years of my ministry I taught it and incorporated it into one of my books entitled *God's Method with Man*. But further study so convinced me of the error of this teaching that I actually went to the expense of buying the plates of that book from my own publisher and destroying them. The idea of a separate and secret coming of Christ to remove the church prior to his coming in [power](#) and glory is a vagary of prophetic interpretation *without any biblical basis whatever*" (*Background to Dispensationalism*, by Clarence Bass, Baker Book House, p. 17, emphasis added).

No student of Scripture need be in any doubt about the order of events described by Paul:

- 1) The Apostasy (falling away from the faith) (II Thess. 2:1-3).
- 2) The Man of Sin (Antichrist) revealed (II Thess. 2:1-3).
- 3) Christ arrives to gather the church (II Thess. 2:1, 8).

Contradicting Paul, Dispensationalism and the pre-trib rapture theory since 1830 teaches:

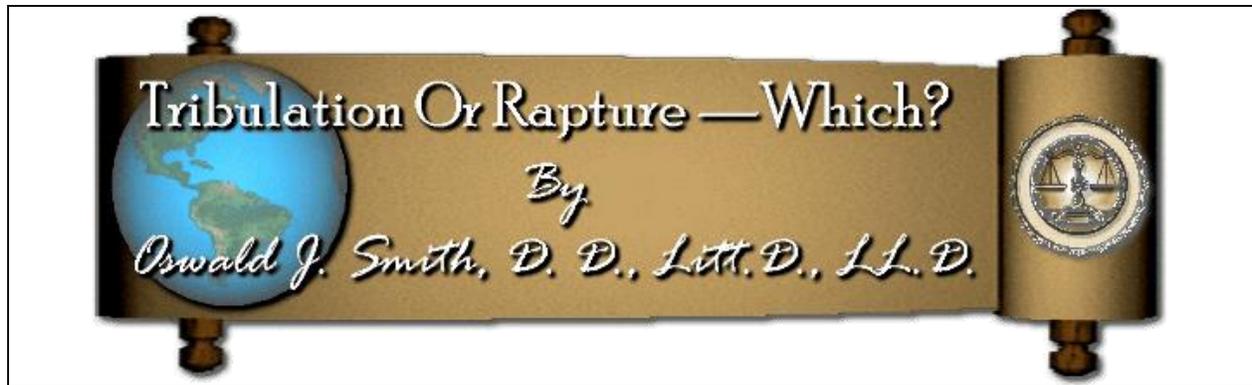
- 1) Christ arrives secretly to gather church.
- 2) Man of Sin is revealed.
- 3) Christ arrives publicly with the church.

Paul specifically warned against teachers who promised that the Day of the Lord and our gathering together to Jesus would come before the Antichrist and the tribulation (see II Thess. 2:1-3). In the interests of a clear understanding of the Bible, the reader is urged to reread Matthew 24 and II Thessalonians 2:1-10:

First the Antichrist and the tribulation (Matt. 24:15ff.)

After the great tribulation, the arrival of Jesus to gather the saints (Matt. 24:31).

Note also: Christians will continue to undergo trouble until the public, spectacular arrival of Jesus to punish the world. Paul could hardly have written II Thessalonians 1:7 if he had believed in a prior "coming." In that verse he states that Christians will be granted relief from suffering, "when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not obey the Gospel." Until Christ comes in power to set up the Kingdom of God on earth, believers must endure the hardships which accompany life as a Christian. There is no relief from trouble seven years before the public arrival of Jesus.



Why did the Lord Jesus conceal the Secret Rapture in Matthew twenty-four? How are we to explain the silence of the Church for centuries concerning it? What about the passages that have been used to support it? Have we been lulling the Church into a false security? Are there any outstanding Christian leaders who believe that the Church will go through the Great Tribulation?

In my first book on Prophecy I asked the questions: "Will the Church pass through the Tribulation or be raptured out of it?" In answering I made this statement: "I have always held the view that the Rapture precedes the Revelation by some seven years, and that the Church, therefore, will not go through the Tribulation, but I do not want to be dogmatic about it and, if God should reveal the contrary to me, I will gladly accept it". Hence, you see, I did not approach the subject with my mind closed to new light and my heart already prejudiced. I was open to whatever God might reveal.

Now, after years of [study](#) and prayer, I am absolutely convinced that there will be no rapture *before* the Tribulation, but that the Church will undoubtedly be called upon to face the Antichrist, and that Christ will come at the [close](#) and not at the beginning of that awful period. I believed the other theory simply because I was taught it by W. E. Blackstone in his book "Jesus is Coming," the Scofield Reference Bible and Prophetic Conferences and Bible Schools; but when I began to search the Scriptures for myself I discovered that there is not a single verse in the Bible that upholds the pre-tribulation theory, but that the uniform teaching of the Word of God is of a post-tribulation Rapture: pre-millennial always. everywhere pre-millennial, but post-tribulation.

### MY FIRST AWAKENING

My first awakening to this important truth came one day in 1925, when I was spending a few days in a cottage at Stoney Lake, Ontario. One of my neighbors, Frank Edmonds by name, simply made the suggestion to me. I opposed it at once. "Why," I exclaimed, "however could that be? What about the Scriptures? The teaching of a pre-tribulation Rapture is clear and indisputable." But he quietly affirmed that I was wrong and emphasized the truth concerning the Last Trump. Of course, I was not convinced. I almost ridiculed the very idea of such a possibility. And there the matter rested.

One day, in the early twenties, I began preaching on Prophecy. I had taken my people through Daniel without difficulty. Then came Mark 13. Luke 21, and Matthew 24 and 25. But, lo and behold, no sooner had I started on Matthew 24 than I got into trouble. I had announced that I

would deal with Matthew 24 at the next service. Hundreds had gathered. I was in a maze, for I was perplexed. So I took a verse here and there through the chapter and thus satisfied the people for that hour at least. But now the next meeting was coming. What was I to say?

I need not point out that there is no pretribulation Rapture in Matthew 24. The Second Coming is unmistakably placed "immediately after the Tribulation" (verse 29), and I was forced to the conclusion that if the Rapture was to be 'before' the Tribulation, the Lord Jesus Christ would certainly have given some hint of it at least. He was dealing with the End-Time of the Age. It is unthinkable that He would have spoken so minutely of the Tribulation without stating that the Church would escape. Instead, He purposely led His hearers to the belief that His followers would be in it. Hence, I was staggered, nor could I honestly defend my previous position.

So, when I again faced the people, I said sufficient to let them know that I questioned my former stand and saw evidence of a post-tribulation Rapture. For, as I read Matthew 24 and 25, I saw that many things, as prophesied by the Lord Jesus Christ, simply had to take place before Jesus could come, namely: "All these things" (verse 33), especially the prediction regarding the preaching of the Gospel. See Mark 13:10, and note the significance of the word "first". Thus, since God's future program could not be set aside, there could be no "any moment expectation" of Christ's Return. We are to watch, watch as prophecy after prophecy is fulfilled, ever looking forward to His Appearing; and, in the End-Time, to watch as never before, and to always be ready, for none can ever know how quickly the events predicted might come to pass and Christ return.

### **MY "ANY MOMENT" THEORY**

Then followed the next step. There came into my hands a copy of a book by Dr. Henry W. Frost, then the Home Director of the China Inland Mission. It was entitled "Matthew 24 and the Revelation," a volume of over 300 pages. I fairly devoured it. Portions of it I read through twice. It was most conclusive in its arguments for a post-tribulation Rapture. About the same time I got hold of a book by James H. McConkey, called "The Book of Revelation," and another—perhaps the best of all—by Edmund Shackleton (England), entitled "Will the Church Escape the Great Tribulation?" Before I had read them through I was firmly convinced that there would be no Rapture before the Tribulation, and that I had done wrong in promising the Church an escape instead of preparing her for the terrible ordeal that must most surely be awaited. My "any moment" theory could not be sustained. In fact, the very first statement in the latter book, which was written about 1890, amazed me beyond measure and I was fairly staggered as I grasped its significance. Let me quote it verbatim:

All who held the pre-millennial Coming of Christ were, till about sixty years ago, of one mind on the subject. About that time a new view was promulgated that the Coming of Christ was not one event, but that it was divided into stages, in fact, that Christ comes twice from heaven to earth, but the first time only as far as the air. This first descent, it is said, will be for the purpose of removing the Church from the world, and will occur before the Great Tribulation under Antichrist. This they call "The coming for His saints" or "Secret Rapture." The second part of the Coming is said to take place when Christ appears in glory and destroys the Antichrist. This they call "The coming with His saints."

Apart from the test of the Word, which is the only final one, there are certain reasons why this doctrine should be viewed with suspicion. It appears to be little more than sixty years old; and it

seems highly improbable that, if scriptural it could have escaped the scrutiny of the many devoted Bible students whose writings have been preserved to us from the past. More especially in the writings of the early Christian fathers would we expect to find some notice of this doctrine, if it had been taught by the Apostles; but those who have their works declare that they betray no knowledge of a theory that the Church would escape the Tribulation under Antichrist, or that there would be any "coming" except that spoken of in Matthew 24, as occurring in manifest glory "after the Tribulation." This is all the more significant, because these writers bestowed much attention upon the subject of the Antichrist and the Great Tribulation. Augustine, referring to Daniel 7, wrote: "But he who reads this passage even half asleep cannot fail to see that the kingdom of Antichrist shall fiercely, though for a short time, assail the Church."

Then when I remembered that the death of Peter, his prediction of corruption and apostasy after his decease, the death of Paul, and many other events had to occur before the Rapture—especially the evangelization of the world (Mark 13:10 and Matt. 24:14)—my "any moment" theory took wings and fled.

Last of all, I ran across "The Great Tribulation—The Church's Supreme Test" by John B. Scruby, the most convincing; the most unanswerable of all. It deals with every point minutely and proves conclusively that the Tribulation precedes the Rapture.

Recently I got hold of that remarkable book "Tribulation to Glory" by H. A. Baker, in which he wrote: "For eighteen centuries the fundamental principle of tribulation to glory was the universal belief of the truly born-again members of the Church", and then he goes on to show that the new pre-tribulation rapture teaching was first proclaimed as a direct revelation by a woman in Edward Irving's church, and then taken up by John Nelson Darby (and the Scofield Reference Bible) in direct contradiction to the teaching of the Church for eighteen hundred years.

"Beginning with the Irvingite woman, then propagated by John N. Darby about 1830, this new 'spirit-inspired' doctrine during the last century has come down to us until it has become popular. George Muller opposed it; so did Benjamin Wills Newton; so did Dr. S. P. Tregelles and other Brethren, but all in vain." But now, thank God, large numbers of our leading Bible Teachers are coming back to the original position.

## **GOD'S WORD**

I discovered that no time element is ever mentioned so far as the Rapture is concerned, except as it is related to the Resurrection. And that the Resurrection is always placed at the time of the sounding of the Last Trump (1 Cor. 15:51-54). This Trump, without doubt, closes the Tribulation. There is no eighth. The saints are rewarded (Rev. 11:18). The "mystery of God", is then finished, there is time (delay) no longer (Rev. 10:6 and 7), and the Resurrection, of course, immediately precedes the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:16).

Naturally, I thought of 2 Thessalonians 2:7: "he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way". But then I learned from the Greek that the second "he" is the Antichrist, and that the Greek does not say "taken out of the way," but "revealed in the midst," or, "born out of the midst." In other words, lawlessness will be restrained until the appointed time for the lawless one, the Antichrist, to appear. There is no mention of the Holy Spirit at all. That is a Scofield Bible assumption. The Holy Spirit and the Church remain to the end of the Age.

Then, too. I thought of Luke 21:36 and of Revelation 3:10. But Noah, I remembered, "escaped" by preservation. Daniel "was kept" and protected in the lion's den. The three Hebrew children were "kept" though in a burning fiery furnace. None of them were taken out. Rather they were kept, preserved, protected while in, and thus they escaped. Why not the Church? Note that 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 finds the saints in trouble, in tribulation, and resting only at the close. In fact the first two chapters of 2 Thessalonians cannot be interpreted in any other way. Chapter two, verse one, is most explicit. "Now we beseech you, brethren", writes Paul, "by the coming (Revelation) of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together (the Rapture) unto Him". There is here no separation between the Rapture and the Revelation. The Coming is the one and only Coming spoken of throughout the two chapters, the Coming described in chapter one, verses seven and eight.

I learned, too, that the word for "meet" in 1 Thessalonians 4: was only used in two other places, and, in both cases, it meant "returning with" and not "remaining at" the place of meeting. When the brethren from Rome met Paul, they immediately returned to the city with him. When the Virgins met the Bridegroom they accompanied Him back to the wedding. When the saints meet Christ in the Air, as He comes to judge the nations and establish His Kingdom on earth, they will return with Him. There is no Scripture that says they will remain for some seven years in the Air.

In 1 Thessalonians each chapter closes with a reference to the Second Coming, but no distinction is made. As Christ descends with His angels after the Tribulation, the saints ascend, and, meeting Him in the Air, turn and continue with Him back to the earth. How long He remains in the Air, following the meeting with the Church is nowhere revealed. "The Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints" (1 Thess. 3:13), is unquestionably the Revelation, after the Tribulation, simply because the words, "with all His saints" are added. But why infer another, a previous Coming, in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 and 1:10, or 5:23? It is all one and the same. There is no Secret Rapture. That theory must be deliberately read into the passage. There is no Rapture in Revelation until chapter nineteen is reached.

I had been taught that the Greek word "*parousia*" always referred to the Rapture and that other words were used for the Coming of Christ in glory after the Tribulation. But I found that this is not true. *Parousia* is used for the latter, too. See 2 Thessalonians 2:1.

While it is clear that the Church must endure the wrath of the Antichrist, it is certain that the Church will not have to endure the wrath of God. When His judgments are poured out on the Antichrist and his followers, the Church will be divinely protected by God even as the Israelites were protected when His wrath was poured upon the Egyptians—not by being raptured, but by being kept.

We might go through all the writers of the New Testament, and we would fail to discover any indication of the so-called "two-stages" of our Lord's Coming. Peter, James and John tell the same story. There is no Scripture for a pre-tribulation rapture. That theory had to be invented by man. Search and see. There is no verse in the Bible that even mentions it.

I discovered that nearly all evangelical missionary leaders believe that there must be representatives in the Church of Christ from every tribe, kindred, tongue and nation, and not just from the so-called civilized world, and that, therefore, the only way to hasten the Coming of Christ is by evangelizing the remaining unreached peoples of earth. Jesus made it perfectly clear when He said, "the gospel must first be published among all nations" (Mark 13:10) "and then

shall the end come" (Matt. 24:14). Hence, the greatest incentive to missionary work is the Second Coming of Christ.

### SPIRITUAL PREPAREDNESS

I am sure that with the true child of God it is not a question of preference but of truth. Does God's Word say so? Why then rebel? Is not His plan best? Besides, what difference does it make so long as we are ready? "Spiritual Preparedness" is the only important factor after all.

I wonder if we have been lulling the Church into a false security? Can it be that we have been preaching an easy escape? Ought we to prepare the Church for the greatest of all ordeals? Should not our teaching harden her for the fires of the Tribulation? What kind of soldiers are we training? I am afraid that we have been very guilty and that God will certainly hold us responsible for the type of Christian our preaching is producing. We need men and women today of the martyr spirit. The test of the Inquisition is coming again and woe betide the pre-millennialists who are not ready. The Church must be purified in the fires of persecution.

### VOICES OF OTHERS

Now if I were to go into the subject in detail and attempt to deal with the numerous passages, both for and against, I would simply be overlapping. Others have already done this most ably, far better than I can, and so, if you are really interested, I would suggest that you secure the books that have been written on the subject and study them prayerfully and with an open mind before taking sides. A great many have been written by men on both sides of the Atlantic. The following are among the best that have been published in Great Britain and you may procure most of them from THE SOVEREIGN GRACE ADVENT TESTIMONY, I DONALD WAY, CHELMSFORD, ESSEX, CM2 9JB, the organization that publishes the Post-Tribulation magazine *Watching and Waiting*, edited by James Payne.

Here are the books:

*Will the Church Escape the Great Tribulation?* (by Edmund Shackleton); *Christ's Second Coming* (by S. P. Tregelles) [these two are scarce]; *Our Lord Cometh* (by W. J. Rowlands); *The Coming of the Son of Man* (by Rev. E. J. Poole-Connor); *The Second Advent of our Lord, Not Secret, but in Manifested Glory* (by B. W. Newton); *One Second Coming of Christ* (by W. J. Rowlands); *The First Resurrection* (by S. P. Tregelles); *Touching the Coming of the Lord* (by Dan Crawford); *The Saints' Rest and Rapture* (by Frank H. White); *The Second Coming of Christ* (by George Muller). Send for their catalogue.

The following have been published in North America: *The Blessed Hope* (by Professor George E. Ladd). Dr. Ladd teaches in Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena. It is a masterly volume and it goes into both the history and doctrine of both the Pre-Tribulation and the Post-Tribulation Advent. "*Will Christ's Coming be in two stages?*" (by Norman F. Douty).

I have a list of nearly seventy Bible Teachers who have proclaimed this view of the Return of Christ. Among them, in addition to those who have written the above books, there are such names as W. J. Erdman, Charles R. Erdman. Dr. Campbell Morgan, Bishop Frank Houghton, Dr. A. B. Simpson, Dr. J. W. Thirtle, Dr. Charles T. Cook, Alexander Reese, Dr. Horatius Bonar, Dr. Adolph Saphir, Henry Varley, Dr. Nathaniel West, David Baron, H. W. Soltau, Dr. Bergin, Dr.

Harold J. Ockenga, and many others. To ignore the convictions of such spiritual leaders is impossible. Deference must be given to their views.

These views I would sum up by quoting from *Watching and Waiting*—"We believe that this was the teaching of our Lord and His Apostles. We believe it was held by the Early Church and by all in the Middle Ages who had any light on the Second Advent. We believe, too, that it was the teaching of the Early Brethren and that no other view was generally accepted among them until the Any Moment. Secret Rapture, Pre-Tribulation, or Two-Stage Coming theory was taught by Edward Irving, as a result of a vision received by a woman in his church. Thus Any Moment teaching is a 'novel' doctrine".

### MY FINAL APPEAL

Beloved, the shadows are darkening. The day is drawing to a close. It is now Saturday night in the history of the Church. The times of the Gentiles have almost run their course. Events are fast shaping for the end. The Antichrist will soon be here.

One fact and one only is important—Christ is coming. Of that there can be no doubt. One question and one only is vital—Are we ready?

We may differ on minor details of prophecy. We may disagree as to the time of His Appearing. We may not see eye to eye regarding the order of prophetic events. But one thing is certain—He is coming. We will be with Him. The Millennium is at hand and soon now we shall know all. Therefore, let us love one another sincerely and labour together "till He Come".

If I am mistaken I will know it then. Hence, let us agree to disagree agreeably. God knows our hearts. He knows that we love Him and that is all that really matters. If I love Him and you love Him, we will love each other. Soon the day will break and all the shadows flee away. Meanwhile I am "looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2 :13).



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Revised: 

# Corrie ten Boom Warns Against Pre-Tribulation Rapture False Doctrine.

 Published April 14, 2011 |  By [womenof7](#)



Many Christians are unaware of the warning written in a letter by Corrie ten Boom where Miss ten Boom warns against a pre-tribulation rapture false doctrine. A Dutch Christian and a survivor of the Nazi Holocaust concentration camps. Corrie spearheaded a rescue operation in Holland that helped hundreds of Jews escape the Nazi extermination camps, and travelled all over the world as an ambassador for Christ telling her story. In her worldwide travels Miss ten Boom met with many Christians abroad. Many in the Suffering Church were enduring persecution just as she had. She met with Church leaders of the underground church in China. There she became aware of what had happened to the Chinese church in 1949. At that time Mao Tse Tung was bringing China into communism. The American missionaries had left the country. Chinese Christians entered into a time of intense persecution.

During that period the Pre-Tribulation Rapture doctrine had been the accepted teaching. But there was a problem. And it turned out to be a serious one. This **Biblically unfounded** doctrine had not prepared the Chinese Church for witness under trial. Christian believers were interrogated and brutalized under the Red Guard. Many fell away from the faith in those times.

Corrie ten Boom's story is told through her book *The Hiding Place*, and the motion picture released by the same name in the 1970s.

Corrie ten Boom went home to be with her Lord April 15, 1983, but her inspiring testimony for Christ will endure.

[Following](#) is the letter Corrie left warning against a pre-tribulation rapture false doctrine that Christians all over the world, and especially in America need to take very seriously. In this capacity Corrie ten Boom has earned the right to be heard. She is eminently qualified to present this special word of warning to the Western Church:

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“The world is deathly ill. It is dying. The Great Physician has already signed [the death certificate](#). Yet there is still a great work for Christians to do. They are to be streams of living

water, channels of mercy to those who are still in the world. It is possible for them to do this because they are overcomers.

Christians are ambassadors for Christ. They are representatives from Heaven to this dying world. And because of our presence here, things will change.

My sister, Betsy, and I were in the Nazi concentration camp at Ravensbruck because we committed the [crime](#) of loving Jews. Seven hundred of us from Holland, France, Russia, Poland and Belgium were herded into a room built for two hundred. As far as I knew, Betsy and I were the only two representatives of Heaven in that room.

We may have been the Lord's only representatives in that place of hatred, yet because of our presence there, things changed. Jesus said, **"In the world you shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."** We too, are to be overcomers – bringing the light of Jesus into a world filled with darkness and hate.

Sometimes I get frightened as I read the Bible, and as I look in this world and see all of the tribulation and persecution promised by the Bible coming true. [Now](#) I can tell you, though, if you too are afraid, that I have just read the last pages. I can now come to shouting "Hallelujah! Hallelujah!" for I have found where it is written that Jesus said,

**"He that overcometh shall inherit all things and I will be His God, and he shall be My son."**

This is the future and hope of this world. Not that the world will survive – but that we shall be overcomers in the midst of a dying world.

Betsy and I, in the concentration camp, prayed that God would heal Betsy who was so weak and sick.

"Yes, the Lord will heal me," Betsy said with confidence.

She died the next day and I could not understand it. They laid her thin body on the concrete floor along with all the other corpses of the women who died that day.

It was hard for me to understand, to believe that God had a purpose for all that. Yet because of Betsy's death, today I am traveling all over the world telling people about Jesus.

**There are some among us teaching there will be no tribulation that the Christians will be able to escape all this. These are the false teachers that Jesus was warning us to expect in the latter days. Most of them have little knowledge of what is already going on across the world. I have been in countries where the saints are already suffering terrible persecution.**

In China, the Christians were told, "Don't worry, before the tribulation comes you will be translated- raptured." Then came a terrible persecution. Millions of Christians were tortured to death. Later, I heard a Bishop from China say, sadly,

**"We have failed.. We should have made the people strong for persecution, rather than telling them Jesus would come first. Tell the people to be strong in times of persecution, how to stand when the tribulation comes, to stand and not faint."**

I feel I have a divine mandate to go and tell the people of this world that it is possible to be strong in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are in training for the tribulation, but more than sixty percent of the Body of Christ across the world has already entered into the tribulation. There is no way to escape it. We are next.

Since I have already gone through prison for Jesus' sake, and since I met the Bishop in China, now every time I read a good Bible text I think, "Hey, I can use that in the time of tribulation." Then I write it down and learn it by heart.

When I was in the concentration camp, a camp where only twenty percent of the women came out alive, we tried to cheer each other up by saying, "Nothing could be any worse than today." But we would find the next day was even worse. During this time a Bible verse that I had committed to memory gave me great hope and joy.

"If you be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of the glory and of God resteth upon you; on their part evil is spoken of, but on your part He is glorified."  
I Peter 4:14"

I found myself saying, "Hallelujah!  
Because I am suffering, Jesus is glorified!"

In America, the churches sing, "Let the congregation escape tribulation", but in China and Africa the tribulation has already arrived. This last year alone more than two hundred thousand Christians were martyred in Africa. Now things like that never get into the newspapers because they cause bad political relations. But I know. I have been there. We need to think about that when we sit down in our nice houses with our nice clothes to eat our steak dinners. Many, many members of the Body of Christ are being tortured to death at this very moment, yet we continue right on as though we are all going to escape the tribulation.

Several years ago I was in Africa in a nation where a new government had come into power. The first night I was there some of the Christians were commanded to come to the police station to register. When they arrived they were arrested and that same night they were executed. The next day the same thing happened with other Christians. The third day it was the same. All the Christians in the district were being systematically murdered.

The fourth day I was to speak in a little church. The people came, but they were filled with fear and tension. All during the service they were looking at each other, their eyes asking, "Will this one I am sitting beside be the next one killed? Will I be the next one?"

The room was hot and stuffy with insects that came through the screenless windows and swirled around the naked bulbs over the bare wooden benches. I told them a story out of my childhood.

"When I was a little girl, I said, I went to my father and said, "Daddy, I am afraid that I will never be strong enough to be a martyr for Jesus Christ." "Tell me," said Father, "When you take a train trip to Amsterdam, when do I give you the money for the ticket?" "Three weeks before?" "No Daddy, you give me the money for the ticket just before we get on the train." "That's is right," my father said, "and so it is with God's strength." "Our Father in heaven knows when you need the strength to be a martyr for Jesus Christ." "He will supply all you need just in time." My African friends were nodding and smiling. Suddenly a spirit of joy descended upon that church and the people began singing, "In the sweet, by and by, we shall meet on that beautiful shore."

Later that week, half the congregation of that church was executed. I heard later that the other half was killed some months ago. But I must tell you something. I was so happy that the Lord used me to encourage these people, for unlike many of their leaders, I had the word of God. I had been to the Bible and discovered that Jesus said He had not only overcome the world, but to all those who remained faithful to the end, He would give a crown of life.

How can we get ready for the persecution?

First we need to feed on the Word of God, digest it, make it a part of our being. This will mean disciplined Bible study each day as we not only memorize long passages of scripture, but put the principles to work in our lives.

Next we need to develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Not just the Jesus of yesterday, the Jesus of History, but the life-changing Jesus of today who is still alive and sitting at the right hand of God.

We must be filled with the Holy Spirit. This is no optional command of the Bible, it is absolutely necessary. Those earthly disciples could never have stood up under the persecution of the Jews and Romans had they not waited for Pentecost. Each of us needs our own personal Pentecost, the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We will never be able to stand in the tribulation without it. In the coming persecution we must be ready to help each other and encourage each other.

But we must not wait until the tribulation comes before starting. The fruit of the Spirit should be the dominant force of every Christian's life. Many are fearful of the coming tribulation, they want to run. I, too, am a little bit afraid when I think that after all my eighty years, including the horrible Nazi concentration camp, that I might have to go through the tribulation also. But then I read the Bible and I am glad. When I am weak, then I shall be strong, the Bible says. Betsy and I were prisoners for the Lord, we were so weak, but we got power because the Holy Spirit was on us. That mighty inner strengthening of the Holy Spirit helped us through. No, you

will not be strong in yourself when the tribulation comes. Rather, you will be strong in the power of Him who will not forsake you. For seventy-six years I have known the Lord Jesus and not once has He ever left me, or let me down.

“Though He shall slay me, yet will I trust Him.” Job 13:15 for I know that to all who overcome, He shall give the crown of life. **Hallelujah!**” - Corrie Ten Boom – 1974

Dr. Ernest L. Martin, David Sielaff

## The Rapture Theory - Its Surprising Origin

Almost all Christians are interested in prophecy. This is especially true if the prophecies show what will happen to Christians themselves. There is nothing wrong in desiring such personal knowledge. Even our Lord gave a considerable amount of teaching about the circumstances to befall His people at the end of the age (Matthew 24:22–25). We all share a common concern in wanting to know about the participants, the chronology, and the [geography](#) of those prophecies. To comprehend the full knowledge of them it is obvious that all relevant statements of our Lord and His apostles must be properly interpreted and placed in a coherent order.

Many Christians have attempted to do this. As a consequence, the doctrine of the Rapture has arisen. So important has it become to many that the teaching is [now](#) sanctioned in some circles as the prime revelation from God to show what will happen to members of His *ekklesia* just before and during the Second Coming of Christ. Some of the greatest friends of the Holy Scriptures have accepted this teaching (and they teach this false doctrine even by mistranslating the phrase “**first resurrection**” as “the former resurrection” in Revelation 20:5). If one translates the word correctly as “*first*,” then it means the resurrection of Christians occurs after the Tribulation, and the Pre-Tribulation Rapture Theory is shown to be false. [1](#)

The Pre-Tribulation Rapture Theory, however, is a menacing doctrine that perverts the plain language of the text of the New Testament. Some preachers today look on the doctrine as the heart and core of present Christian expectations in regard to prophetic truth for the near future! Many believe this false teaching is the principle hope of the Body of Christ for their redemption and safety during the Great Tribulation. We need to look at this teaching carefully.

### **The Doctrine of the Rapture**

First understand that the word “Rapture” is not found in the King James translation. There is also no single word used by biblical authors to describe the prophetic factors that comprise the doctrine. Its formulation came about by means of inductive reasoning. Certain biblical passages concerning the Second Coming, and the role Christians will [play](#) in that event, were blended together inductively to establish the teaching.

The modern expression “Rapture” has been invented to explain the overall teaching and the term suits the subject well. The basic tenets of the doctrine are simple. It purports that Christ will come back to this earth in two phases. He will first return secretly to *rapture* His church away from this world so that they might escape the Great Tribulation to occur at the end of the age. Christ then returns in a visible advent to dispense His wrath on the world’s nations. This is the general teaching.

Many details concerning these prime factors are hotly debated. There is especially much argument over the chronological features associated with it. Some think the time lapse between the two phases will be 3 ½ years, others say 7 years. Some feel that the Rapture of the *ekklesia* occurs before the Tribulation, others about mid-way through. Many suggest that the saints of God will be taken to heaven for protection, while others suggest a geographical area on this earth (as I have shown in various articles). <sup>2</sup> Some feel that only part of the *ekklesia* will escape, while others say all will be rescued.

These variations and others have multiplied the interpretations among those holding the belief. But all are unanimous on one point: the central theme of the "Rapture Theory" (as it is normally called in the theological world) shows that Christ will return to earth in two phases. They think Christ will come at first secretly for His saints and then He will come visibly with His saints returning with Him from heaven at the actual Second Advent. In this book, when I use the term "Rapture" standing alone, I always mean the "Rapture Theory" of the pre-tribulation theorists.

### ***The Newness of the Doctrine***

It may come as a surprise but the doctrine of the Rapture is not mentioned in any Christian writings, of which we have knowledge, until after the year 1830 C.E. Whether the early writers were Greek or Latin, Armenian or Coptic, Syrian or Ethiopian, English or German, orthodox or heretic, no one mentioned it before 1830 (though a sentence in *Pseudo-Dionysius* in about 500 C.E. could be so interpreted). Of course, those who feel the origin of the teaching is in the Bible would say that it ceased being taught for some unknown reason at the close of the apostolic age only to reappear in 1830. But if the doctrine were so clearly stated in Scripture, it seems incredible that no one should have referred to it before the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The lateness of the doctrine does not necessarily mean the teaching is wrong (only the plain statements of the Bible can reveal that). It does show that thousands of eminent scholars over seventeen centuries (including the most astute "Christian Fathers" and those of the Reformation and post-Reformation periods) must be considered prophetic dunces for not having understood so fundamental a teaching. This lapse of seventeen centuries when no one elaborated on the doctrine must be viewed as an obstacle to accepting its reliability.

### ***The Beginnings of the Doctrine***

The result of a careful investigation into the origin of the Rapture was published in 1976. This was in an excellent research book that deserves to be read by all people interested in the subject. Its title: *The Unbelievable Pre-Trib Origin* by Dave MacPherson. <sup>3</sup> He catalogs a great deal of historical material that answers the doctrine's mysterious derivation. I wish to review the results of his research.

In the middle 1820's a religious environment began to be established among a few Christians in London, England which proved to be the catalyst from which the doctrine of the Rapture emerged. Expectations of the soon coming of our Lord were being voiced. This was no new thing, but what was unusual was the teaching by a Presbyterian minister named Edward Irving that there had to be a restoration of the spiritual gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14 just before Christ's Second Advent. To Irving, the time had come for those spiritual manifestations to occur. Among

the expected gifts was the renewal of speaking in tongues and of prophetic utterances motivated by the spirit.

Irving began to propagate his beliefs. His oratorical skills and enthusiasm caused his congregation in London to grow. Then a number of people began to experience the "gifts." Once this happened, opposition from the organized churches set in. It resulted in Irving's dismissal from the Presbyterian Church in 1832. His group established themselves as the Catholic Apostolic Church and continued the teachings of Irving. These events were the beginnings of what some call present day Pentecostalism. Some church historians referred to Irving as "the father of modern Pentecostalism."

What does this have to do with the origin of the Rapture doctrine? Look at what happened in the year 1830 — two years before Irving's dismissal from the Presbyterian Church. In that year a revival of the "gifts" began to be manifested among some people living in the lowlands of Scotland. They experienced what they called the outpouring of the Spirit. It was accompanied with speaking in "tongues" and other charismatic phenomena. Irving preached that these things must occur and now they were.

On one particular evening, the power of the Holy Spirit was said to have rested on a Miss Margaret Macdonald while she was ill at home. She was dangerously sick and thought she was dying. In spite of this (or perhaps because she is supposed to have come under the "power" of the spirit) for several successive hours she experienced manifestations of **"mingled prophecy and vision."** She found her mind in an altered state and began to experience considerable visionary activity.

The message she received during this prophetic vision convinced her that Christ was going to appear in two stages at His Second Advent, and not a single occasion as most all people formerly believed. The spirit emanation revealed that Christ would first come in glory to those who look for Him and again later in a final stage when every eye would see Him. This visionary experience of Miss Macdonald represented the prime source of the modern Rapture doctrine as the historical evidence compiled by Mr. MacPherson reveals.

### ***The Influence of John Darby***

Many people have thought that John Darby, the founder of the Plymouth Brethren, was the originator of the Rapture doctrine. This is not the case. Darby was a brilliant theologian with outstanding scholarly abilities. Even those who disagreed with his teachings admit that he, and many associated with him, helped cause a revival in biblical learning throughout the evangelical world which has perpetuated down to the present day. All who love biblical research ought to be thankful for what Darby and especially his associates accomplished for biblical scholarship. These early men helped pave the way particularly for the renewal of modern lexical studies in the biblical languages.

This renewal of language studies was not the only thing they produced. The doctrine of "dispensationalism" was also a teaching they brought to the attention of the Protestant world. And then, there was this new doctrine termed the "Rapture." While many Christians long thought the Rapture doctrine originated with John Darby, it is now known that this was not true. Darby did popularize it. Scofield and others took it over. But Darby provided the intellectual mantle that helped make it respectable. Many of

those in the evangelical sphere of Christianity today are so certain of its veracity that it is accepted as the absolute truth of God. The fact is, however, John Darby received the knowledge of the doctrine from someone else. His source was Margaret Macdonald.

The studies of Mr. MacPherson show that her sickness during which she received her visions and revelations occurred sometime between February 1 and April 14, 1830. By late spring and early summer of 1830, her belief in the two phases of Christ's coming was mentioned in praise and prayer meetings in several towns of western Scotland. In these meetings some people were speaking in "tongues" and other charismatic occurrences were in evidence. Modern "Pentecostalism" had its birth.

These extraordinary and strange events so attracted John Darby that he made a trip to the area to witness what was going on. Though he did not approve of the ecstatic episodes that he witnessed, it is nonetheless significant that Darby, after returning from Scotland, began to teach that Christ's Advent would occur in two phases. MacPherson shows good evidence that Darby even visited Miss Macdonald in her home. There can hardly be any doubt that the visions and spiritual experiences of Miss Macdonald are the source of the modern doctrine. But belief in such paranormal experiences is dangerous, especially when they are contrary to scriptural teachings.

### ***Visions and Dreams***

While it is possible that visionary revelations can come from God, it is always prudent to be cautious in such matters. Near the same time Miss Macdonald was receiving her visions, Joseph Smith in America was experiencing his apparitions that brought Mormon doctrines to the world. John Wilson also had his dreams that were the spark that started the false teaching of British-Israelism. Not long afterwards, Ellen G. White received her visions that resulted in many Seventh Day Adventist teachings. And remarkably, all these individuals received revelations of doctrines supposedly from God that were much at variance with one another and contrary to biblical teachings. Such incidents bring to mind the warning that God gave to Moses.

**"If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and gives you a sign or wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spoke unto you, saying, 'let us go after other gods, which you have not known, and let us serve them'; you shall not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the Lord proves [tests] you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul."**

- ***Deuteronomy 13:1-3***

In regard to the teachings of visionaries, recall what the apostle John commanded Christians.

**"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." <sup>4</sup>**

- ***1 John 4:1***

And though some refer to the prophecy of Daniel that **"knowledge shall be increased"** (Daniel 12:4) as proof that the revival of doctrinal truths will occur at the end of the age, this is not what Daniel meant. If you read the prophet carefully you will find Daniel was speaking that **"the knowledge"** of his prophecies will be increased, not the revival of general doctrines. In the original text of Daniel, the definite article occurs before the word **"knowledge."** Daniel said **"THE knowledge will be increased,"** and the text shows he meant "the knowledge of his prophecies." Daniel was in no way speaking about a renewing of doctrines at the Time of the End.

A further admonition is necessary concerning the origins of visionary teachings that might emerge near our own time. It is by the apostle Paul and we should pay close attention to it.

**"Now the Spirit speaks expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils."**

- **1 Timothy 4:1**

These warnings from God's word are a reminder that we should exercise caution in accepting the truthfulness of visionary revelations, particularly those near the end of the age, and which are contradictory to one another and to the Bible. The Pre-Tribulation Rapture Theory is such a doctrine; a teaching with no scriptural warrant. After all, the Holy Scriptures makes it plain that the *first* resurrection (when Christians from the past have their resurrections and we are caught up to heaven with Christ) occurs after the Tribulation is over (Revelation 20:5). And though a number of people within the Body of Christ have taken up with this false doctrine, it is time to jettison it from Christian belief.

## Ruth B. Graham on the Pre-Tribulation Rapture

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*RUTH B. GRAHAM, WIFE OF EVANGELIST BILLY GRAHAM, COMMENTS ON THE IDEA OF THE PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE IN A LETTER TO DAVE MACPHERSON, AUTHOR OF “LATE GREAT PRE-TRIB RAPTURE.” RUTH COMMENTS ON THE GREAT TRIBULATION AND ON A RAPTURE VIEW WHICH IS POPULAR TODAY.*

*MANY OF TODAY’S POPULAR PROPHECY TEACHERS ARE SIMILARLY FAILING TO PREPARE COMFORTABLE WESTERN CHRISTIANS FOR THE POSSIBILITY/LIKELIHOOD THAT THEY WILL HAVE TO ENDURE MUCH, EVEN MOST, OF THE COMING “TRIBULATION” AND “GREAT TRIBULATION” PERIODS. PREPARE OURSELVES TO GO THROUGH THE TRIBULATION AND NOT NECESSARILY TO EXPECT TO BE RAPTURED BEFORE IT OCCURS. SHE TELLS OF THE CHINESE CHRISTIANS’ NOT BEING PREPARED FOR THE TRIBULATION THEY WOULD UNDERGO.*

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## 1. FAMOUS RAPTURE WATCHERS – Addendum

by Dave MacPherson

(The statements in my “Famous Rapture Watchers” web article appeared in my 1983 book “The Great Rapture Hoax” and quoted only past leaders. Here are the other leaders who were quoted in that original printing.)

Oswald J. Smith: “...I am absolutely convinced that there will be no rapture before the Tribulation, but that the Church will undoubtedly be called upon to face the Antichrist...” (Tribulation or Rapture – Which?, p. 2).

Paul B. Smith: “You are perfectly free to quote me as believing rather emphatically in the post-tribulation teaching of the Bible” (letter dated June 9, 1976).

S. I. McMillen: “...Christians will suffer in the Great Tribulation” (Discern These Times, p. 55).

Norman F. Douty: “...all of the evidence of history runs one way – in favor of Post-tribulationism” (Has Christ’s Return Two Stages?, p. 113).

Leonard Ravenhill: “There is a cowardly Christianity which...still comforts its fainting heart with the hope that there will be a rapture – perhaps today – to catch us away from coming tribulation” (Sodom Had No Bible, p. 94).

William Hendriksen: “...the one and only second coming of Christ to judgment” (Israel in Prophecy, p. 29).

Loraine Boettner: “Hence we conclude that nowhere in Scripture does it teach a secret or pre-tribulation Rapture” (The Millennium, p. 168).

J. Sidlow Baxter: “...believers of the last days (there is only one small part of the total Church on earth at any given moment) will be on earth during the so-called ‘Great Tribulation’ ” (Explore the Book, Vol. 6, p. 345).

Merrill C. Tenney: “There is no convincing reason why the seer’s being ‘in the Spirit’ and being called into heaven [Revelation 4:1-2] typifies the rapture of the church...” (Interpreting Revelation, p. 141).

James R. Graham: “...there is not a line of the N.T. that declares a pre-tribulation rapture, so its advocates are compelled to read it into certain indeterminate texts...” (Watchman, What of the Night?, p. 79).

Ralph Earle: "The teaching of a pre-tribulation rapture seems first to have been emphasized widely about 100 years ago by John Darby of the Plymouth Brethren" (Behold, I Come, p. 74).

Clarence B. Bass: "...I most strongly believe dispensationalism to be a departure from the historic faith..." (Backgrounds to Dispensationalism, p. 155).

William C. Thomas: "The return of Jesus Christ, described by parousia, revelation, and epiphany, is one single, glorious, triumphant event for which we all wait with great eagerness!" (The Blessed Hope in the Thessalonian Epistles of Paul, p. 42).

Harold J. Ockenga: "No exegetical justification exists for the arbitrary separation of the 'coming of Christ' and the 'day of the Lord.' It is one 'day of the Lord Jesus Christ' " (Christian Life, February, 1955).

Duane Edward Spencer: "Paul makes it very clear that the Church will pass through the Great Tribulation" ("Rapture-Tribulation" cassette).

J. C. Maris: "Nowhere the Bible teaches that the Church of Jesus Christ is heading for world dominion. On the contrary – there will be no place for her, save in 'the wilderness,' where God will take care of her (Rev. 12:13-17)" (I.C.C.C. leaflet "The Danger of the Ecumenical Movement," p. 2).

F. F. Bruce: "To meet the Lord [I Thessalonians 4:17]...on the final stage of...[Christ's] journey...to the earth..." (New Bible Commentary: Revised, p. 1159).

G. Christian Weiss: "Some people say that this ['gospel of the kingdom' in Matthew 24:14] is not the gospel of grace but is a special aspect of the gospel to be preached some time in the future. But there is nothing in the context to indicate this" ("Back to the Bible" broadcast, February 9, 1976).

Pat Brooks: "Soon we, in the Body of Christ, will be confronted by millions of people disillusioned by such false teaching [Pre-Tribism]" (Hear, O Israel, p. 186).

Herman Hoeksema: "...the time of Antichrist, when days so terrible are still to arrive for the church..." (Behold, He Cometh!, p. 131).

Ray Summers: "Because they [Philadelphia] have been faithful, he promises his sustaining grace in the tribulation..." (Worthy Is the Lamb, p. 123).

George E. Ladd: "[Pretribulationism] may be guilty of the positive danger of leaving the Church unprepared for tribulation when Antichrist appears..." (The Blessed Hope, p. 164).

Peter Beyerhaus: "The Christian Church on earth [will face] the final, almost superhuman test of being confronted with the apocalyptic temptation by Antichrist" (Christianity Today, April 13, 1973).

Leon Morris: "The early Christians...looked for the Christ to come as Judge" (Apocalyptic, p. 84).

Dale Moody: "There is not a passage in the New Testament to support Scofield. The call to John to 'come up hither' has reference to mystical ecstasy, not to a pretribulation rapture" (Spirit of the Living God, p. 203).

John R. W. Stott: "He would not spare them from the suffering [Revelation 3:10]; but He would uphold them in it" (What Christ Thinks of the Church, p. 104).

G. R. Beasley-Murray: "...the woman, i.e., the Church...flees for refuge into the wilderness [Revelation 12:14]..." (The New Bible Commentary, p. 1184).

Bernard L. Ramm: "...as the Church moves to meet her Lord at the parousia world history is also moving to meet its Judge at the same parousia" (Leo Eddleman's Last Things, p. 41).

J. Barton Payne: "...the twentieth century has indeed witnessed a progressively rising revolt against pre-tribulationism" (The Imminent Appearing of Christ, p. 38).

Robert H. Gundry: "Divine wrath does not blanket the entire seventieth week...but concentrates at the close" (The Church and the Tribulation, p. 63).

C. S. Lovett: "Frankly I favor a post-trib rapture...I no longer teach Christians that they will NOT have to go through the tribulation" (PC, January, 1974).

Walter R. Martin: "Walter Martin finally said...'Yes, I'm a post-trib' " (Lovett's PC, December, 1976).

Jay Adams: "Today's trend is...from pre- to posttribulationism" (The Time Is at Hand, p. 2).

Jim McKeever: "Nowhere do the Scriptures say that the Rapture will precede the Tribulation" (Christians Will Go Through the Tribulation, p. 55).

Arthur Katz: "I think it fair to tell you that I do not subscribe to the happy and convenient theology which says that God's people are going to be raptured and lifted up when a time of tribulation and trial comes" (Reality, p. 8).

Billy Graham: "Perhaps the Holy Spirit is getting His Church ready for a trial and tribulation such as the world has never known" (Sam Shoemaker's Under New Management, p. 72).

W. J. Grier: "The Scofield Bible makes a rather desperate effort...it tries to get in the 'rapture' of the saints before the appearing of Antichrist" (The Momentous Event, p. 58).

Pat Robertson: "Jesus Christ is going to come back to earth again to deliver Israel and at the same time to rapture His Church; it's going to be one moment, but it's going to be a glorious time" ("700 Club" telecast, May 14, 1975).

Ben Kinchlow: "Any wrath [during the Tribulation] that comes upon us – any difficulty – will not be induced by God, but it'll be like the people are saying, 'The cause of our problems are those Christians in our midst; we need to get rid of them' " ("700 Club" telecast, August 28, 1979).

Daniel P. Fuller: "It is thus concluded that Dispensationalism fails to pass the test of an adequate system of Biblical Interpretation" (The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism, p. 369).

Corrie ten Boom: "The Bible prophesies that the time will come when we cannot buy or sell, unless we bear the sign of the Antichrist..." (Tramp for the Lord, p. 187).

- [Adolfo Ricardo Ybarra](http://www.docstoc.com/docs/91582190/Las-Bases-de-la-Fe-Postribulacional---Adolfo-Ricardo-Ybarra) (outstanding post-tribulational Christian writer of Spanish language), *The Basis of the Post-tribulational Faith* (<http://www.docstoc.com/docs/91582190/Las-Bases-de-la-Fe-Postribulacional---Adolfo-Ricardo-Ybarra>)
- [Augustine of Hippo](#), *The City of God*, Chapter 23.
- [Barnabas](#), *The Epistle of Barnabas*, chapter 4
- [Caecilius Cyprianus](#) (Bishop of Carthage; Post-tribulationist) [Treatise 7.2]
- [Didache](#) (speaks of Jesus gathering the elect after the Tribulation)
- [Ephrem the Syrian](#) (Post-tribulationist)
- [George Müller](#) (19th Century Christian evangelist and orphanage coordinator)
- [Greg Koukl](#) (Evangelical Radio Host, Apologist, Author and Speaker for Stand to Reason)
- [Hermas](#), *The Shepherd of Hermas*
- [Hippolytus](#) (Writer of the early Christian Church; Speaks of the Antichrist's reign and persecution of the Church )
- [Irenaeus](#) (Post-tribulationist; Disciple of Polycarp who was a disciple of John the apostle)
- [John Charles Ryle](#) (19th Century Anglican bishop and theologian)
- [Benjamin Wills Newton](#) (Evangelist, leader in the Plymouth Brethren, theological rival to John Nelson Darby.)

- [John Gill](#) (Held the view that the Church was not raptured out in any event prior the tribulation)
- [Justin Martyr](#) (Christian apologist and post-tribulationist)
- [Charles Spurgeon](#) (Christian English Baptist Preacher. Known as the "Prince of Preachers".)
- [James Montgomery Boice](#) (Former Pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, PA.)
- [John Piper](#) (Evangelical Calvinist, Pastor, Author) Article listed below.
- [Samuel Prideaux Tregelles](#) (19th Century Bible scholar)
- [Tertullian](#) (Father of the Latin Church; Post-tribulationist)
- [Victorinus](#) (third or fourth century; Book of Revelation first commentary writer)
- [Walter Ralston Martin](#) (20th Century American Apologist, Minister, Author, and Founder of Christian Research Institute)
- [George Eldon Ladd](#) (Baptist minister and Theologian. Taught at Fuller Theological Seminary.)
- [Gordon Clark](#) (Christian Philosopher and Theologian.)
- [Francis Schaeffer](#) (Christian Philosopher, Theologian, and Presbyterian Pastor.)
- [Wayne Grudem](#) (well known Christian theologian, author, and professor)

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY AND CREDITS**

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Also see articles in the appendix for more sources.