INTRODUCTION TO REVELATION

The Book of Revelation was written by **His servant John** (Revelation 1:1) who, along with his initial readers, shared in Jesus **the suffering and kingdom and patience endurance** (Revelation 1:9). It was probably written about 95 *AD*. "The majority of scholars place the composition of the Apocalypse either during the reign of Domitian (A.D. 81-96) or toward the end of or immediately after the reign of Nero (A.D. 54-68)."

This John was in exile **on the island of Patmos** (off the west coast of Asia Minor) because of his steadfast **testimony of Jesus** (Revelation 1:9);² he was writing of things he heard and all that he saw in a revelation granted to him by Jesus Christ through a mediatory angel (Revelation 1:1-2). He was a prophet (Revelation 22:9) and his book is prophetic in nature (Revelation 1:3), as well as apocalyptic (see below). He never identifies himself as an apostle, and in Revelation 21:14 he refers to **the twelve apostles of the Lamb** without indicating whether or not he belonged to that group. The author has long been identified as John the Apostle, the son of Zebedee, but this is not conclusive from the book itself.

The original recipients of the letter were seven churches (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea) in Asia (Revelation 1:4).³ They were suffering persecution, perhaps because they refused to worship Emperor Domitian. John was calling them to resist this and similar evil so as to see Satan's defeat, not only in the end as the book clearly portrays, but in their lives at the present time.

¹ Mounce, Robert, *The Book of Revelation – Revised*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI., 1998, pg. 15.

² This sentence was likely that of a local authority, expressing Rome's general policy toward Christianity—a policy which saw the first persecution of Christians under Emperor Domitian.

³ All of these churches were within one hundred miles of Ephesus, where tradition reports John returned and died sometime after 98 AD.

Revelation⁴ is a translation of the Greek word *apokalupsis*, which occurs in Revelation 1:1. The book is sometimes known by the Anglicized transliteration⁵ of this Greek word, **Apocalypse**. As noted above, the book is both prophetic and apocalyptic.⁶ As literature, apocalyptic referred to a certain category (genre) of Judeo-Christian literature of the time (200 *BC*-100 *AD*) which concerned itself with events in history that lead up to the end of the Age and the consummation of the kingdom of God; apocalyptic literature used very vivid, symbolic language.

- The [apocalyptic] message is usually expressed in vivid symbolism, sometimes of a bizarre kind. It appears in difficult times [in history] and conveys to its readers the author's profound conviction that the troubles in which they find themselves are not the last word. God in His own time will intervene catastrophically and destroy evil.
- George Ladd holds that apocalyptic rose out of a historical milieu that involved a historical-theological problem consisting of three elements: (1) the emergence of a "righteous remnant" who maintained loyalty to the law over against the prevailing mood of compromise; (2) the problem of evil in the sense that even when Israel was apparently keeping the law she was undergoing suffering and national abuse; and (3) the cessation of prophecy at the very time when the people needed a divine explanation for their historical plight.⁸

Although there is much apocalyptic type literature from the time period, Revelation is the only biblical piece. Regarding its nature as apocalyptic/prophetic, Pickerill notes—

• The Book of Revelation is, strange as it sounds, one of the most difficult and yet at the same time one of the easiest books in the Bible to understand. It is easy because its theme is perfectly clear. It claims to be a prophecy of things to come with the main event centered in the coming of Jesus (Revelation 1:7; 19:11-16). One might get lost in the difficult symbolism and fail to see "the

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⁴ "The term 'revelation' in 1:1 refers not to the literary form of Revelation but rather to the revelatory experience of the author on the basis of which the book was written" (David Aune, *Revelation*, Word Books, Publisher, Dallas, TX., 1997, pg. 22).

⁵ To "transliterate" refers to writing a word in the letters of another alphabet when the letters of the two alphabets are different.

⁶ Revelation cannot be classified as pure apocalyptic because of the absence of certain elements common to the genre (such as the fact that John does not interpret the visions for us; the inclusion of the seven pastoral letters, etc.). However, its general nature follows the apocalyptic format (*i.e.*, "The extensive use of symbolism, the vision as a major instrument of revelation, concentration on the close of this age and the dramatic inauguration of the age to come, [and] the unveiling of the spiritual order lying behind and determining the course of events in history" [Robert Mounce, *op. cit.*, pg. 6]).

⁷ Morris, Leon, *The Revelation of St. John*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI., 1984 reprint, pp. 22-23.

⁸ Mounce, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3.

forest for the trees." But, the main message is manifest—God is on His throne (Revelation 5), the kingdom of God will triumph over all evil (Revelation 11:15) and the eternal inheritance of the people of God will be gloriously realized (Revelation 5:9-10 and Revelation 21-22).

He goes on to note the following about the symbolism.

• Symbols are really the best way to express such powerful spiritual truths as the Book of Revelation sets forth. Symbols alone can describe the indescribable. A picture of the American flag expresses a reality impossible to describe in a dozen words. So we do not easily forget Satan as a red dragon who can sweep the stars of heaven with his tail (Revelation 12:3-4) or Jesus victoriously riding on a white horse (Revelation 19:11). Much of the symbolism is drawn from the Old Testament. There are over 348 direct verbal quotations and symbolic allusions in Revelation from the Old Testament. Hence, much of the mystery of Revelation's symbolism unfolds as we remember the full scope of biblical symbolism and let it interpret itself. Symbolism also conceals. We need to know the final outcome of history, but it is not healthy for men to know the precise details. The Bible wisely keeps our anticipation alive (cf. Acts 1:7). The symbolism is the perfect vehicle to keep us studying and at the same time full of faith (faith which is humble and free from rigid interpretations which reject all other views in the Church). 10

Boismard notes—

• When the Seer describes a vision, he translates into symbols the ideas suggested by God; he goes on then, by accumulating colors, symbolic numbers, etc., without giving a thought to the resulting plastic effect. His purpose is, above all, to translate the ideas received from God, not to describe a coherent vision, an imaginable vision. To follow him to the end on the way he has chosen, one must play his game and convert into ideas the symbols he describes without troubling oneself about their incoherence. 11

Regarding an approach to interpreting the book, Luther said, "Everyone thinks of the book whatever his spirit imparts!" There are four basic schools of interpretation, however.

1) **Preterist/Contemporary-Historical**—this school states that the author was writing about the first century Church's clash with Rome (the beast of Revelation 13). According to the preterists, John has "nothing more in mind than [the first century

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⁹ Pickerill, Don, *Notes on Revelation - Introduction*, unpublished manuscript, LIFE Bible College @ Los Angeles, 1975.

¹⁰ *Ibid*.

¹¹ Boismard in Morris, *loc. cit.*

Church's situation." ¹² "The Church was threatened with practical extinction in the face of impending persecution, and John wrote to confirm the faith of believers that even though terrible persecution was at the door, God would intervene, Christ would return, Rome would be destroyed and the kingdom of God shortly established."13

Faced with the reality that this did not happen, the preterists hold that such is unimportant. The book served its purpose in strengthening and encouraging the firstcentury Church.

- 2) Historistic/Continuous-Historical—this school states that the book is an inspired forecast of the whole of human and Church history, especially the history of Western Europe and its Church from the first century to the Second Coming. Quite often in this school of thought, the Roman papacy is the beast and the Roman Catholic Church the false prophet (Revelation 12). One of the many problems with this school is that it claims Revelation is about the European Church, when it was in fact originally written to Asian churches.
- 3) Idealist/Symbolic—this school states that Revelation has relatively few references to specific events or persons in history. Rather, it is a symbolic portrayal of the spiritual conflict which exists between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. The beast, for example, is satanic evil rather than any specific person—past, present or future. "It simply sets out principles on which God acts throughout human history."¹⁴ Whereas apocalyptic literature was a symbolic genre, the difficulty with this school is it fails to remember that apocalyptic also concerned itself with specific end times historical events.
- 4) Futurist—this school sees Revelation as largely a prophetic forecast of history, especially as it concerns the Church in this Age. The seven letters were addressed to seven historical churches; the seals represent the forces of history (however long they may last), used by God to work out His plan of salvation. Beginning with either Revelation 8 or 16 (scholars vary), the events pertain exclusively to God's final will for human history, the Millennium and the Age to Come. 15

¹² Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 16.

Ladd, George, A Commentary on the Revelation of John, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI., 1972, pg. 11.

¹⁴ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 18.

¹⁵ Dispensationalism is a sub-unit of the futurist school, sometimes termed the extreme futurist view. "The seven letters are seen as seven successive ages of Church history symbolically portrayed. The character of

Before taking a stance on which of these four views will be taken in this work, it is necessary to say something about prophecy in general; this is important because Revelation is both prophetic and apocalyptic.

The general nature of biblical prophecy is not so much to give a precise chart of the future, as it is to give prophetic understanding of the present (*cf.* 2 Peter 1:19A). Furthermore, prophecy can have multiple applications and/or multiple fulfillments. For example, in Jesus' famous Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24; Luke 21), in which He talked about upcoming wars and tumults, great earthquakes, famines and great signs from heaven, Matthew and Luke present the same prophetic material in answer to two different questions! According to Matthew, Jesus was responding to a question regarding His return and the close of this Age, including the appearance of the Antichrist (Matthew 24:3-15); according to Luke, He was responding to the matter of the destruction of the Jewish Temple and the fall of Jerusalem, which we know happened in 70 *AD*. ¹⁶

What does all this mean? It means that what happens in history, especially in the history addressed by the biblical, prophetic writers, can have both an <u>immediate</u> and <u>futuristic</u> fulfillment. From the Olivet Discourse, we see that Roman Emperors can be forerunners of the Antichrist (*cf.* 1 John 4:3), and the destruction of Jerusalem a preview of the events and happenings at the end of this Age. The same evil powers operating through Rome will continue throughout history and dominate/climax at the end of this Age. The events of Revelation, then, happen to some degree throughout history, with an obvious intense climax at the end of this Age. This study, therefore, will adopt a blending of the idealist and futurist (non-dispensational) views, looking for the ongoing fulfillment of certain principles and events in history, as well as gaining a feel for what the future

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the seven churches depicts the chief characteristics of the seven periods of Church history, the last of which will be a period of decline and apostasy (Laodicea). The rapture of John (4:1) symbolizes the rapture of the Church at the end of the age. Chapters 6-18 depict the period of the Great Tribulation—the last short but terrible period of Church history when the Antichrist will all but destroy God's people. In the dispensational view, God's people are Israel, restored to Jerusalem, protected by a divine sealing (7:1-8), with a rebuilt temple (11:1-3), who suffer the wrath of Antichrist. The Church is no longer on earth, for it has been caught up to be with the Lord in the air" (George Ladd, *op. cit.*, pg. 12). In dispensationalism, the Millennium is the time when a Jewish theocracy, with the Temple, the sacrificial system, and the Law of Moses, are restored and the Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel's future political triumph over the Gentiles are literally and physically (geographically) fulfilled.

¹⁶ Other such examples of this principle can be found in Amos 5, Isaiah 13 and Daniel 12.

will ultimately hold as God consummates His reign. This interpretive view also fits with the scheme of apocalyptic literature.

OUTLINE OF REVELATION

- Appreciating God Almighty (Revelation 1)
- Jesus' Relationship to His Church (Revelation 1)
- What Jesus Hates in the Church (Revelation 2-3)
- What Jesus Loves in the Church (Revelation 2-3)
- What Jesus Promises the Church (Revelation 2-3)
- The Importance of Worship and Nature of God's Throne Room (Revelation 4)
- Jesus, God's Overseer of Human History (Revelation 5)
- Why the Negatives of Human History? (Revelation 6)
- Protection from the Wrath of God (Revelation 7)
- God's Powerful "Shaking" of Sinners (Revelation 8-9)
- God's Reassurance to His Faithful Servant, John (Revelation 10)
- National Israel's Salvation (Revelation 11)
- Spiritual Dynamics Behind the Scenes of Daily Life (Revelation 12)
- Satan's Consummate Henchmen (Revelation 13)
- God's Sovereignty Reaffirmed (Revelation 14-15)
- "Keep Awake, Saints!" (Revelation 16)
- God's Consummate Judgment of Sinful Civilization (Revelation 17-18)
- Jesus Christ Returns (Revelation 19)
- The Final Judgment and Christ's Intermittent Reign (Revelation 20)
- Heaven on Earth (Revelation 21-22)

REVELATION 1:1-3—

These verses give the source of the book's message and John's role in the process; they also pronounce promised blessing upon those who read, hear and keep what is said. This indicates that the Book of Revelation can be understood, giving us a road map for understanding life now as well as insight into how history will climax.

Revelation's message originated with God the Father, who first revealed it to Jesus (cf. Mark 13:32) for the purpose of showing the message to **His servants** (vs. 1). **Servants** refers to all Jesus' servants (the community of faith) from that time to the close of this Age. **To show** (Greek, deiknumi) has the idea of revealing through significant signs, an important fact to remember as the book unfolds.

That which was to be shown or revealed was **what must soon take place** (vs. 1). This does not mean **soon** in terms of the clock, but "the definite, imminent time of fulfillment, which likely has already begun in the present." The future was always imminent to the biblical prophet, for the emphasis was more on the certainty of events and our responsibility to that certainty than it was on any precise time on the clock of history (*cf.* Mark 13:33). **Must** (Greek, *dei*) indicates that what was written in the book was divinely predestined.

The Father's revelation to Jesus was then revealed through an **angel** to John (vs. 1), who, by writing down what he saw, **testifie[d]** to everything he saw—that is to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ (vs. 2). The three-fold blessing of vs. 3 to the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy¹⁸...and [to] those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it proves that Revelation is not just to inform us of the close of this Age. "The Revelation was given not merely to impart information about the future but to help God's people in the present, who must therefore keep what is written in the words of the prophecy." ¹⁹

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⁹ Ladd, *op. cit.*, pg. 23.

¹⁷ Beale, G.K., *The Book of Revelation*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI., 1999, pp. 181-182.

¹⁸ "Since he calls his book 'the words of this prophecy' (NIV) and the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible had been included in synagogue services as readings complementary to readings from the Pentateuch, John places his book on an equal footing with OT Scripture" (David Aune, *op. cit.*, pg. 23).

Taking into consideration the message of Revelation as a whole, **because the time is near** (vs. 3) has two meanings: 1) the prophetic words were imminent; and 2) God's kingdom was already penetrating Satan's.

REVELATION 1:4-8—

The seven churches in the province of Asia (vs. 4A) comprised the original recipients and represent God's Church throughout history, even as do the churches at Ephesus or Corinth in their respective letters. Grace to you and peace (vs. 4), though a common literary greeting of the day,²⁰ would have been particularly comforting to those suffering persecution at the time; they also show that the message of Revelation is positive and understandable.

From Him who is, and who was, and who is to come (vs. 4) refers in context to the Father (cf. Exodus 3:14 in the LXX), as Jesus Christ is expressly mentioned separately in vs. 5.²¹ "Just as Moses is told by God to tell the people that 'the one who is' had sent him, so John legitimates his prophetic book by claiming that it was inspired by 'the one who is'."

From the seven spirits before His throne (vs. 4) is an obscure and difficult phrase, variously interpreted. The same phrase occurs elsewhere in the book (Revelation 3:1; 4:5; 5:6), and is generally agreed to refer to the Holy Spirit in His fullness or completeness (*cf.* Zechariah 4).²³ "The expression is most likely a figurative designation of the effective working of the Holy Spirit...who empowers the church to be effective as a burning lamp of witness in the world (v 20), which is why He is included in v 4."²⁴

The three appositives attached to **Jesus Christ** in vs. 5 are very important, for they reaffirm His roles as Prophet (**the faithful witness**), Priest (**the firstborn from the dead**) and King (**the Ruler of the kings of the earth**). This last appositive also reaffirms the truth that Christ, not the Emperor or any other human ruler, is or ever will be the true

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²⁰ Revelation 1:4-5A and 22:21 contain elements from the epistolary genre of the day.

²¹ **Who is to come** emphasizes the Father's future role in history; He is to be active throughout history. It is not a reference to Jesus' return.

²² Aune, *op. cit.*, pg. 40.

²³ See from the seven Spirits who are before His throne [NASB] and from the sevenfold Spirit [TNIV footnote reading].

²⁴ Beale, *op. cit.*, pg. 189.

Ruler of the Earth, especially of God's people. These designations are a fulfillment of Psalm 89:28, 38.

John's heart next burst forth into praise for what Jesus has done for us (vv. 5B-6). Addressing the praise directly to Jesus as opposed to the Father served to emphasize God's redemptive action in Him. John reminds us that glory and dominion belong to Jesus Christ and not to any other ruler or ruling power. Such glory and dominion are to be afforded Him for ever and ever! John then notes three essential ministries of Jesus to us—1) He loves us (present tense); 2) He has freed²⁵ us from our sins by His blood; and 3) He has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve His God and Father (*cf.* Exodus 19:6). Has made us to be a kingdom means believers have been made participants in the messianic reign; the appositional clause,²⁶ priests to serve His God and Father, further defines our main function in that reign—people of imputed kingly status who offer thanksgiving, worship and praise to God (*cf.* Isaiah 61:6).

Drawing from Daniel 7:13 and Zechariah 12:10-14, John states in vs. 7 the ultimate goal of history ("**He is coming with the clouds**"), the universal scope of His return ("**every eye will see Him**") and the judgment process that will accompany His coming (**all peoples on earth "will mourn because of Him"**). No matter what God's people may be facing at any time in history, God wants us assured of the fact that Jesus is returning and His Parousia will mark the beginning of the end of satanic opposition (*cf.* Matthew 29:29-31; 2 Thessalonians 2:8; Revelation 20). Regarding the practical outworking of the fact that "**every eye will see Him**," Ladd notes—

• It is idle to speculate how this event will occur and how it will be possible for Jesus to be visible to the whole world at once. What the passage means to say is that the lordship which is His now, but recognized only by believers and confessed only by faith, will become inescapably evident to the whole world. It is interesting to note that this event is nowhere described in terms of this verse in Revelation. The return of Christ is pictured in chapter 19 where He comes riding on a battle horse to overthrow the enemies of God.²⁷

"Every eye will see Him" is further described by "even those who pierced Him" (vs.

7). This could refer to only those directly involved in Christ's Crucifixion, but it

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²⁵ Washed [NKJV] is based on an inferior Greek textual reading.

²⁶ See NRSV contra TNIV.

²⁷ Ladd, op. cit., pg. 28.

probably has the idea of all who have rejected Him throughout history. **Mourn** (Greek, koptomai) has the idea of uncontrollable mourning, accompanied by the beating of one's breast (wail [NRSV]). This wailing will be on His account, as the unrepentant undoubtedly recognize their lost-ness. John "predicts the Parousia ('coming') of Christ as a cosmic event that will be witnessed by all and anticipates the distress and fear of unbelievers about to experience judgment (and so anticipates 19:11-16)."28

John's terse response to all this, So shall it be! Amen (vs. 7), was not a cold-hearted response to sinners' judgment; rather, it solidified the certainty and expectancy believers can have of Jesus' Parousia and His judgment over all opposing forces.

The salutation closes with an affirmation of God the Father's sovereignty and authority over all history, "I am the Alpha and the Omega...the Almighty" (vs. 8). 29 Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet; **Omega** is the last letter. They "represent the Hebrew Aleph and Tau, which were regarded not simply as the first and last letters of the alphabet, but as including all the letters in between...[setting] forth God as the sovereign Lord over everything that takes place in the entire course of human history." The **Almighty** reaffirms God's authoritative rulership; He is omnipotent. Neither history's rulers nor conflicts affect Him or His plans. This is a central message of Revelation.

REVELATION 1:9-11—

John once again identifies himself and his location at the time of the revelation (vs. 9). Was on the island of Patmos seems to indicate that he was not there at the time of the actual writing, only at the time of the revelation.³¹ **Patmos** was a "small, treeless, scantily populated island...whither criminals were some-times banished by the Roman authorities."³² He was indeed experiencing the suffering, even as the churches were to whom he was writing. But at the same time, he was living in the reality of **the kingdom**,

²⁸ Aune, *op. cit.*, pg. 59.

²⁹ This is a quote by the Father, contrary to the fact it is printed in red in the TNIV and NKJV. Alpha and Omega is used again as a designation of the Father in Revelation 21:6; Jesus uses it of Himself in Revelation 22:13.

³⁰ Mounce, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-52.

³¹ The command of Revelation 1:11 to "write on a scroll what you see" does not necessarily mean he was to have pen in hand at the time of the revelation.

³² Moffatt, James, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI., 1979 reprint, pg. 341.

the two realities together producing the fruit of **patient endurance** (vs. 9). The Book of Revelation, then, is one Christian writing other Christians about understanding life's hassles, understanding God's rulership in our lives and understanding the attitude necessary to go through life successfully. He found himself on Patmos **because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus** (vs. 9). This probably means that he was there as a form of persecution and banishment because of his faith.³³

Though experiencing the realities of banishment on **Patmos**, one certain **Lord's day** (an undefined phrase referring either to a Sunday, Easter Sunday or a Saturday [the Jewish Sabbath]), he **was in the Spirit** (vs. 10). This phrase, which occurs again at Revelation 4:2; 17:3 and 21:10, refers to a supernatural, ecstatic experience in which John was saturated with the presence of the Spirit. It does not necessarily mean he was unconscious, but it may have been trance-like (*cf.* Acts 10:10-11).³⁴ While in this state, John heard behind [him] a loud voice like a trumpet (vs. 10), directing him to, "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea" (vs. 11). All but two of these churches were located in cities in the region of Lydia, which at the time was a virtual by-word for voluptuous civilization. It is not difficult, therefore, to understand why they were having some of the struggles mentioned in Revelation 2-3.³⁵

REVELATION 1:12-16—

John turned around to see the voice that was speaking (vs. 12) and saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands...someone like a son of man (vv. 12-13). The Old Testament knows of seven pronged lampstands, but the fact that there were seven different lampstands has no Old Testament precedent. They are defined in Revelation 1:20 as representing the seven churches to whom the letter was written. The fact that there were seven different lampstands affirms what is true in reality—God's Church is dispersed throughout the world in the form of numerous individual congregations. The fact that they were golden represents their worth and value.

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³³ See note #1 above.

³⁴ The NRSV translates **I was in the spirit** (i.e., in a trance).

³⁵ "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last" (NKJV, vs. 11) is based on inferior Greek textual evidence and is best left out (*cf.* RSV, NRSV, NASB and TNIV).

The **someone like a son of man** is clearly Jesus Christ (*One* like the Son of Man [NKJV]) as the description in vv. 13-16 and the dialogue in Revelation 1:17-18 affirm. His position **among the lampstands** confirms that He was/is present in His churches, regardless of what accusation He may have against local congregations (Revelation 2-3), or what they might be facing, either currently or in the future (Revelation 4 *ff*). The phrase **a son of man** harkens back to Daniel's term for the Messiah (Daniel 7:13); it was Jesus' favorite self-designation.

A robe reaching down to His feet and...a golden sash around His chest (vs. 13) do not necessarily mean He was dressed like a priest. They likely simply defined clothing of distinction.

The hair on His head was white like wool, as white as snow (vs. 14) symbolizes wisdom and dignity, a description Daniel 7:9 gives to Yahweh. This wisdom and dignity do not mean He is weak or feeble, however. His eyes were like blazing fire (vs. 14), signifying Christ is energetic and spirited.

The translation of the metal symbolizing His feet (vs. 15) is difficult, as the Greek word (*chalkolibanon*) is unknown apart from two uses in Revelation. It probably refers to some sort of polished **bronze** (RSV, NRSV, NASB, TNIV), although it could be referring to a **fine brass** (NKJV). At any rate, it described a precious metal and served to convey its intent—Christ is majestic!

The fact that **His voice was like the sound of rushing waters** (vs. 15) draws attention to the reality that when Christ speaks, He is to be heeded. Such a voice is certainly awe awakening. Again, this is a description of Yahweh in the Old Testament (*cf.* Ezekiel 43:2), a fact that serves to reinforce the truth that Christ is God Himself. The **sharp**, **double-edged sword** issuing from His mouth (vs. 16) bespeaks His sternness and authority, especially against His enemies. When He speaks, His words come to pass. It is interesting to note that the only weapon of warfare that Christ uses to conquer is a sword proceeding out of His mouth (Revelation 19:15). Concerning this particular image, Ladd notes, "Taken literally, this would indeed be a grotesque picture; but understood symbolically, it expresses a sublime truth. He shall speak, and it shall be done. This

transcends all human imagination and speculation. It is, however, analogous to the account of the creation: God spoke, and it was done (Genesis 1:3)."³⁶

The final description noted that **His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance** (vs. 16). This describes Christ's incredible glory, and is reminiscent of that revealed at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:2).

REVELATION 1:17-20—

John's response to the revelation of Jesus' majesty and greatness was to fall at His feet as though dead (vs. 17). This was biblically typical (cf. Ezekiel 1:28; Daniel 8:17). It was a fitting response to the realization of Christ's fullness. Christ responded with an authoritative and comforting touch; He placed His right hand on John (vs. 17), speaking words to him that further affirmed His deity, sovereignty and greatness. "Do not be afraid" (vs. 17) was a command not only to John, but also indirectly to the seven churches and to the Church in persecution throughout this Age. "I am the First and the Last" (vs. 17) is another way of stating that He is in control of all history; His sovereignty is the same as the Father's (Revelation 1:8).

"I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever!" (vs. 18) emphasizes Christ's supremacy over humankind's number one enemy, death (cf. Hebrews 2:14-15); it also shows His personal identity with the death process, an identity most precious to those who may have to give up their lives for the sake of the gospel (cf. Revelation 7:9-17). "I hold the keys of death and Hades" (vs. 18) shows that He is the One in charge of people's eternal destinies. He determines when people shall die and what shall happen to them after death. Hades is a complex dynamic in the New Testament, here representing humankind's general state after death. 37 The implication for the letter's recipients is—if Christian martyrdom awaits any because of their faith, so be it; it is merely a doorway to eternal victory and to the presence of the Victor. It also assures them that Christ will dole out just eternal punishment to their spiritual enemies.

³⁶ Ladd, *op. cit.*, pg. 33.

³⁷ Generally speaking Hades is the current "holding place" of the unrighteous dead who are awaiting the future resurrection of the dead when they will be judged and cast into hell (Revelation 20:11-15). It apparently has all the same dynamics as hell itself.

John was then given the same command that the voice had given him earlier (Revelation 1:10-11), namely, "Write, therefore..." (vs. 19). He was told to "write what you have seen" (referring to the vision of Christ), "both what is now" (referring to the letters to the seven churches), and "what will take place later" (referring to the events of Revelation 4-22).

Revelation 1 closes with an interpretation of the symbolism of the **lampstands** and of the **seven stars** seen held in Christ's **right hand** (Revelation 1:16). "**The seven lampstands are the seven churches**"—that is, congregations that represent His Church throughout history (vs. 20). "**The mystery of the seven stars that you saw...are the angels of the seven churches**" (vs. 20) is problematic, leading to much speculation. These angels are mentioned again in each of the individual letters of Revelation 2-3, in the form of the immediate addressees.

There are three major considerations as to what is meant by **the angels**.

- **1. The angels** represented the bishops/pastors of the churches. This usage for angel is found no where else in the New Testament.
- **2. Angels** (Greek, *angeloi*) should be translated "messengers," referring to the carriers of the seven letters. Whereas this is a legitimate rendering of *angeloi*, it is difficult to see why so much emphasis would be given to a "postman."
- **3.** The angels of the seven churches were just that—angels assigned to individual congregations to minister to them as they do to individuals (*cf.* Matthew 18:10; Hebrews 1:14) and nations (Daniel 10:13; 12:1). As such, they were representatives of each congregation. This is the easiest and most literal understanding, but leaves many unanswered questions as such a concept is taught nowhere else in the Bible.

The essence of the symbolism of **the seven stars** is clear, however. Jesus has all aspects of His Church (churches) authoritatively under control; we are "**in [His] right hand**" (Revelation 1:16). He is aware of and involved in the life of each local congregation as He stands **among the lampstands** (Revelation 1:13).³⁸

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³⁸ The fact that Revelation 1:20 interprets these two mysterious symbols shows us that God wants the symbolism of Revelation understood. He realizes it is full of mystery (truth that needs divine insight to

REVELATION 2—

Revelation 2 contains the first four letters of Christ to selected churches in Asia. These letters fulfill one aspect of the prophetic nature of Revelation (Revelation 1:3), in that they reveal the Spirit's assessment of various local matters (Revelation 2:7, et al).

• A true insight into this section as a message of prophecy leads us to expect just here in the outset some such direct and searching address to the Church regarding its own life. The first concern of the church is its own present state, its fidelity to all that the Lord requires of it; and only thus can it prepare itself for the future.³⁹

A simple reading of these letters reveals that they were addressed to specific congregations battling real problems; at the same time, they contain commendations, indictments and promises applicable to all of God's people throughout this Age, even as Jesus standing in the midst of these congregations symbolizes His presence in all local Christian churches throughout this Age (Revelation 1:13). They are timeless messages for the Church, even as the other New Testament Epistles are.

• The seven churches addressed were actual churches in the cities mentioned. They are representative of all churches of that time, as well as churches in all subsequent generations. The letters are to be interpreted historically, pastorally, and practically, with immediate application instructing the seven actual Asian churches; with ongoing application to all local churches throughout church history, giving discernment as to where they stand spiritually before the Lord; and with ongoing personal application, exhorting the individual to be an overcomer. 40

This is further supported by the "Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (italics added) which is repeated in each of the letters. ⁴¹

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understand), but the purpose of biblical mystery is not to keep us in undue suspense through baffling enigmas. Its intent is to press us to Him and His entire Book for as much interpretation as is possible (*cf.* Jesus' reason for teaching with parables [Mark 4:10-12]).

³⁹ Beckwith, Ibson, *The Apocalypse of John*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI., 1979 reprint, pg. 259. ⁴⁰ Morey, Earl, *Revelation* in *Spirit Filled Life Bible* [Jack Hayford, General Editor], Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN., 1991, pg. 1962.

⁴¹ Many within the dispensational school of interpretation see another dimension in these seven letters. They feel the letters have a "hidden" application, that of prophesying seven epochs of the Church in this Age—sometimes referred to as the "predictive/prophetic interpretation" of the letters. "The [predictive] prophetic interpretation of the messages to the seven churches, to be sure, should not be pressed beyond bounds, as it is a deduction from the content, not from the explicit statement of the passage; however...a study of the messages to the seven churches, and the general trend indicated, confirm other Scripture that, instead of progressive improvement and a trend toward righteousness and peace in the church age, it may be expected that the age will end in failure as symbolized in the church of Laodicea" (John Walvoord, *The*

REVELATION 2:1-7—

This first of the seven letters within Revelation was written "to the angel of the **church in Ephesus"** (vs. 1). The same difficulties arise here as arose in Revelation 1:20 in terms of identifying "the angel" (see note on Revelation 1:20). Whoever "the angel" was, the letter makes it clear that its message was intended for both the congregation as a whole and every individual within it (vv. 5B, 7).

"In the spread of Christianity, [Ephesus] became an important center; St. Paul made it the seat of his ongoing missionary work in Asia (Acts 19); Apollos labored there (Acts 18); Timothy was placed there for a considerable time (1 & 2 Timothy);...it was reported to be the center of the work of the John of Asia Minor."⁴² In the first century, Ephesus was an important seaport in Asia. It was also one of the principal religious centers in the Graeco-Roman world. At one point in its history, it had three temples dedicated to the worship of the Roman Emperor. Luke tells us that it was also "the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven" (Acts 19:35). "The image, which fell from heaven" likely referred to a meteorite which fell and was enshrined in conjunction with Artemis.

 Artemis was the Greek name of a goddess [Latin: Diana (cf. NKJV)] who had been identified in Hellenistic syncretism with an Asiatic goddess. While Artemis was a virgin goddess, the patron of hunting, the Asian goddess was a fertility goddess. She was represented as a female figure with many breasts...and an image of her was placed in the great temple at Ephesus which ranked as one of the seven wonders of the world.⁴³

Jesus as authoritative Protector of the churches ("the words of Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand" [vs. 1]) and as the One involved in their lives ("and walks among the seven golden lampstands" [vs. 1]) is reaffirmed prior to the content of the letter. The letter begins with a commendation, "I know your deeds," which is then further defined as "your hard work and your perseverance" (vs. 2). Both spiritually

Revelation of Jesus Christ, Moody Press, Chicago, IL., 1974, pp. 52-53). By way of a practical implication, perhaps the most unfortunate offshoot of this "predictive/prophetic interpretation" is that it has caused much of the Church in the last century to cease contending for the advancement of the kingdom of God over the kingdom of darkness in practical living. After all, if the Church is going to "go out" in defeat, amidst wide-spread apostasy, why contend for anything other than "getting people saved" and teaching them to hang on by "the skin of their teeth" until the Rapture?

⁴² Beckwith, *op. cit.*, pg. 447. ⁴³ *Ibid*.

and in everyday life, the Ephesians were copious and patient. Barclay translates **perseverance** as "the courageous gallantry which accepts suffering and hardship and loss and turns them into grace and glory."⁴⁴

They were further commended in that they did not "tolerate wicked people" (vs. 2). The fact that they had "tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and [had] found them false" (vs. 2) indicates that the evildoers were false teachers/leaders claiming apostolic authority. Their attack was in keeping with Paul's final warning to the Ephesian elders, "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock" (Acts 20:29).

The Ephesians were again commended because they "persevered and...endured hardships for [His] name, and have not grown weary" (vs. 3). "Have not grown weary" (vs. 3) connotes not only that they were doing well spiritually, but that they had remained doctrinally pure amidst the input by false teachers.

By way of a strong adversative ("Yet"; Greek, *alla* [vs. 4]), Jesus turned from commendation to indictment. "I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first" (vs. 4). Because the object of the lost love is not defined, commentators and translators are divided. Weymouth insists it was love for Christ that had been lost and paraphrases, "You no longer love Me." Moffatt insists it was love for fellow believers that was lost, rendering it, "You have given up loving one another." Other commentators think it might have been an evangelistic love for humankind in general.

The fact that they were inwardly "endur[ing] hardships" (vs. 3) and the fact that a part of the solution to their problem was that they "do the things [they] did at first" (vs. 5; emphasis mine), seem to indicate that their problem lay with each other and not with a love for Christ. Paul had at one point commended them for their love for all His people (Ephesians 1:15), a love which by this time had apparently waned. It appears the contests with the false apostles had somehow hardened the hearts of the second generation of Ephesian Christians against servicing fellow believers.

Jesus' solution to the situation was, "Consider how far you have fallen!" (recall the past which was marked by service); "repent" (make a 180 degree change in thinking and action); "and do the things you did at first" (start to once again do the acts of service

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⁴⁴ William Barclay, quoted in Morris, op. cit., pg. 354.

you know to do [vs. 5]). Tied to Jesus' solution was a very sober warning, "If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place" (vs. 5). This means that unless they changed their thinking and again started serving each other in love, Jesus would see to it that the Ephesian congregation was eliminated, likely by removing His blessing on the congregational life so that it underwent natural attrition. A local church without demonstrated love for the brethren is a reproach to His name; His reputation is better off if the congregation does not exist. Interestingly, "Ephesus declined as a city after the fifth century, and the Turks deported its remaining inhabitants in the fourteenth century."

Vs. 6 returns to a commendation, as Jesus noted that they hated "the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." "The practices of the Nicolaitans" likely refers to false teaching permitting idolatry and immorality (cf. vs. 2; Revelation 2:14-15); no one knows with certainty who "the Nicolaitans" were. They are not spoken of in any Greek literature, and are biblically mentioned only in Revelation. Some feel Nicolaitans (derived from a Greek root meaning, "to conquer") is a symbolic name, referring to anyone who conquers the laity through false teaching.

Again, "Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (vs. 7) indicates that the essence of this message goes beyond Ephesus; it is for every individual in all of God's Church throughout this Age. As each of these seven letters was most likely circulated together with the rest of Revelation, each of the other six churches would have read this message and noted its import. This hortatory also links Jesus' voice with that of the Spirit. They are one and the same authority.

"Those who are victorious" (vs. 7) refers to everyone who "passes successfully through life's temptations and the judgment after death." ⁴⁷ 1 John 5:5 tells us that this victory is accomplished by believing that Jesus is the Son of God. The Bible assumes

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⁴⁵ This does not mean, however, He would destroy the individuals and banish them to hell.

⁴⁶ Walvoord, *op. cit.*, pg. 57. A couple of notes of interest from the Greek text of Revelation 2:4-5. "I will come" (vs. 5), though future tense in most English Bibles, is in the Greek present tense; this use of the Greek present emphasizes the certainty of a yet future event. It could be translated, "I am most certainly coming!" Also, Greek, unlike English, has both a singular and plural form of "you/your." Both you and your in Revelation 2:4-5 are Greek singulars, indicating that Jesus saw the situation in the church as belonging to every individual comprising it. The indictment and the call to change, then, were to each individual there, regardless of how he/she might perceive him/herself relative to the situation in the church.

⁴⁷ Moffatt, *op. cit.*, pg. 352.

Christians will live a life of victory. "All believers are overcomers, but those who remain faithful in the midst of persecution and doctrinal error give proof to their faith." Although the judgments to the churches were clear and severe, the eternal destiny of the unrepentant, erring believers is not clearly discussed.

"To eat from the tree of life" (vs. 7) is synonymous with living in the consummated messianic kingdom (the Age to Come [cf. Genesis 3:22]), a promise to anyone whose name is found written "in the book of life" (Revelation 20:15); yet, this promise is not to be taken for granted as if a legal relationship with Jesus Christ precluded a proper subsequent life-style. "The paradise" translates a Persian loan word and means something like "park/garden"; it describes the bliss that is part of the heaven in which God lives (cf. Luke 23:43).⁴⁹

REVELATION 2:8-11—

The second letter was addressed "to the angel of the church in Smyrna" (vs. 8) and, unlike the letter to Ephesus, contains only commendation. Smyrna was located about thirty-five miles north of Ephesus and today is Ismir in Asiatic Turkey. "Smyrna was one of the greatest cities of the region, and indeed disputed with Ephesus for the title 'First (city) of Asia'...It was one of the first cities to engage in worship of the Roman emperor and it won the honour of erecting a temple to him in the reign of Tiberius." There is no New Testament record of the church's founding.

Jesus' introduction, "the words of Him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again" (vs. 8), harkens back to Revelation 1:17-18. It serves two purposes here: 1) to reinforce His sovereignty over history (an important element to those suffering persecution in history); and 2) to remind the Smyrniote Christians, themselves facing possible death for their faith, that He had first hand experience with death—an experience which resulted in victory through resurrection. The Greek verb tense behind "came to life" (aorist) emphasizes this latter element; it could be translated, "sprang back to life." Death did not have the final word.

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⁴⁸ Morey, *op. cit.*, pg. 1962.

⁴⁹ Those opting for the dispensational predictive interpretation of this letter see Ephesus as representative of the Church at the close of the first century.

⁵⁰ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 63.

Jesus next stated that He was keenly aware of their "afflictions" and "poverty" and "the slander" against them (vs. 9). He would not intervene to prevent any of this now, but He would comfort them by informing them of His awareness and by giving them guidance to face the situation (vs. 10). "Afflictions" (Greek, thlipsis) means serious trouble or a burden that crushes. Although not clearly stated, it appears from the context that this tribulation was in the form of persecution for their faith. "Poverty" (Greek, ptoxheia) means having nothing at all, being in extreme physical poverty. Smyrna was prosperous, so they had apparently lost materially because of their Christianity, likely through boycotting. He reminded them, however, that they were spiritually rich (vs. 9); He had no indictment against them.

"The slander [was] of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan" (vs. 9). The exact nature of the slander is not stated; the fact that it lead to imprisonment (vs. 10) makes it fairly obvious it had something to do with accusing the Christians of being insubordinate to Rome. "They are Jews" by birth, but in reality are not; this probably does not mean they were practicing a false form of Judaism, but that they had rejected the Messiah (cf. Romans 2:28-29). In the same light, the fact that they were "a synagogue of Satan" does not necessarily mean they were directly worshiping Satan. It derives from the fact that not being a Christian makes one a child of the devil (cf. John 8:44), whose purpose and intent are to slander believers (cf. Revelation 12:10).

• The letter reflects the fact that Smyrna contained a substantial colony of Jews who were aggressively hostile to Christianity and who exercised considerable influence with the civil authorities. Some years later, the Jews joined the Gentiles to form a mob and to call for the death of the bishop of the church, Polycarp. They actively assisted in his martyrdom by burning and prevented the Christians from getting possession of his body. 51

Alerting them to yet increased persecution, Jesus called them to resist fear and to endure (vs. 10). "Thou orderest us to endure, not to love, trials. A man may love to endure, but he does not love what he endures." Although "the Jews" were the human agents, the real authority doing the persecution was "the devil [who] will put some of

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⁵¹ Ladd, *op. cit.*, pg. 42.

⁵² Augustine, quoted in Moffatt, *op. cit.*, pg. 354.

[them] in prison" (vs. 10). The purpose for the imprisonment was "to test [them]." Some commentators see this as a Job-like experience, stating that God was orchestrating the situation to purify the Smyrniote Christians. This is unlikely in that the Greek construction behind **so that** makes it clear it was Satan who had purposed to oppose them, so as to test the validity of their Christian confession.

As noted earlier, Jesus did not choose to intervene and prevent this persecution. As "the First and the Last" He did assure them, however, that the imprisonment would be relatively short; "ten days" (vs. 10) could be taken literally, but is likely symbolic for "a relatively short time." Ten is often a biblical number for a short, yet complete time (*cf.* Daniel 1:12-14; Genesis 24:55). The command to "be faithful, even to the point of death" (vs. 10) has the idea of demonstrating faithfulness even amidst martyrdom. The reward for such faithfulness would be a "victor's crown" (eternal life [*cf.* James 1:12]).

Once again Jesus says, "Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (vs. 11). The letter then closes with a reminder that "those who are victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death" (vs. 11)—*i.e.*, though they give their lives physically for the gospel, they would not be banished to eternal punishment in the lake of fire (*cf.* Revelation 20:6, 14; 21:8). ⁵³

REVELATION 2:12-17—

The third letter was addressed "to the angel of the church in Pergamum" (vs. 12). Located forty-five miles north of Smyrna and fifteen miles inland, Pergamum was not only the seat of the Roman government for Asia Minor, but an important religious center, including the center for Emperor-worship.

• Pergamum was an important religious centre. People came from all over the world to be healed by the god Asclipius, and Pergamum has been described as "the Lourdes of the ancient world." Zeus, Dionysos, and Athene also had notable temples in the city. Pergamum was a centre of Caesar-worship, and it had a temple dedicated to Rome and Augustus as early as 29 BC...It took its devotion to emperor-worship seriously.

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⁵³ Those opting for the dispensational predictive interpretation of this letter see Smyrna as representative of the Church from the beginning of the second century until the time of Constantine in the beginning of the fourth century.

⁵⁴ Morris, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-66.

Jesus' self-introduction as "Him who has the sharp, double-edged sword" (vs. 12) once again draws from the introduction (Revelation 1:16); it symbolizes Jesus as He who discerns truth (cf. Hebrews 4:12) and punishes evil (cf. Romans 13:4). Jesus was emphasizing this aspect of His person to show that He is more powerful than any earthly emperor and to remind Pegamum that He does have access to the "sword of correction/chastisement" to use "against them" that do not repent at Pergamum (vs. 16).

Jesus' commendation addressed their steadfast witness, even in the face of severe persecution (vs. 13). They are said to live "where Satan has his throne...where Satan lives." This has been variously interpreted. Alford contends it means that the Pergamum church was surrounded by satanic evil in general; Morris contends it had specific reference to Pergamum being the Asia Minor headquarters of Emperor-worship; Kennedy contends it referred to Pergamum being the center of Graeco-Roman idol worship in Asia Minor, including home to a two-hundred-foot-high altar to Zeus. All three of these ideas are probably included, the essence being that the church was in the midst of much satanic profligacy, both religious and political, which was pressing upon her (*cf.* I Peter 4:4).

At key, unspecified times in the past, the Pergamum Christians had been particularly hard pressed to deny the faith by returning to their former life-style; yet, they "did not renounce [their] faith in Me" (vs. 13). In one such instance, they saw "Antipas, My faithful witness...put to death in [their] city" (martyred [vs. 13]).

• (According to tradition) he was an old intrepid bishop of Pergamos whose prestige drew upon him the honour of being burned to death in a brazen bull during Domitian's reign. The sober truth is probably that he formed the first prominent victim in the local church, possibly in Asia Minor, to the demands of the Imperial cultus.⁵⁵

Jesus next dealt with His indictments, "I have a few things against you" (vs. 14). The indictments had to do with moral and doctrinal laxity that had crept in through compromise or indifference. First, "some among [them] hold to the teaching of Balaam" (vs. 14), a reference to the Old Testament prophet Balaam's leadership in Israel that lead to her downfall in Shittim (Numbers 25, 31). Regarding Balaam's persuasion of Balak, Ladd notes,

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⁵⁵ Moffatt, *op. cit.*, pg. 356.

 Balak, king of Moab, threatened by the Israelites, had invited the prophet Balaam to curse them. Balaam had been restrained by God and to Balak's disgust had blessed rather than cursed (Numbers 22-24). Subsequent to this, however, Israel had let herself become involved in harlotry and in the idolatrous worship of Baal of Peor (Numbers 25:1-3), and this sin was attributed to the advice of Balaam (Numbers 31:16). 56

In the spirit of Balaam then, some in Pergamum were teaching compromise with heathen practices. As to the specific sins mentioned, "they ate food sacrificed to idols" (vs. 14) could refer to eating meat which had been offered to idols and then sold in markets, a practice considered relative at Corinth (cf. I Corinthians 8) but possibly not at Pergamum because of its intense idolatry; however, it most likely refers to some sort of participation in idolatrous, demonic feasts (cf. I Corinthians 10:21). "Social relations with the heathen world would lead in some instances to partaking of the heathen feasts which in turn led to heathen immorality which was a part of the idolatrous worship."⁵⁷

To commit "sexual immorality" (Greek, porneuo [vs. 14]) refers to a wide variety of sexual misconduct, from general sexual immorality (adultery, fornication, homosexuality, bestiality, etc.), to cultic sexual practices, to heathen inter-marriage. The church was also tolerating a group holding "to the teaching of the Nicolaitans" (vs. 15). As with the teaching at Ephesus (Revelation 2:6), we do not know the exact nature of the Nicolaitan error. The Greek sentence structure seems to indicate that it was on the same continuum as that of Balak's error—inciting the Pergamenes to overall immorality.⁵⁸

Jesus' solution was simple and terse—"Repent therefore!" (vs. 16). The church as a whole was too tolerant of the problems and needed to voluntarily change both its thinking and practice toward those in error. "Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth" (vs. 16; cf. vs. 12). In other words, Jesus would speak judgment against those in error, but the entire congregation would obviously suffer. As to exactly what "fight against them with the sword of My mouth" would entail, we are not told. Moffatt conjectures the following,

 If she does not act on her own initiative and expel the wrongdoers (in the hope of them ultimately coming to a better mind), she must submit to having them

Ladd, *op. cit.*, pg. 47.
 Walvoord, *op. cit.*, pg. 68.

⁵⁸ Some commentators feel the Greek construction indicates that **the Nicolaitans** were the teachers of the Balak error; this is not clear, however.

cut out of her, and thus being irretrievably lost by death. The church is responsible for her erring members, and the exercise of discipline is viewed as a duty to them as well as to herself and God. Weak laxity is false kindness, the prophet implies; it merely exposes offenders to an alternative far more dreadful than discipline itself.⁵⁹

The letter closes with the familiar, "Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (vs. 17). The promise "to those who are victorious" is that of being given "some of the hidden manna [and]...a white stone" (vs. 17). "Hidden manna" (the symbolism being prompted by the reference to Balaam) has a wide variety of interpretations. Walvoord states it represents union with Christ Himself, "the true hidden Manna," especially as it applies to future fellowship with Him; Ladd states it is a metaphor for participation in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (cf. Revelation 19:9); Beckwith states it symbolically refers to partaking in the overall rewards of the consummated kingdom. Although its precise meaning remains a mystery, the fact that it is hidden likely has reference to the fact that it will be revealed only when the kingdom was consummated. It therefore refers to some sort of blessing in the Age to Come.

The "white stone" or amulet is also difficult. Scholars offer no less than seven major sources of meaning, all the way from legal symbolism in which jury members handed in a white stone for acquittal, to a Greek practice of gaining admission to a circus or feast with a white stone! So, it could be a symbolic promise of acquittal from eternal condemnation or it could symbolize a "ticket" to the messianic banquet for everyone who conquers. It is probably best, however, to simply view it as some unspecified symbol of victory and blessing, the essence being that of guaranteed future blessing for everyone who conquers.

The fact that "the white stone [has] a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it" (vs. 17) likely refers to the fact that the blessing is personalized and guaranteed, and will somehow have unique significance to each individual.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Moffatt, op. cit., pg. 358.

Those opting for the dispensational predictive interpretation of his letter see Pergamum as representative of the Church from the fourth through the seventh centuries.

REVELATION 2:18-29—

The fourth letter was "to the angel of the church in Thyatira" (vs. 18). This is the longest of the seven letters. Thyatira appears to have been a commercial center with a large number of trade guilds. Beyond this not very much is known of it. "This makes it difficult to be certain on some points and we must interpret this letter with due caution."

The title "the Son of God," which Jesus used as a self-designation (vs. 18), is found only here in Revelation. It is biblically rare, Jesus' favorite self-designation being Son of man. His statement that His "eyes are like blazing fire and...[His] feet are like burnished bronze" (cf. Revelation 1:14-15) serves to remind us that Jesus sees all and that He pursues and treads down evil.

His commends their "deeds...love...faith...service and perseverance," noting that they "are now doing more than [they] did at first" (vs. 19). Unlike the Ephesians, these believers were growing in demonstrations of their relationship with Him. "Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel" (vs. 20). They were tolerating doctrinal and moral error from one who "by her teaching...misleads My servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols" (vs. 20). This error was probably the same as that at Pergamum (see Revelation 2:14 above for the explanation).

Speculating as to why they have become so tolerant, Ford notes,

• ...the church in Thyatira tolerated this Nicolaitan teaching because it justified their membership in the city guilds and their sharing in the common meals...in any small town no citizen is a stranger and the penalties of ostracism can easily be inflicted if one does not fall in with the general trend of ideas. One's livelihood might be jeopardized if one refrained from joining a trade guild. 62

It is the general consensus among scholars that **Jezebel** here is a symbolic name for the woman heading up this false teaching; the symbolism is intended to tie her into the spirit and strategy of the Old Testament Queen Jezebel. She was likely a part of the congregation, since she was being heeded and tolerated; her inroad was that she "[called] herself a prophet" (vs. 20), a designation which many were obviously accepting. We

⁶¹ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 70.

⁶² Ford, J. Massynberde, *Revelation*, Doubleday & Company, Garden City, NY, 1985 reprint, pg. 50.

are not told how or when, but Jesus did say He "gave her time to repent of her immorality"; her obstinacy prevailed, however, in that "she [was] unwilling" (vs. 21).

Jesus' judgment, should there continue to be no repentance, was different than at Ephesus and Pergamum; the matter of the church as a whole changing was not addressed; rather, attention was given to judgment against Jezebel and her followers. "I will cast her on a bed of suffering" (cf. sickbed [RSV; vs. 22]) indicates she would be inflicted with a lethal illness; "I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways" (vs. 22) indicates severe, unspecified punitive suffering for her unrepentant followers.

"I will strike her children dead" (vs. 23) has been interpreted one of two ways. 63 Some commentators take children to mean her physical children (likely the result of physical harlotry); their deaths were meant as further judgment against Jezebel, who would personally suffer from their loss. Others take children to refer to her most intimate followers, those not only practicing immorality (vs. 22) but teaching the same error as she. The latter is probably the most correct; this being the case, the fact that there were children seemingly indicates her influence had been longstanding.

The notoriety of her error is seen in the fact that with the execution of these judgments "all the churches will know that I am He who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds" (vs. 23). "Minds" translates the Greek word for "kidneys," the seat of emotions; "hearts" refers to the seat of intellect and will. Jesus' introductory remark that He is the One "who has eyes like blazing fire" finds significance here; His omniscience enables this inward knowing.

Not everyone in the church had succumbed. Turning His attention "to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets," Jesus said, "I will not impose any other burden on you" (vs. 24). It is not clear what He meant by "any other burden." Some have speculated that the Gentile church here was following the edicts of the Jerusalem Council to abstain from what had been sacrificed to idols, from blood, from what was strangled and from fornication (Acts 15:29), and that Jesus did not intend to add any other restraints. Others

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 $^{^{63}}$ **And** (Greek, kai) indicates this was another category of people from those mentioned in Revelation 2:22B.

feel that "any other burden" is a misleading translation of the Greek, and that a more proper rendering would be "any other weighty admonition" (than that of vs. 25— "to hold on to what you have until I come"). This latter seems the simplest solution.

The precise meaning of "Satan's so-called deep secrets" is also difficult. Was Jezebel herself using the phrase "deep secrets" in a somewhat favorable light? Was she merely teaching "deep secrets," which the church at Thyatira was calling satanic?

• Some hold that "Jezebel" recognized these idol feasts as satanic temptations, but taught that Christians should be strong enough in spirit to be able to explore "the deep things of Satan." It is equally possible, however, that "Jezebel" taught what she simply called "deep things" and that it is Christ and His righteous who brand them as satanic.⁶⁴

A promise was then affirmed "to those who are victorious and do My will to the end." To them "I will give authority over the nations—they 'will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery" (vv. 26B-27). "Authority over the nations" likely refers to participation in the messianic authority over Earth during the Millennium (*cf.* Matthew 5:5; 1 Corinthians 6:2; Revelation 20:4); "they will rule them with an iron scepter" draws from the messianic fulfillment of Psalm 2:9, further elaborating the same idea.

• The effective establishment of the Kingdom of God cannot be accomplished apart from the destruction of all hostile and recalcitrant powers. The new age cannot be inaugurated without the displacement of the old, fallen, sinful age with its rebellious hosts. In some way not made clear in Scripture, the followers of the Messiah are to share in His triumph over the hostile nations. 65

The final promise, "I will also give them the morning star" (vs. 28) is again an obscure saying. Some (Wilcock, Ford, Walvoord) take this to mean that "those who are victorious" will live forever with Jesus Himself, "the bright Morning Star" (Revelation 22:16). The more probable interpretation is that this is apocalyptic symbolism referring to the glory and prominence afforded victors (*cf.* Daniel 12:3). In other words, Christians will be granted prominence during the messianic rule (*i.e.*, we will rule and reign with Him over Earth).⁶⁶

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⁶⁴ Wilcock, Michael, *The Message of Revelation*, Inter-Varsity Press, Downers Grove, IL., 1975, pg. 50.

⁶⁵ Ladd, op. cit., pg. 54.

⁶⁶ Those opting for the dispensational predictive interpretation of this letter see Thyatira as representative of the Church during the Middle Ages, the time preceding the Protestant Reformation.

REVELATION 3:1-6—

The fifth letter was sent "to the angel of the church in Sardis" (vs. 1). Sardis was located in west Asia Minor, about fifty miles east of Smyrna and thirty miles southeast of Thyatira. Prior to the first century AD, it had been a prominent trade and culture center; by New Testament times it had sunk to relative obscurity. It was still, however, a rather important industrial center, noted for its woolen and dyed goods. It was also noted for its loose morality.

Unlike the previous four letters, there is very little commendation in this letter. It is mostly a letter of rebuke. "In the other churches, evil had not been the habit, but rather the exception, and therefore it was possible first to commend. Here the case is reversed, and no word of commendation is addressed to the church as a church."

In language reminiscent of Revelation 1:4, Jesus introduced Himself as, "Him who holds the seven spirits of God" (vs. 1). He also introduced Himself as He "who holds...the seven stars" (vs. 1; *cf.* Revelation 1:16, 20). This latter is the same introduction given the Ephesian church (Revelation 2:1), and emphasizes His role as authoritative Protector of the C/church.

As noted, there is no commendation before indictment. Jesus simply began, "I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead" (vs. 1). The Sardian church had a reputation (name) for being spiritually alive; all but Christ saw it as flourishing in the Spirit. To Him, it was dead (spiritually asleep). "From the divine standpoint, it is considered as a church that had only a name of being alive and actually was dead as far as spiritual life and power were concerned."

Jesus' corrective command to the entire church was, "Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die" (vs. 2). "Wake up!" (Greek, gregoreo) has the idea of "show yourself alert" (Beckwith). "What remains and is about to die" indicates that not all was yet totally lost; there was still some spiritual vitality, weak though it be, which needed to be fanned to full life (cf. vs. 4).

The reason for Jesus' indictment was that He "found [their] deeds unfinished in the sight of [His] God" (vs. 2). Deeds refers to their overall spiritual life. Unfinished

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⁶⁷ G. Campbell Morgan in Walvoord, op. cit., pg. 79.

⁶⁸ Walvoord, op. cit., pg. 80.

connotes that which is incomplete, inadequate or a failure before God. "Secure, complacent, like the city she lived in, untroubled by persecution or heresy, she set herself the task of avoiding hardship, by pursuing a policy based on convenience and circumspection, rather than whole-hearted zeal."⁶⁹

Their corrective steps consisted of three commands: "Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent" (vs. 3). "Remember" has the idea of "bear in mind" (Morris), and refers to the zealousness with which they initially received the gospel. **Repent** (a Greek agrist imperative) has a sense of urgency about it; they were to immediately turn from the current defection to genuine commitment. "If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you" (vs. 3) was the sober warning attached to the imperatives. In as much as Jesus' Second Coming is not dependant on man keeping awake, this is not a reference to the Parousia, though it is couched in Second Coming language (cf. I Thessalonians 5:3-4). Rather, this was referring to some surprise visit of judgment Jesus would make against the Sardian church, should it fail to "remember...hold fast...and repent." It is not stated as to how He would come in judgment; we know from the New Testament in general that it would be by the Holy Spirit, which is likely why He introduced Himself to Sardis in conjunction with the Spirit (vs. 1).

Jesus did give a brief commendation, noting there are "still a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes" (vs. 4). To soil one's clothes is figurative language for spoiling or staining one's character. These **few** had apparently not partaken of pagan luxuries and activities; they may even be yet alive spiritually. As a reward, "they will walk with Me" (vs. 4)—i.e., they will be Jesus' companions in the Age to Come. The fact that "they will walk...dressed in white" (vs. 4) has reference to their justification, (their acceptance before God) which demonstrated itself in their fidelity of character.

"For they are worthy" (vs. 4) does not refer to the fact that they have earned this fellowship through conduct alone; justification is by grace through faith. The idea rather is that they "walk with Christ (contrast Jn. 6:66) in accordance with their status as justified persons...they have done nothing to forfeit justification."⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Wilcock, op. cit., pg. 32.

⁷⁰ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 77.

Using these few as a model, Jesus said to the Sardians, "Those who are victorious will...be dressed in white. I will never blot out their names from the book of life, but will acknowledge their names before My Father and His angels" (vs. 5). "I will never blot out their names from the book of life" (which has the idea of condemning one to eternal death) is somewhat troublesome in light of the New Testament's emphasis on the security of the believer by grace through faith in Jesus' death and resurrection (cf. Romans 8:1; but also note Colossians 1:23 and Hebrews 6:1-8). It is probably best, therefore, not to press for understanding as to how one's name can be blotted out as the process is not the emphasis here; the emphasis is that of assured, indelible recognition "before My Father and His angels" in the consummated kingdom for those faithful in their confession to the end (cf. Matthew 10:32).⁷¹

REVELATION 3:7-13—

The sixth letter went "to the angel of the church in Philadelphia" (vs. 7).

• The city was prosperous, partly from its strategic situation, partly from the grape-growing that flourished in the vicinity. It was a centre of worship of the god Dionysos, but contained also temples to many other gods...the church was evidently small (vs. 8), but of good quality...it had a good deal in common with that at Smyrna. Both receive no blame, only praise. Both suffered from those who called themselves Jews and were not, both were persecuted it would seem by the Romans, both are assured that the position is satanic, and both are promised a crown. 72

Jesus introduced the letter (vs. 7) as "the words of Him who is holy" (a designation connecting Him with Yahweh [cf. Revelation 4:8] that also shows His dedication and confirms His messiahship); "the words of Him who is true" (a term designating He is faithful, trustworthy, reliable and "free from human weakness" [Kennedy]); "the words of Him who holds the key of David" (a term which affirms His authority to operate in complete messianic power [cf. Isaiah 22:22]); and "what He opens no one can shut, and

⁷¹ See Revelation 13:8, 17:7; Exodus 32:32 and Daniel 7:10 for similar references to a book of life/enrollment. Those opting for the dispensational predictive interpretation of this letter see Sardis as representative of the Church at the time of the Protestant Reformation "when a great mass of Christendom was dead even though it had a name that it lived" (John Walvoord, *op. cit.*, pg. 83).

⁷² Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 78.

what He shuts no one can open" (a term which shows He gives entrance to and exclusion from the kingdom of God).

Jesus' commendation was one of "unqualified approval" (Kennedy), "I know your deeds" (vs. 8). This was further defined by, "I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept My word and have not denied My name" (vs. 8). "Little strength" likely refers to the fact that they were a small, somewhat non-influential and possibly not very wealthy church; it does not refer to spiritual weakness. They had remained true to apostolic teaching and, even amidst persecution, they had maintained a good public confession.

"See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut" (vs. 8) is subject to two possible interpretations because "open door" is undefined and somewhat ambiguous. Some, following Paul's terminology (cf. 2 Corinthians 2:12), take this to mean Jesus would open opportunities for them to preach the gospel, to broaden their testimony; others, in light of the situation Philadelphia was facing and the ideas expressed in the opening statement, take this to mean Jesus would provide them entrance into the eschatological kingdom, into the fullness of messianic glory which no one could take from them. The latter is probably the more correct contextually.

"I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you" (vs. 9) finds its roots in the Old Testament. There the prophets look forward to a day in which the remnant of Israel will triumph over the nations, and in which the Gentiles will be saved by faith in the true God of Israel (*cf.* Isaiah 45:14; 49:23; 60:14; Ezekiel 37:28). What Jesus was saying is that those Jews who reject the Messiah will be paying homage to the Gentiles, who have become a part of the true Israel of God (*cf.* Galatians 6:16); this will most probably be in the consummated kingdom, as opposed to a particular historical time in Philadelphia. "(This denotes) abject submission and homage before the glory of the Church in the future messianic reign. What the Jews fondly expect from the Gentiles, they were themselves to render to Christians—such would be the grim irony of providence."

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⁷³ Moffatt, *op. cit.*, pg. 357.

"Since you have kept My command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test those who live on the earth" (vs.. 10) is problematic for a number of reasons:

- 1. What exactly is "My command to endure patiently"? It most likely has reference either to the fact that "they share and emulate Jesus' steadfastness amidst pressure" (Ladd) or that with patient endurance they continue to serve Christ in the midst of trials (Kennedy, Alford).
- **2.** Is **from** the best understanding of the Greek preposition *ek* (NRSV, RSV, NIV, NASB, NJKV) or should it be translated **through/in** (Ford, New American Bible)? Both have linguistic and biblical support.
- **3.** What precisely is "the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world"? Is it the time of seduction to Emperor-worship that was experienced under Rome? Is it the time of birth pains and messianic woes spoken of in Matthew 24 and Revelation 9:4; 16:2? Is it another way of saying they will be spared the full brunt of "life's perennial ordeal" (Wilcock)?
- **4.** Who is meant by "those who live on the earth" who will be tested? Is this all humankind (Beckwith) or just the pagans (*cf.* Revelation 6:10; 8:13 [Ladd, Ford])?

Not being able to fully answer all these questions makes a concrete decision on the verse difficult. The idea is probably primarily eschatological, with the inference being that the Church will be kept (helped) in the midst of the severe persecution of the birth pains and beast, while at the same time spared from God's wrath.

• Here is a distinct eschatological reference to the "messianic woes" which are to precede the return of the Lord. John viewed the troubles which the church will suffer in the near future against the background of the consummation of evil and the time of terrible trouble at the end. This period is referred to elsewhere in the Bible in Daniel 12:2; Mark 13:14 and the parallels; II Thess.. 2:1-12. This time of great tribulation (Matt. 24:21) will involve two aspects: the persecution of the church by Antichrist (Rev. 13:7-8), and the outpouring of divine judgments upon a rebellious and apostate civilization. The danger of martyrdom is nothing the church should fear. Jesus said that when His disciples are hated and put to death, "not a hair of your head will perish" (Luke 21:17). Physical death, even as a martyr, has no eternal significance; indeed, in the time of Antichrist, the martyrdom of the saints will

- prove their salvation. In the very act of martyrdom, they conquer the beast (Rev. 15:2).
- On the other hand, God will pour out His wrath upon the followers of the beast to try to drive them to repentance before it is too late (9:20; 16:9, 11). The Greek expression translated "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). The outpouring of God's wrath is pictured symbolically by the plague of the seven trumpets (8:1-9:19) and the seven bowls (16:1-20). Before these terrifying judgments, the people of God are sealed upon their foreheads that they should not be hurt by these plagues. These fearful divine judgments are directed upon those who follow the beast (16:2); those who have the seal of God will be divinely sheltered (9:4). Although the church will be on earth in these final terrible days and will suffer fierce persecution and martyrdom at the hands of the beast, she will be kept from the hour of trial which is coming upon the pagan world. God's wrath, poured out on the kingdom of Antichrist, will not afflict His people. The search of the beast of the

"I am coming soon" (vs. 11) stresses the surety of His return to usher in the fullness of what His death and resurrection purchased. "Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown" (vs. 11) is an encouragement to "keep a firm grip on" their salvation (Morris), so that they do not lose their eternal reward through a denial of the faith (cf. Revelation 2:10).

The promise to steadfast Christians here is two-fold: 1) "I will make [them] pillars in the temple of My God. Never again will they leave it" and 2) "I will write on them the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from My God; and I will also write on them My new name" (vs. 12). To be made "pillars in the temple of My God" is a symbolic way of stating that believers will be assured admission into the kingdom of God in the Age to Come; "never again will [you] leave it" emphasizes the permanency of life in the consummated kingdom.

The writing of the three names symbolizes: 1) believers belong to God ("I will write on them the name of My God" [cf. Numbers 6:27; Revelation 22:4]); 2) believers belong to the redeemed order of the Age to Come ("I will write on them...the name of the city of My God"); and 3) believers will participate in Jesus' future glory and majesty ("I will also write on them My new name"). Jesus' "new name" likely refers to the

⁷⁴ Ladd, *op. cit.*, pg. 62.

name inscribed that no one knows but Himself (Revelation 19:12) that will characterize Jesus at His return.

Again the letter closed with the exhortation, "Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (vs. 13).⁷⁵

REVELATION 3:14-22—

The final letter, written "to the angel of the church in Laodicea" (vs. 14), contains the most severe condemnation and virtually no commendation.

• The church in Laodicea is obviously quite prosperous and outwardly in excellent condition. The letter makes no mention of persecution from Roman officials, of trouble from the Jews, or of any false teachers within the church. Laodicea was much like Sardis: an example of nominal, self-satisfied Christianity. One major difference is that at Sardis there remained a nucleus who had preserved a vital faith (3:4), while the entire Laodicean church was permeated by complacency. It is probable that many of the church members were active participants in the affluent society, and that this very economic affluence had exercised a deadly influence on the spiritual life of the church. 76

Jesus introduced the letter as "the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation" (vs. 14). "The Amen," which is further described by the appositional phrase "the faithful and true [reliable, trusted] witness," reaffirms His verity; it lets the church know that Jesus is the One who can be trusted to keep His promises and statements. "The ruler of God's creation" stresses Jesus Christ's role as Yahweh's Agent in creation (cf. 1 Corinthians 8:6); it is not saying He was the first One God created. Barclay translates the phrase, "the moving cause of the creation of God." It reminded the Laodiceans that if they would repent, He is capable of making them new for He is the Agent who created them in the first place.

The indictment, "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot" (vs. 15), indicated they were neither hostile to the gospel nor zealous after it. They were nominal, a state which is worse even than being actively opposed. This is evident in Jesus' next statement, "I wish you were either one or the other!" "What can be done with people

⁷⁵ Those opting for the dispensational predictive interpretation of this letter see Philadelphia as representative of the true Church in every era.

⁷⁶ Ladd, *op. cit.*, pg. 62.

⁷⁷ The Hebrew text of Isaiah 65:16 calls Yahweh **the God of the amen**, which is lost in most English translations (i.e., **the one true God** [TNIV]).

who are nominal Christians, unable to recognize that they need repentance and that Jesus is really outside their lives?"⁷⁸

This tepid state caused Jesus to say, "I am about to spit you out of My mouth" (vs. 16). Wilcock paraphrases this, "You make me sick!" "I am about" indicates Jesus was not yet implementing this judgment; He would yet offer repentance and forgiveness (vv. 19-20). The effect of this state was that they said, "I am rich; I have acquired wealth, and do not need a thing." It is not entirely clear as to whether the wealth of which they boasted was material or spiritual; the reference to buying "gold refined in the fire" (vs. 18) seems to indicate they were boasting in their material wealth, but this is not entirely clear. What is clear is that they had a false spiritual pride, and a false boast as to how they had arrived at where they felt they were.

Whereas they say they are rich and prosperous, the truth of the matter is they were spiritually "wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked" (vs. 17). The solution? "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, so that you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see" (vs. 18). "Buy" means "obtain" (cf. Isaiah 55:1) and "gold refined in the fire" references true spiritual wealth; "white clothes" connote purity and sincerity; and "salve to put on your eyes" references true spiritual vitality and perception.

To prove that He (Jesus) and not Satan was behind this indictment, and to assure them that He was being disciplinary and not punitive, Jesus said, "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline" (vs. 19). This refers to pointing out faults and correcting, as a parent would a child (*cf.* Hebrews 12:6). "This is a touching and unexpected manifestation of love to those who deserve it least among the Seven Churches." The command to "So be earnest, and repent" (vs. 19) demonstrates Jesus' hope that they would counter their complacency.

"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them, and they with Me" (vs. 20) was a summons to Laodicea's complacent believers to open their heart door to Jesus now, so

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⁷⁸ Moffatt, *op. cit.*, pg. 370.

Charles in Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 84.

that He could come in a new and afresh for affectionate, intimate fellowship ("I will...eat with them").

"To those who are victorious, I will give the right to sit with Me on My throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with My Father on His throne" (vs. 21) stresses the ultimate victory of the saints as we participate in the messianic reign, a reign which has already begun in that Jesus has already conquered (though the fullest effects of His conquering yet await release into the human experience). Although the usual biblical definition of Jesus' place is at the right hand of the Father (cf. Acts 2:34), "on His **throne**" is essentially the same; it simply means Jesus participates in His reign. 80

CONCLUSION—

"We are reminded that the messages to the seven historic churches in Asia are at the same time a composite word to the church universal throughout time."81 Putting together the common threads of the seven letters, we discover that—

- Jesus loves it when we teach the truth; when we stay faithful to Him; and when we keep our love for people fresh and active.
- Jesus hates it when we are indifferent and when we are not different than unbelievers in life-style, passion and priorities.
- Jesus promises the Church we will enjoy Him in consummate fellowship in the Age to Come; we will not be hurt by the Second Death; we are under divine favor; we shall rule and reign with Him in the Age to Come; and our eternal inheritance is secure.
- Taken as a whole the messages to the seven churches of Asia constitute a comprehensive warning from Christ Himself as embodied in the exhortations to each of the churches...the danger of fearing suffering...of doctrinal compromise...of moral compromise...of spiritual deadness...of not holding fast...and of lukewarmness and self-sufficiency. 82

⁸⁰ Those opting for the dispensational predictive interpretation of this letter see Laodicea as representative of the Church in the last days, in the time immediately preceding her rapture at the beginning of the Great Tribulation.

⁸¹ Aune, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-115.

⁸² Walvoord, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-100.

REVELATION 4

"An overview of Revelation 4-5 together reveals that they exhibit a unified structure which corresponds more to the structure of Daniel 7 than with any other vision in the OT." John begins his "other worldly" journey using both conventional apocalyptic and Old Testament imagery.

REVELATION 4:1-6A—

Turning now to "what will take place later" (Revelation 1:19), John deals with those matters future to his reception of the vision. As stated in the Introduction, most of these matters have happened "in type" throughout history, but the consummated, specific happenings await the end of this age. The vision begins in heaven's throne room.

• Revelation 4 represents a vision based on theocracy, the heavenly court, the function of the host of heaven, and the idea of prophetic mission closely modeled on that of Ezekiel. The throne room will be the place from which the Commander directs His operations towards and on the earth. He will be assisted by His angels who will seek to re-establish the theocracy in the face of opposing satanic powers.⁸⁴

"The Revelation proper begins with the ultimate and eternal fact of God enthroned and ruling in His universe. However fearful or uncontrolled the forces of evil on earth may seem to be, they cannot annul or eclipse the greater fact that behind the scenes God is on His throne governing the universe."

After this I looked (vs. 1) indicates the beginning of a new vision. The matter of the letters to the churches was complete, and John's attention is now turned to future events (Revelation 1:19). He declares that there before me was a door standing open in heaven (vs. 1). In heaven is biblical terminology for the dwelling place of God; Paul terms it the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2). The fact that a door [stood] open in heaven indicates God was opening up His will to John. Summoned by the same voice he'd heard earlier, John was given access to the very presence of God, and from this

⁸³ Beale, *op. cit.*, pg. 314.

⁸⁴ Ford, *op. cit.*, pg. 79.

⁸⁵ Ladd, *op. cit.*, pg. 70.

vantage point God would unfold the future—"Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this" (vs. 2). The thrust of "Come up here" then is the turning of John's attention from matters on earth to matters in heaven. Kennedy paraphrases, "Come, take a penetrating look into heavenly mysteries."

• John is now swept up in the Spirit to the very door of heaven. There he beholds a vision of a sovereign God in full command of the course of human affairs as they move swiftly to their denouement. On the plane of history the church appears unable to resist the might of hostile worldly powers, but the course of history is not determined by political power but by God enthroned and active. At his appointed time the scroll of destiny is to be handed to the Lamb, who himself will open the seals, bring history to a close, and usher in the eternal state. The great throne-room vision of chapters 4 and 5 serves to remind believers living in the shadow of impending persecution that an omnipotent and omniscient God is still in control.⁸⁶

John's translation to heaven was **in the Spirit** (or **in the spirit** [NRSV], vs. 2), *i.e.*, an ecstatic, possibly trance-like and out-of body, encounter with God for the purpose of revelation. This expression is used four times, suggesting each time that he was experiencing a new vision (Revelation 1:10; 4:1; 17:3; 21:10). "He has been ushered into the timeless dimension where truth and reality can clearly be discerned." 87

• This is without doubt one of the most majestic and important chapters in the entire Bible, for it tells the fundamental truth that God is on the throne of the universe and will cause all of His purposes in creation and history to be realized. To do this He must, of course, move against sin and evil. This is why the second vision in Revelation 4-16 has been called "the process of world judgment." John is permitted to go through a door into heaven and see

⁸⁶ Mounce, op. cit., pg. 116. Many within the dispensational school of interpretation see Jesus' command to John to "Come up here" (Revelation 4:1) as constituting the pre-tribulation rapture of the Church. This interpretation dates from the mid-19th century, and is contrary to the classical interpretation of historic Christianity. Even Walvoord, a leading pre-tribulation dispensationalist, warns against making too much of Revelation 4:1. "The invitation to John to 'Come up hither' is so similar to that which the Church anticipates at the rapture that many have connected the two expressions. It is clear from the context that this is not an explicit reference to the rapture of the Church, as John was not actually translated; in fact he was still in his natural body on the island of Patmos...the rapture as a doctrine is not part of the prophetic fore-view of the book of Revelation. This is in keeping with the fact that the book as a whole is not occupied primarily with God's program for the Church" (John Walvoord, op. cit., pg. 103). Notes Ladd, "The terrible conflict that takes place on earth between the church and the demonic powers embodied in an apostate civilization—Rome in the first century and Antichrist at the end—are in reality expressions in historical form of a fearful conflict in the spiritual world between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan...the church must therefore be here throughout the events of Revelation. The entire question of a socalled pre-tribulation rapture is an assumption which does not command the support of explicit exegesis of the New Testament" (George Ladd, op. cit., pg. 70).

⁸⁷ Beale, *op. cit.*, pg. 319.

behind the scenes. He is given an understanding of the divine processes underlying history, especially in its final fulfillment.8

John's first observation was that of a throne in heaven with Someone sitting on it (i.e., sitting at the center of the cosmos [vs. 3]). He immediately turned his attention to the aura surrounding the throne, likening the Someone sitting on it to two precious stones—jasper (probably a white, diamond-like stone) and ruby (vs. 3). In his description of heaven's throne room, John drew heavily from Exodus 19 and 24:9-10; Ezekiel 1; Isaiah 6 and Daniel 7. "The very first thing John sees is the magnificent throne of God (symbolizing his universal sovereignty), but, unlike Ezekiel, he carefully avoids any description of God himself (vs. 3)."89 He notes that a rainbow [or possibly "halo"] that shone like an emerald encircled the throne (vs. 3); the rainbow/halo may be reminiscent of the rainbow with which God established His covenant with Noah (Genesis 9:16), and hence a sign of the eternality of His covenant promises.

Many have tried to see symbolic significances in these three particular stones (jasper...ruby...emerald); they are named in the breastplate of the High Priest (Exodus 28:17) and appear in the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:19). All that can be said with certainty, however, is that they are precious stones, used to communicate the fact that God and His presence are splendid and magnificent.

God's splendor and magnificence are further reiterated in the continued description in vv. 5-6—from the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder...also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as **crystal.** Lightning and peals of thunder are traditional accompaniments of theophany (cf. Exodus 19:16). Although we cannot be sure, the sea of glass may symbolize—

God's ineffable, absolute holiness—holiness in its original sense of separateness. Could any man born of woman cross this "sea of glass" resembling crystal" into the presence of the Creator? As we read John's first vision of the heavenly court in chap. iv., he must have felt the utter impossibility of venturing near the haloed throne, whence issue "flashes of lightning, and loud blasts and peals of thunder." A shining ocean barred all approach.90

⁸⁸ Pickerill, op. cit., Notes on Revelation 4:1-11.

⁸⁹ Aune, *op. cit.*, pp. 313-314.

⁹⁰ Kiddle quoted in Morris, op. cit., pg. 90.

John was also informed of the presence of the Holy Spirit in all His fullness—before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God (vs. 5).

Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders (vs. 4) presents a major interpretive problem—who are the **twenty-four elders**? The arguments fall basically into three categories—1) they are the twelve Old Testament tribal heads and the twelve apostles; 2) they are special, unidentified humans representing the newly raptured Church;⁹¹ or 3) they are angels/specially created beings representing redeemed humankind throughout history. The most favorable position seems to be that of identifying them as angels (or possibly specially created beings), who symbolically represent God's redeemed throughout history; they appear again in Revelation 5:9-10 and 7:9-11, where they are clearly distinguished from redeemed humankind itself. "Probably the elders are angels who are identified with the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles, thus representing the entire community of the redeemed of both testaments." ⁹²

The fact that they symbolize redeemed humankind is reinforced by the fact that they were dressed in white (vs. 4); had crowns of gold on their heads (vs. 4); were seated on...[thrones] (vs. 4); lay their crowns before the throne (vs. 10); and continually worship God as Creator (vs. 11) and Redeemer (Revelation 5:9-10).

REVELATION 4:6B-11—

The next center of John's attention was the **four living creatures** (vv. 6B-8). They resemble both Ezekiel's **four living creatures** (Ezekiel 1:4-14) and Isaiah's **seraphs** (Isaiah 6:1-3). The fact they are said to be **covered with eyes, in front and in back...all around, even under [their] wings** (vv. 6B, 8) represents "universal watchfulness" (Morris); they have an eye on God and creation. The **eyes** also represent their unlimited intelligence, their access to God's knowledge and their "sleepless vigilance" (Ford). Their **six wings** (vs. 8) indicate they are capable of swift movement, particularly in carrying out God's will.

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⁹¹ This view assumes the rapture of the Church at Revelation 4:1.

⁹² Beale, *op. cit.*, pg. 322.

The four resemblances (like a lion...like an ox...like a man...like a flying eagle [vs. 7]) picture the highest manifestations of creation in their respective realms; they are all kings, so to speak. They also represent various attributes found in nature—nobility (a lion), strength (an ox), wisdom (a man) and swiftness (a flying eagle). The four living creatures then seem to suggest that all creation is subject to the throne of God, even as Ezekiel 1 pictures all creation like a great chariot under the throne of God.

• The four creatures represent general creation...it is likely that [they] are designed to be representative of the whole created order of animate life...the cherubim also represent the Creator. Such double symbolism should not be unexpected in apocalyptic visions. The multitude of eyes in the living beings signifies divine omniscience and that they are God's agents...they must also be seen as servants of the Lamb...their knowing eyes search the earth, and they execute punishments only on those who truly deserve them...to the discerning reader, these "living beings" are an encouragement to keep persevering under persecution, knowing that God is acutely aware of their plight and is already in the process of taking action in their favor and against their persecutors (as chs. 6ff reveal).

More important than their identity is the activity of these **living creatures**. **Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God the Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come"** (vs. 8). In praise anticipatory of what will happen in the consummated kingdom, this "sleepless praise of nature" extols God's complete purity and separateness from the sin and evil of the world. He is being praised for His essential nature—His holiness, omnipotence and eternalness.

Revelation 4 closes by noting that the worship of the living creatures (vs. 9)⁹⁴ prompts the twenty-four elders [to] fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:⁹⁵ "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things, and by Your will they were created and have their being" (vv. 10-11). The fact that they cast their crowns before the throne indicates that as

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 329-330.

⁹⁴ A slight problem exists in Revelation 4:9. In Revelatin 4:8, John has mentioned **they never stop saying**, yet in Revelation 4:9 he states, *Whenever* **the living creatures give glory, and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne....** (emphasis mine). No one is quite sure just what to make of this but Walvoord's insight seems reasonable. "Though it is stated earlier that the living creatures do not rest in their ascription of holiness to God, according to verse 9, periodically they give special glory and honor and praise to God sitting on His throne" (John Walvoord, *op. cit.*, pg. 111).

⁹⁵ Cf. singing (NRSV; NIV) or responding (Aune).

representatives of the redeemed, they are acknowledging dependence; they are also acknowledging that Yahweh alone reigns. Hence, God's lordship and worthiness in creation are acknowledged.

REVELATION 5

Revelation 4 extols God as Creator and Sustainer; Revelation 5 extols Him as God the Redeemer.

• Revelation 5 is the pivot point to the entire Book of Revelation. It cannot be separated from chapter four, where God is seen seated on the throne of the universe, and from the fact that the rest of the events take place as each of the seals are opened. The chapter has three important features: 1) the seven-sealed book (vs. 1); 2) the symbolic description of Jesus who alone can open the book (vv. 2-7); and 3) the three songs of praise given by all creation to the Holy Trinity (vv. 8-14).

REVELATION 5:1-5—

Then I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals (vs. 1) is primarily to remind us that the contents of the scroll are controlled by God in His sovereignty. Whatever the contents of the book, they are superintended by God. The right hand was the place from which ancient kings issued decrees; we see then that the contents have to do with divine decrees relative to the kingdom of God.

The **scroll** would have been a rolled up piece of parchment with seven seals fixed in a row along the edge in such a way that the seals must be broken in succession if the **scroll** is to be unrolled and read.⁹⁷

• Just as in Germany before the introduction of money orders, everyone knew that a letter sealed with five seals contained money, so the most simple member of the Asiatic churches knew that a scroll made fast with seven seals was a testament. When the testator dies, the testament is brought forward and

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⁹⁶ Pickerill, *op. cit.*, Notes on Revelation 5.

⁹⁷ The NRSV, RSV, NKJV and NIV rightly translate the document as **a scroll** (Greek, *biblion*), in that it is too early in the history of writing for this to have been a leafed book (*cf.* NASB). "A minority of commentators have argued that this book was a leaf book, the seven seals binding together groups of leaves. In this way, as each seal was broken, a part of the book could be read. A major difficulty with this view is that if this is the case, the entire contents of the book should be exhausted with the breaking of the seven seals, whereas in fact the breaking of the seals seems to be only preparatory to the opening of the book" (George Ladd, *op. cit.*, pg. 79).

when possible, opened in the presence of the seven witnesses who sealed it. So also here, the document fastened with seven seals is an easily understood symbol of the promise and assurance by God to His Church of the future basileia (kingdom). So this might be called The Book of Human Destiny. It shows what must happen in order for the people of God to enter into the fullness of their eternal inheritance. And it makes it perfectly clear that Jesus alone makes it possible. ⁹⁸

The fact that the **scroll [had] writing on both sides** (vs. 1) indicates that the decrees are ready for consummation. The **scroll** alludes to Ezekiel 2:9-10, which records **written words of lament and mourning and woe**. "As the seals are opened they bring forth judgments and woes. This suggests that the righteous kingdom of God and the inheritance of God's people cannot be realized until evil is put down. And this, of course, is exactly what the Book of Revelation is all about." "The scroll represents the final and fully predetermined stage in God's redemptive purpose for the world, which will unfold between the heavenly exaltation of Christ following his death and resurrection and the final inauguration of the eternal reign of God."

The next thing John saw was a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" (vs. 2). The unidentified angel is no doubt termed mighty (capable) because of the role he played in seeking out a worthy one. Even in all his strength, however, he was not worthy/capable of opening the scroll. To break the seals and open the scroll has the idea of both explaining and setting off the scroll's contents.

The question posed by the **mighty angel** is answered in vs. 3—**no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it**. This caused John to begin to weep bitterly (vs. 4). "John weeps when no one is found, a conscious fiction representing the past perspective of Israel awaiting the Messiah." "He wept at the prospect of an indefinite postponement of God's final and decisive action." ¹⁰²

• There are mysteries in life. Men feel themselves caught up in the world's evil and its misery, and they cannot break free. Some become rigid determinists, and we must all, at times, feel a sense of hopelessness and helplessness in the

¹⁰⁰ Aune, op. cit., pg. 374.

⁹⁸ Theodor Zahn quoted in Pickerill, *loc. cit.*

⁹⁹ Pickerill, *loc. cit.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 373.

¹⁰² Mounce, *op. cit.*, pg. 131.

grip of forces stronger than we. The world's agony is real. And the world's inability to break free from the consequences of its guilt is real. This chapter with its seals which no man can break stresses man's inability. But it does not stop there. More important is the fact that through the Lamb the victory is won. The seals are opened and God's purpose is worked out. 103

John's despair was interrupted by **one of the elders** saying, "**Do not weep! See, the** Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals" (vs. 5). These names for Jesus, though not found elsewhere in the Bible, do have Old Testament precedent—

- The Lion of the tribe of Judah is an allusion to Genesis 49:9-10, where Judah is called a lion's cub...like a lion he crouches and lies down; Jesus is worthy because of His power.
- The Root of David is an allusion to Isaiah 11:1, which says of the Messiah—a shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. Jesus is worthy because of His relation to David and because He fulfills the promises made to the patriarchal fathers. Both of these names further emphasize that He is the conquering messianic King.

Has triumphed refers to Christ's complete triumph over Satan, death, and all forms of evil; this victory was completed on the Cross, and its effects are to some degree released into human experience now. They await the future, consummated kingdom, however, to be totally released onto the human scene (*cf.* Matthew 12:29; Colossians 2:15; 2 Timothy 1:10; Hebrews 2:14-15).

• The important thing to emphasize is that the biblical hope is not one of spiritual salvation alone, of the salvation of the individual from his guilt and his sin. While individualistic salvation is included, the primary emphasis is upon the salvation of the people of God as a society dwelling on the earth and their deliverance from all evils—spiritual, social, political and physical. 104

REVELATION 5:6-14—

Interestingly enough, when John looked to see the **Lion** he saw instead a **Lamb**, **looking as if it had been slain** (vs. 6). This is an obvious allusion to Jesus' incarnation and His role as the Suffering Servant Messiah, whose sacrificial death made possible His

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¹⁰³ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 93.

¹⁰⁴ Ladd, *op. cit.*, pg. 84.

resurrection role of a conquering **Lion**. "The striking contrast between the two images suggests the contrast between the type of warrior messiah expected by first-century Judaism and the earthly ministry of Jesus as a suffering servant of God." ¹⁰⁵

- What John appears to be telling us, then, in his different symbols is that Christ, of the tribe of Judah and the line of David, is supremely powerful and all-knowing, and that He has won His victory by his atoning and sacrificial death. There is a striking combination of the thoughts of the utmost in power and the utmost in self-giving. 106
- The third reason Jesus is worthy is because of His sacrificial death. This is probably one of the most important pictures in the entire Bible A LAMB AT THE CENTER OF THE THRONE. This means that God rules the world through self-giving, sacrificial love. As long as a Lamb is at the heart of the throne, we have nothing to fear from the judgments of God if we submit to His authority. 107

The Lamb is said to have seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth (vs. 6). Seven horns emphasize His fullness of power (cf. Matthew 28:18); seven eyes bespeak the perfection of His omniscience and personality. John's coded reference to the fullness of the Holy Spirit (the seven spirits of God) ties Jesus' life/ministry into the Spirit—a ministry He exercises in all the earth.

We are next told that Jesus went and took the scroll from the right hand of Him who sat on the throne (vs. 7). This alludes to His fulfillment of the messianic King role spoken of in Daniel 7:13-14. He has the authority, right and character to take the scroll. It also reiterates the working relationship of the Father and the Son spoken of in Revelation 1:1. "In his own way, John is expressing the perfect harmony between the will of God and the will of Christ." Jesus' action sets off a scene of tremendous praise in heaven—when He had taken [the scroll], the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding

¹⁰⁵ Aune, op. cit., pg. 373.

¹⁰⁶ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 97.

¹⁰⁷ Pickerill, *loc. cit.*

¹⁰⁸ "Any attempt to visualize a seven-horned, seven-eyed lamb in a literal fashion should remind us of the symbolic nature of John's visions. The throne-room scene is not a graphic description of heaven but a symbolic representation of the decrees of God concerning the final stages of human history" (Robert Mounce, *op. cit.*, pg. 133).

¹⁰⁹ Kiddle in Morris, loc. cit.

golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people. And they sang a new¹¹⁰ song, saying:

"You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because You were slain, and with Your blood You purchased for God members¹¹¹ of every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth" (vv. 8-10).

The harp was a major biblical instrument of worship. We are not told exactly why the golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people are part of their worship. In some unidentified way, however, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders are assisting the prayers of God's people to rise to God.

- On earth the saints are despised and accounted as of no importance. In heaven their prayers are precious, being brought into the very presence of God Himself, while the bowls in which they are offered are golden. John often brings out the reversal of values in heaven from those accepted by his earthly contemporaries. 112
- In the Old Testament...golden bowls were used in temple worship. The prayers of the saints are associated with this song because they represent the goal of all praying--to become a kingdom of priests before God. All our prayers will be answered when we enter into our kingly reign with Christ on the earth, and as priests have direct access to God. 113

Worthiness/excellence is here ascribed to Christ (vs. 9), as it is to the Father (Revelation 4:11). The basis for His worthiness to break the seals and open the scroll is His work on the Cross—"because You were slain, and with Your blood You purchased for God members of every tribe and language and people and nation..." (vs. 9). In addition to purchasing freedom from sin/death for all those who appropriate

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¹¹⁰ **New** (Greek, *kaine*) has the idea of either special or fresh. It is being sung because the new order of things is about to begin. Such **new** songs are spoken of in Psalms 33:3; 98:1.

The NKJV reads "have redeemed <u>us</u> to God...and have made <u>us</u> kings and priests to our God" (Revelation 5:9-10, emphasis mine). This is one of the supports some use to teach that the twenty-four elders are actual redeemed men and not angels representing redeemed humankind. However, two things must be recognized: 1) this translation is based on an inferior school of Greek manuscripts, which nearly all other modern versions reject in favor of those reading saints/them for us; and 2) if us is retained, then not only are the elders claiming redemption, but the four living creatures as well. Virtually no commentators see these creatures as redeemed humans.

¹¹² Morris, op. cit., pg. 98.

¹¹³ Pickerill, *loc. cit.*

His provision ("You purchased"), by His work on the Cross Jesus made the ransomed "to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth" (vs. 10). "The coming of the eschatological kingdom is an essential part of the redemptive work of Christ; what He did on the Cross remains forever unfinished until the ransomed enter into their kingly reign with Christ and until faith is changed to sight when God comes to dwell in the midst of His people (21:3)."114

The praise of the living creatures and the elders is joined by the voice of many angels...[who] encircled the throne...ten thousand times ten thousand (vs. 11), who in a loud voice praise Jesus for His inherent qualities—"power and wealth and wisdom and strength"—and for humankind's ultimate attitude toward Him ("honor and glory and praise" [vs. 12]). These seven qualities represent the essence of all human values and needs. In poetic language, John then notes that all of creation joins in the praise "to Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb" (vs. 13), 115 to which the four living creatures [then] said, "Amen!" (vs. 14).

This is a prophetic preview of consummated history. "All history is moving toward the predestined goal of the eventual and ultimate universal recognition of the lordship of Jesus Christ (see Phil. 2:10,11)."116

Chapter 5 has revealed a central truth that governs the entire book of Revelation. By his sacrificial death the Lamb has taken control of the course of history and guaranteed its future. He alone was worthy to break the seals and open the scroll of destiny...His triumphant sacrifice has transformed men and women from every part of the universe into priests in the service of God...the vision of the grandeur of the triumphant Lamb prepares John to share with his readers the more solemn aspects of the judgments that lie in the future. A vivid portrayal of the one who has won the crucial battle against sin supplies the confidence that in the troubled times to come there remains a hope that is steadfast and sure. 117

¹¹⁴ Ladd, op. cit., pg. 93. "Rev. 5:9-12 and 5:13 are good examples respectively of the 'already' and 'not yet' time reference of chs. 4-5 in particular and of the Apocalypse in general" (G. K. Beale, op. cit., pg.

^{115 &}quot;The goal of God in everything is to glorify himself, to enjoy that glory, and to have his creation enjoy glorifying him forever" (G. K. Beale, *Ibid.*, pg. 369). Morey in Hayford, *op. cit.*, pg. 1968.

¹¹⁷ Mounce, op. cit., pg. 138.

REVELATION 6

The vision of the glorified Son of man in chapter 1 led to the writing of the seven letters to the churches (chaps. 2-3). Similarly the throne-room vision of chapters 4 and 5 sets the stage for the opening of the scroll with its sequence of seals, trumpets, and bowls (chaps. 6-16). The dramatic portrayal of God's righteous judgment is now under wav. 118

Before proceeding with the matter of the breaking of the seals, the issue of when these events will take place needs to be discussed. A reading of Revelation shows that the specific time of the breaking of the seals is not given. All we know is that the specifics here are a part of the concluding events of this age—"what will take place later" (Revelation 1:19). We also know that many of the events represented by the seals have occurred throughout human history, 119 although obviously not with the intensity associated with the breaking of the seals.

As we survey the picture revealed by the opening of the seals we may be a little surprised. The picture is a grim one, but it is not particularly new. War, bloody conquest, famine and pestilence are found in many apocalypses. We begin to wonder why John wept at the prospect of such well-known contents remaining undisclosed (5:4). But there is something new here, and that is the place of the church. The martyrs are singled out in verses 9ff., and chapter 7 is given over to the great multitude of the redeemed. John sees God as in control of the whole process and God is concerned for His people. So, though apocalyptic judgments be loosed against all mankind, God's people need never be dismayed. They will be preserved no matter what the tribulation. That is the precious new revelation. 120

Any time frame given these events, therefore, must be determined by looking at other scriptures. In that light, a careful reading of Revelation 6 seems to indicate that the events of the seals find parallel in Jesus' Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24). Jesus, near the end of His earthly ministry, was leaving the Temple with His disciples. They apparently were marveling at the buildings of the Temple when Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down" (Matthew 24:2). In response, His disciples asked Him, "Tell us, when will this happen, and what

¹¹⁸ Mounce, op. cit., pg. 139.

^{119 &}quot;The natural inference...is that all the events described in 6:1-8 are not reserved exclusively for a period of severe trial immediately preceding Christ's final coming" (G. K. Beale, *op. cit.*, pg. 371). Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 102.

will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3). Jesus' lengthy response (Matthew 24:4 ff) offers the following—

- 1. There will be "wars and rumors of wars...famines and earthquakes...all these are the beginning of the birth pains" (vv. 6-8, emphasis mine).
- 2. There will be great persecution against God's people (vs. 9).
- 3. "Then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now" (vs. 21 [RSV], emphasis mine).
- 4. Finally, "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world [during all this] and then the end will come" (vs. 14, emphasis mine).

In light of the major similarities between these Matthew 24 woes and those of the seals, we can conclude that at the very least the first five seals represent "the beginning of the birth pains" (Matthew 24:8), an undefined period of time just prior to the Great Tribulation. 121 They are the beginning of God's eschatological judgment process, ultimately leading to the consummated kingdom.

> The breaking of the seven seals is preliminary to the actual opening of the scroll and the events of the end time. It also pictures the forces that will be operative throughout history by which the redemptive and judicial purposes of God will be forwarded. They are not a part of the great tribulation itself, but are preparatory and preliminary to the great tribulation. conclusion is reinforced by the fact that the breaking of the sixth seal clearly brings us to the threshold of the end; the five seals must precede it. 122

One final introductory observation—the seals are opened by the Lamb (Revelation 6:1); this clearly defines yet again that God is in control of the woes attached to the breaking of the seals. This is reinforced grammatically with the use at key points of what is termed the "divine passive" in Greek grammar—he was given a crown (vs. 2); its rider was given power to take peace from the earth (vs. 4); they were given power over a fourth of the earth (vs. 8). Again, the seals have to do with God's judgment process in the earth (cf. Romans 1:18; 2:2), a process that will be intensified during "the beginning of the birth pains," accelerated even more during the Great Tribulation and

¹²¹ Dispensationalists teach that the breaking of the seals starts **the Great Tribulation** (Revelation 7:14) and that the time of the birth pangs is not addressed in Revelation.

¹²² Ladd, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-96.

consummated by the release of His wrath (violent rage) and the subsequent persecutions of the beast.

The seals cannot be separated from the throne of God. In Revelation 5:1, God is pictured sitting on the throne of heaven with a scroll in His right hand sealed with seven seals. This scroll might be called, "God's last will and testament"; it is the book of human destiny leading up to the coming of Christ and the eternal inheritance of the people of God. But before the end comes, the wrath of God must be poured out. Therefore, a whole series of judgments must come on the earth. The seven seals begin the process and reveal the principles of divine judgment...A leading point in John's theology is that God's judgments are righteous. Remember before God's throne in Revelation 4:6 was a glassy sea, like crystal? This seems to suggest the truth and purity of God's judgments. Those who overcome evil are pictured standing beside the glassy sea in Revelation 15:2-4 singing, Just and true are Thy ways...of special interest is the closing picture of Jesus riding on a white horse in Revelation 19:11-16. John says, He who sat on the white horse is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges. 123

REVELATION 6:1-2—

As noted above, it is **the Lamb** who opens each of the seals (vs. 1). Here then we see that by His sacrificial death, Christ both saves from sin and condemns sin. Christ is said to **open the first of the seven seals**, which prompts **one of the four living creatures** to issue a summons, "**Come!**" (vs. 1). The summons is apparently to the **rider** of a **white horse**. 124

The first of the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" involves a **white horse** whose **rider held a bow** (no reference is made to any arrows) and who receives **a crown** (a victor's wreath [vs. 2]). The purpose of his release is to conquer (vs. 2). The symbolism of the **white horse** and **its rider** is the most difficult of the four horses and their riders to interpret, because there is no obviously negative woe associated with it and because the horse is **white** (the color usually associated with Christ and His purposes; in Revelation 19:11, Christ rides a white horse in obvious victory at the time of His Parousia).

• No explanation is given of this vision. In many cases the reader of Revelation is not left to his own ingenuity but is given the meaning of what is beheld. Here as in many other instances, however, because there is no

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¹²³ Pickerill, *op. cit.*. Notes on Revelation 6.

¹²⁴ The first four seals are associated with the release of four different colored horses and their riders. The colors of the horses are similar to those of the horses pulling the four chariots of divine judgment in Zechariah 6.

specific interpretation of the vision, more diverse explanations have been given of verse two than probably any other portion of the entire book. 125

There are basically three views:

- 1. The rider is the Antichrist. For a season at the beginning of the Great Tribulation, his evil intent to conquer is somehow disguised (hence, a white horse). This is the most common view among dispensationalists, who see the Great Tribulation as beginning at Revelation 6:1.
- 2. The **rider** is Christ (consistent with Revelation 19:11), His going forth symbolizing the spreading of the gospel through the Church during "the **beginning of the birth pains**" (*cf.* Matthew 24:14). Again, this school sees Revelation 6:1 as "the beginning of the birth pains," not the start of the Great Tribulation.
- 3. The **rider** represents undefined nations engaged in power politics through military conquest (**a bow**)—the spirit of conquest and militarism. A **white horse...a crown** symbolize the various victories such nations often experience. The basis for this view is that the four riders should be seen as forming a unit; hence, this **rider**, like the following three, is releasing some sort of calamity—not a blessing (which would be true if it were referencing Christ). "It is possible to interpret the figure of the cavalier in either a positive or a negative manner, though the fact that the second, third, and fourth seals are negative makes it difficult to maintain that the first seal is positive." 128

This last option seems the most true to the context, although there is good argument as well for option #2. To identify the **rider** as the Antichrist is the least likely in that **white** is never associated with him, and there is no contextual evidence this is in fact the Great Tribulation, the time of his appearing. Assuming it does symbolize the last option, Morris notes,

• John is saying that any nation that embarks on a career of conquest unleashes bloodshed and famine and destruction (the other three horsemen). He is saying that this will be so till the end of time, and indeed, especially in the last

¹²⁵ Walvoord, op. cit., pg. 126.

This view goes as far back as Irenaeus in the second century. This is Ladd's view as well.

¹²⁷ This corresponds to the "wars and rumors of wars" of Matthew 24:6.

¹²⁸ Aune, *op. cit.*, pg. 393.

days. "The lust of conquest which makes great Empires...was the first and most momentous of the precursors of the final revelation." ¹²⁹

REVELATION 6:3-4—

With the opening of the second seal...another horse came out, a fiery red one (vs. 4). Its rider is summoned by the second living creature, and was given power to take peace from the earth and to make people slay each other. To him was given a large sword (vs. 4). The fiery red obviously symbolizes civil strife, warfare and bloodshed (cf. 2 Kings 3:22), an interpretation reinforced by the fact that its rider takes peace from the earth...[and] make[s] people slay each other. The fact that its rider was given power...was given a large sword (divine passives) symbolizes that "God uses human history for history's judgment" (Morris); war and civil strife are sometimes divinely orchestrated to bring forth judgment on a people. The second seal shows this will particularly be the case as history comes to a close. 130

• Though "wars and rumours of wars" (Matthew 24:6) are characteristic of the age, it is evident that warfare occupies a large place in the consummation of the age with a resultant great loss of life. There apparently is a series of wars, the greatest of which is under way at the time of the Second Coming. The hope of permanent peace by means of the UN and other human efforts is doomed to failure. 131

REVELATION 6:5-6—

With the opening of the third seal...there before [John] was a black horse! Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand. Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, "Two pounds of wheat for a day's wages, and six pounds of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!" vv. 5-6). A black horse symbolizes death, mourning and suffering (cf. Lamentations 5:10; Zechariah 6:2, 6). Its rider is releasing sufferings having to do with

¹²⁹ Morris, op. cit., pg. 105.

¹³⁰ There has been much speculation among contemporary popular prophecy teachers about the end times war of **the second seal**. Coordinating this with Ezekiel 38, Sutton says there will be a disruption of "the peace between Israel and her Arab neighbors by sending Russia from the north...which brings about the total destruction of Russia, at the beginning of the Tribulation" (Hilton Sutton, *The Book of Revelation Revealed*, Harrison House, Tulsa, OK., 2001, pg. 95). This seems unlikely and the best stance is probably to see this as teaching that a part of the end time consummation (beginning with the time of "**the beginning of the birth pains**") will involve massive bloody wars and civil strife (*cf.* Matthew 24:6).

economic and sustenance turmoil. A pair of scales in his hand indicates that food will have to be measured, a sign of scarcity and hard times (cf. Ezekiel 4:16).

Two pounds of wheat sold for a day's wages is about twelve times the normal amount; wheat and barley symbolize staples, showing the severity of the economic and sustenance turmoil. "One quart of wheat, the usual rations for a working man for a day, is to cost twelve times its normal price, while the labourer's daily pay will not command more than an eighth of the ordinary twenty-four measures of the coarser barley." ¹³²

"Do not damage the oil and the wine!" (vs. 6) is somewhat curious. It could mean that the luxuries of life will for some reason not be hard hit and the rich will continue to prosper for a while; or, it could refer to the fact the famine/judgment is limited—that is, though severe (cf. Matthew 24:22), it is not necessarily world-wide or massively destructive at this time. 133 This latter is probably the more correct, especially if this is "the beginning of the birth pains" for "the end is still to come" (Matthew 24:6). The [consummate] end, therefore, comes with the judgments of the seven bowls (Revelation 15:1).¹³⁴

REVELATION 6:7-8—

When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, there is again a summons from a living creature. This time there before [John] was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth (vv. 7-8).

Pale (pale green [NRSV], Greek, chloros) is obviously a very unusual color for a **horse**; it could be translated "pale gray," the color commonly associated with a corpse. Its rider is clearly identified as **Death**. Following in an unexplained way (perhaps on another horse) is **Hades** (the grave). It is not unusual then that John says they were given power...to kill.

Apparently modeled after God's four dreadful judgments in Ezekiel 14:21, the opening of the fourth seal further intensifies the sufferings associated with the previous

¹³² Moffatt, op. cit., pg. 390.

¹³³ See Beale, *op. cit.*, pg. 381.

134 The events of the End begin with the breaking of the seventh seal.

riders. **Sword** probably has reference here not only to war (the **fiery red** horse), but to any kind of murderous, violent killing; civil disorder is likely its intent. The food scarcity of the **black horse** becomes more intense (**over a fourth of the earth**), though the destruction is still limited in its scope. "The black horse symbolizes famine, followed by the pale horse, which represents death, for death always follows war (the red horse) and famine." Plague and destruction by the wild beasts of the earth are ambiguous, though their intent is clear.

REVELATION 6:9-11—

The content of **the fifth seal** seems to be out of sync until we remember Matthew 24:9, **"Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of Me." A major part of "the beginning of the birth pains,"** as indeed throughout Church history, is the martyring of God's people for their faith. Ford also makes an interesting observation about the contents of this seal. "This seal confirms all the seals are in the just judgment of God." 136

Regarding the souls of those who had been slain (vs. 9), note the following—

- 1. They are under the altar (vs. 9). This is obviously a scene in heaven, which Psalm 11:4 terms God's holy temple and throne. It is apparently a representation of the altar of sacrifice, for they had been slain and are seeking His avenging of their blood. They are viewed under the altar to show that their death is a type of sacrifice (*cf.* Leviticus 4:7 where a portion of the sacrificed blood is put at the base of the altar). Under the altar may also be an Old Testament way of noting protection and honor, much like Christians say, "Under the blood."
- 2. They had been slain because of the word of God (for advancing the gospel) and the testimony they had maintained (vs. 9).
- 3. They acknowledge that God is responsible for them ("Sovereign Lord") and that He will be faithful to His covenant promises, for He is holy and true (vs.

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¹³⁵ Lindsell, Harold, *NRSV Harper Study Bible*, Verlyn Berbrugge (Editor), Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI., 1991, pg. 1854.

¹³⁶ Ford, *op. cit.*, pg. 76.

¹³⁷ "That the souls of the martyrs were 'under the altar' is a way of saying that their untimely deaths on earth are from God's perspective a sacrifice on the altar of heaven" (Robert Mounce, *op. cit.*, pg. 146).

- 10). Yet, they ask of Him a painful question, "How long...until You judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" (on rebellious humankind [vs. 10]). They are not seeking indiscriminate revenge; they are asking God to quickly execute justice.
- 4. They are told to wait a little longer (vs. 11). In other words, the End is not yet. More time is required until the full number of their fellow servants and brothers and sisters were killed just as they had been (vs. 11). "The martyrs are told to wait a little longer until their number is completed. The victims of Nero's persecution are about to be joined by those who will give their lives rather than pay homage to Domitian as divine." This will be more fully explained when we discuss the Great Tribulation martyrs in Revelation 7.
- 5. Though not yet rewarded with consummated rest through the execution of God's final justice, they are given further consoling proof that no judgment awaits them and that they are already, in part, blessed—each of them was given a white robe.
 - As the Lamb unseals the book of history, the immediate impression we get is of a suffering world. If He is in control, though, surely within that world His Church is protected from these woes?...the answer of Seal 5 (cf. Matthew 24:9-12) is "No": the Church is not exempt. Assaults from without and within will test to the limit those who are prepared to stake everything, even life, on the Word and Witness of God...Will there never be a respite for His suffering people? Again the answer is "No"-- not in this world; only with the end of the world...

REVELATION 6:12-17—

As stated earlier, students of Revelation have difficulty with the time frame of the seals, especially **the sixth**. The difficulty with **the sixth seal** arises from the fact that the events described use biblical terminology <u>usually</u> reserved for describing the events of the Day of the Lord, Jesus' Second Coming (*cf.* Isaiah 2, 13 and 34 and Joel 2). Furthermore, in the Olivet Discourse, Jesus specifically says, "Immediately after the distress of those

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¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, pg. 149.

¹³⁹ Wilcock, *op. cit.*, pg. 76.

days 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all peoples of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great **glory**" (Matthew 24:29-30).

However, in spite of the distinct parallels between Old Testament descriptions and Jesus' Olivet Discourse words, John does not go on to describe the End. "The author is here clearly using current apocalyptic language and describing great natural convulsions, which, though traditionally connected with the final catastrophe, he places in a series of plagues belonging all alike to the forerunners of the last calamities." ¹⁴⁰ "The first six seals are a summary of the judgments distributed over the whole book; a brief summary of what will occur in 'the Day of the Lord,' up to the time of His actual Apocalypse or Unveiling in chapter 19."141

We can conclude, then, that though the language seems to describe the Day of the Lord. the sixth seal is instead describing the fact that prior to that Day there will be a similar intervention of God into human history that will be cataclysmic. The sixth seal brings us up to the very threshold of the End, the End not being fully described until "the breaking of the seventh seal opens the book and begins the story of the events of the end time." ¹⁴²

There is yet another difficulty to be addressed before examining the contents of the sixth seal. To what degree are we to take the events described literally? It is very difficult to determine. The fact that the Bible is consistent in the terminology of such events indicates the events are actual; there will be a literal great earthquake followed by various cosmic disruptions (vv. 12-14). However, we need to remember that John is

¹⁴⁰ Beckwith, op. cit., pg. 528.

Bullinger quoted in Walvoord, op. cit., pg. 137. Wilcock takes a slightly different view, stating that the sixth seal corresponds unquestionably to Matthew 24:29-30 and "describes the day which will end (human history)." (Michael Wilcock, loc. cit.). He then goes on to state that the contents of the unsealed book, especially the events of the trumpets, are "flashbacks" to those described by the seals. This has great merit and does indeed harmonize the Olivet Discourse and the various Old Testament passages with the language of the sixth seal. However, the nature of the scroll and its seals seems to indicate these events are preliminary to the contents of the scroll itself, even as the Olivet Discourse says there will be a definite time of "the beginning of the birth pains" before the End itself.

¹⁴² Ladd, *op. cit.*, pg. 109.

using apocalyptic language, which by nature is often hyperbolic and full of imagery, so the exactness of details is not clear. 143

There are six events associated with the opening of the sixth seal—

- 1. there was a great earthquake;
- 2. the sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair;
- 3. the whole moon turned blood red:
- 4. and the stars in the sky fell to the earth;
- 5. the sky receded like a scroll, rolling up;
- 6. and every mountain and island was removed from its place.

In response to these events, the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains. He rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, had who can withstand it?" (vv. 15-17). Using the number of completion, John lists seven categories of people to show that this seal affects judgment on every rank of human being who has rejected the work of the Lamb (cf. Isaiah 2:19; Hosea 10:8). Their cry to the mountains and the rocks to fall on them and hide them shows their awareness of the awesomeness of God's wrath; anything is preferable to experiencing the calamity of God's fury. "Who can withstand it?" (vs. 17) is modeled after Nahum 1:6, Who can withstand His indignation? Who can endure His fierce anger? It serves as a marvelous springboard to Revelation 7 where the question is answered.

For example, our understanding of the sky being in reality an optical illusion makes it difficult to conceive of the sky vanishing **like a scroll, rolling up** (Revelation 6:14). The same is true of **every**

conceive of the sky vanishing like a scroll, rolling up (Revelation 6:14). The same is true of every mountain and island [being] removed from its place (Revelation 6:14), since Revelation 6:15 says men hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains.

^{144 &}quot;The continued existence of the caves, rock, and mountains indicates that cosmic destruction is not in view" (David Aune, *op. cit.*, pg. 391).

¹⁴⁵ Their statement that **the great day of their wrath has come** (Revelation 6:17) can be interpreted in one of two ways—1) though not actually **the great day** of God's wrath, this statement reflects their perception of what is going on (**the great day** being yet future); or 2) they are indeed speaking what is the case, but day here refers to the entire scope of end times events, from the breaking of the seals to the Day of the Lord's wrath (Revelation 8 ff).

¹⁴⁶ "When the sixth seal is opened, men 'hide from God's face.' This is nothing new. It only shows the just reasons why God must bring judgment on evil men before the eternal inheritance can come to God's people. John stresses the unrepentant attitude of men until the very last (Revelation 9:20-21; 16:9-11). The sad words are, 'Men did not repent and give Him glory'" (Don Pickerill, *loc. cit.*).

REVELATION 7

Revelation 6 sees the breaking of six of the seven seals of the scroll. The seventh seal is broken in Revelation 8, setting off another series of plagues (this time more intense than those of the seals) as various trumpets are sounded. All of this continues the drama of the Day of the Lord, leading up to the End.

Before the seventh seal is broken, however, John has an interlude (Revelation 7). It is a crucial interlude because it deals with God's sealing of His people before He unleashes His intense fury in the battle against the forces of this Age, forces which must be judged before His kingdom can be consummated. Unfortunately, there are tremendously diverse views as to who the people represented in the two different multitudes in Revelation 7 are. "It is true that no explanation can be offered (concerning their identity) to which at least plausible objections may not be made." Yet, there are good clues and conclusions can be drawn. We must also remember that this interlude serves to answer the question of Revelation 6:17, "The great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?" This provides great clues. Furthermore, we must not examine Revelation 7 independent of Revelation as a whole, including the fact it was written to in part assure the Church amidst tribulation.

• Chapter 7 comes as a parenthesis between the sixth and seventh seals...[it] consists of two visions—one, the sealing of the 144,000, and the other, the blessedness of the great multitude before the heavenly throne...in both visions the church is in view, but from two vantage points. Prior to the trumpet judgments the last generation of believers is sealed so as to be saved from the destruction coming upon the earth and to be brought safely into the heavenly kingdom. The second vision is anticipatory of the eternal blessedness of all believers when in the presence of God they realize the rewards of faithful endurance. 148

REVELATION 7:1-3—

Following the vision of the breaking of the sixth seal, John sees four angels standing at the four corners of the earth...who had been given power to harm the land and the sea (vv. 1-2). "It was the belief of the ancient peoples that the winds which came

¹⁴⁷ Beckwith, op. cit., pg. 533.

¹⁴⁸ Mounce, op. cit., pg. 154.

from due north, south, east and west were all good winds; but the winds which blew diagonally across the earth were harmful. That is why the angels are at the corners of the earth. They are about to unleash the winds which blow diagonally across the earth." They are told, however, by another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God... "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God" (vv. 2-3). The intent is clear—God's servants are to be sealed from the wrath He will release with the sounding of the various trumpets and the plagues of the bowls (Revelation 8, 9 and 16).

• In Revelation 7:14, one of the heavenly elders explains to John that a multitude has "come out of the great tribulation." The progress of the book of Revelation seems to demand that this refers to a yet future time. Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 24:21, "There will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world." He was speaking about both the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and the end of this age when He returns (Matthew 24:3). So the coming judgment will be greater than anything yet known, but we are not to image it is totally different from tribulation throughout history. The point is that all God's people in all ages draw strength from the symbol of the sealing and salvation through tribulation. Paul taught the church in Acts 14:22, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." In one sense, all history has been a "great tribulation," but apparently evil will increase, as Jesus said, until it calls for the judgment of God at the end. 150

To mark with **a seal** (vs. 3) is a picture drawn from Ezekiel 9:4, 6. Everyone in John's day would have grasped the symbolism—God is protecting His own. "The seal is the invisible sign of God's protection, not from tribulation and death, but from God's wrath. See Eph. 1:13." Some commentators take exception with Morey's designation that the seal will be an invisible sign, comparable to that of being sealed by the Holy Spirit at salvation (*cf.* Ephesians 1:13). However, from the various promises "to those who are victorious" (Revelation 2-3), we must remember that John is fond of symbolic imagery to convey truths about the relationship between God and His people. 152

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¹⁴⁹ Barclay, quoted in Pickerill, op. cit., Notes on Revelation 7.

Pickerill, *ibid*.

¹⁵¹ Morey, *op. cit.*, pg. 1970. "The primary purpose (of the seal) is to insure protection for the believers in the coming judgments. The seal of God in 2 Tim 2:19 is 'the Lord knows those who are his.' Ownership entails protection" (Robert Mounce, *op. cit.*, pg. 157).

¹⁵² For example, using obvious symbolism, John has noted that everyone who conquers shall be made "pillars in the temple of My God" and that "the name of My God and the name of the city of My

"On the foreheads of the servants of our God" is an apocalyptic expression for the fact that God knows who are authentically His and who are not. The intent of the sealing is to assure the Church that she is secure and shall not be damned when His wrath is released. He has "marked us as His own," so to speak; it is therefore a real marking, though not physically visible.

REVELATION 7:4-8—

The first group John saw was that of the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel (vs. 4). "The figure 144,000 has given rise to all sorts of strange doctrines and cults." The first thing to be noted is that those being described are servants of our God (vs. 3). This marking is not for salvation; it is for protection. This serves to heighten the drama about to unfold. There will be those during the upcoming released wrath who are not so sealed; they consequently bear the mark of the beast (Revelation 16:2) and experience God's fury.

Though there is much speculation about who this 144,000 represents, two viewpoints vie for attention among conservative Christians—

- 1. The 144,000 is "a literal band of Jews, alive at that time and the godly remnant of national Israel on Earth during the Great Tribulation. That they are physical Jews (as opposed to 'spiritual') is noted by the fact a detailed listing of the 12 tribes is given (vv. 5-8)...without this seal, all who witness to the true God during the Great Tribulation will be martyred, except the 144,000 'sealed' Jewish remnant." There will be other Israelites saved besides these 144,000, but many of these will die martyrs' deaths and give up their lives for their faith. The 144,000 are those who are delivered from their persecutors and brought safely through this terrible time of tribulation." 155
- 2. The 144,000 symbolize the saints alive at the End, members of God's Church about to enter **the Great Tribulation** (Revelation 7:14). Though it is said that

God" shall be written on them (Revelation 3:12). It seems best, therefore, to go with Morey's observation and see the same symbolism in Revelation 7:3.

¹⁵³ Pickerill, *loc. cit.*

¹⁵⁴ Coleman Phillips, *Dispensational Interpretation notes on Revelation 7:4-17* in Hayford, *op. cit.*, pg. 1970.

¹⁵⁵ Walvoord, *op. cit.*, pg. 143.

they are sealed from all the tribes of Israel, the New Testament makes it clear that the Church is now the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16; cf. Romans 9:25). "It refers to that generation of faithful believers about to enter the final turbulent period that will mark the end of human history."156

This latter best fits the context and the overall scheme of Revelation—the final struggle between the kingdom of God through His Church (not through national Israel) and the kingdom of darkness through the "church" of the Antichrist. Furthermore, the 144,000 is too neat and perfect a number to be anything but symbolic, and the twelve tribes listed do not match with either the original Old Testament listing (Genesis 49) nor the listing of "the redeemed tribes" (Ezekiel 48). "These twelve tribes cannot be literal Israel, because they are not the twelve tribes of Old Testament Israel. The tribes here listed nowhere appear in the entire Bible...John means by this deliberate irregular listing of the twelve tribes to designate the Israel that is not the literal Israel."157

Revelation 7:1-8 then is (as noted above) an interlude designed to show the Church throughout the ages that the Church alive during the Great Tribulation will not escape tribulation, but its members will escape God's wrath (Revelation 6:17); this will be particularly comforting to the Church alive at that time or the Church in tribulation at any time in history.

REVELATION 7:9-17—

John says that next he looked, and there before [him] was a great multitude that no **one could count** (vs. 9). "This is one of the most beautiful scenes in all of Revelation. What a shame to get lost in technical interpretations and miss the wonderful picture. It shows the glorious triumph of a universally redeemed people who bring praise to God and in turn cause all the other creatures to glorify God." 158 "The Church is pictured a second time from an entirely different perspective. The first multitude is pictured as

¹⁵⁶ Mounce, op. cit., pg. 158.

¹⁵⁷ Ladd, George, A Theology of the New Testament – Revised Edition, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI., 2000 reprint, pg. 677. Pickerill, *loc. cit*.

standing on the threshold of the tribulation; the second multitude is seen after the tribulation is over, saved in the Kingdom of God."¹⁵⁹

Though there are interpretive problems in this section, these two quotes do call our attention to basically keep the issues simple and view Revelation 7 as a whole without bringing in fanciful speculation. John is still wrestling with the issue, "Who can withstand [God's wrath]?" (Revelation 6:17). Hence, this interlude not only assures the Church that she will escape God's fury (Revelation 7:1-8), but that when the End comes, the consummated result will be one of intimate fellowship with God and substantially different circumstances than characterize life in this Age (vv. 15-17). The Great Tribulation Church, including her martyrs, will be joined by a great multitude that no one could count (vs. 9; cf. Revelation 22:3).

This great multitude is expressly described as from every nation, tribe, people and language (vs. 9). This is biblical terminology for describing its universality; the great multitude, therefore, represents all God's redeemed, both Jew and Gentile (especially Great Tribulation martyrs [vs. 14]). "From God's standpoint they are all 'Israel,' His people; from our standpoint, they come from every nation under heaven." They are said to be standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (vv. 9-10). Wearing and holding symbols of victory, this great multitude is seen giving a cry of victory in a loud voice, as an expression of gratitude for the fact that the kingdom has reached consummation. Their cry sets off another hymn of praise as all the angels [who] were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures...fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God (vs. 11).

The **great multitude** is identified by way of a dialogue between John and **one of the elders** in which the elder poses a question to John. John throws the answer back to him saying, "Sir, you know" (vs. 14). The elder then identifies them as "they who have

¹⁵⁹ Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, pg. 117.
160 Wilcock, *op. cit.*, pg. 81; see also Mounce, *op. cit.*, pg. 161.

¹⁶¹ We see here the first clear indication that Revelation is not totally sequential. This vision is proleptic, "jumping to the very End."

come out of the Great Tribulation" (vs. 14). 162 The fact that "they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (vs. 14) serves to remind us that all our victory, righteousness and purity come through the life and death of Jesus Christ. We are made clean and acceptable in Him. He then indicates they are enjoying perfected fellowship with God ("they are before the throne of God" [vs. 15]); they are offering continuous worship in His very presence ("[they] serve Him day and night in His temple" [vs. 15]); and they are being protected from any future harm ("He who sits on the throne will spread His tent over them" [vs. 15]).

"Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them,' nor any scorching heat" (vs. 16) is a reference to Isaiah 49:10; it describes some particular blessings to be enjoyed in the consummated kingdom. This is obviously a continuation of the Exodus motif, wherein God's provision of manna, quail and water is emphasized; it also serves as a stark counter to specific difficulties experienced in this age, particularly during the time of "the beginning of birth pains" and the Great Tribulation.

"For the Lamb at the center before the throne will be their Shepherd; 'He will lead them to springs of living water.' 'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes'" (vs. 17) gives the basis for their enjoyment in the consummated kingdom (cf. Revelation 4-5).¹⁶³

• It is the author's habit, followed almost universally, to introduce at a great crisis or turning-point just such an anticipatory passage as this, looking beyond the immediate connection to the great outcome at the end. It is in pursuance of his art in throwing light into his darkest pictures. His aim is in each new instance to encourage his readers in the face of the calamities foretold. 164

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¹⁶² "Daniel 12:1 is acknowledged as the likely origin for the idea of 'the great tribulation'" (G. K. Beale, *op. cit.*, pg. 433).

op. cit., pg. 433).

The following is a popularized teaching on Revelation 7:9-17 that should serve to caution us against importing conjecture into the text. "Revelation 7:9-17 describes the mid-Tribulation catching up of the Great Multitude, the converts of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists...this reference tells us that the Great Multitude is composed of the converts of the 144,000. However, Zechariah 8:23 describes the Israeli company as including multitudes of Gentiles...backsliders and lukewarm Christians will not be ready for Jesus' appearing; therefore, they will miss the catching up of the Church in 4:1. Today the Holy Spirit is working so mightily, thousands of Gentile backsliders are daily returning to God. The few believers who missed the Rapture can be caught up with the Great Multitude, provided they too have accepted the ministry of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists" (Hilton Sutton, op. cit., pp. 102-104).

¹⁶⁴ Beckwith, op. cit., pg. 540.

REVELATION 8

As noted under the exposition of Revelation 6, there is great diversity among scholars as to the time frame of certain events in Revelation. Sutton, for example, is adamant about the seven trumpets being in the middle of the Great Tribulation; many other dispensationalists agree. However, as stated earlier, this is not at all clear. The more likely time frame is that the opening of the seventh seal (Revelation 8:1) corresponds to the beginning of the Great Tribulation. "The beginning of the birth pains" (Matthew 24:8) is coming to an end; we have reached "the beginning of the End."

• We have seen that the visions of the earlier seals tell of those more ordinary judgments, war, famine, etc., the beginnings of woes, which are only preparatory to the last times; but now that the scroll is opened, we have in the corresponding visions the whole vast cycle of the last things which follow the beginnings of woes, i.e., the awful plagues which more immediately precede the end, the appearance of the superior forces of evil, the final conflict, and all the other events issuing in the consummation of the kingdom. 166

As with the events of **the sixth seal** (Revelation 6:12-17), it is difficult to know just how literally to take the events described in the sounding of the trumpets. Those of the first four bear remarkable resemblance to the plagues of Egypt, which happened literally according to the Exodus description. ¹⁶⁷ It is clear that these are <u>actual</u> divine interventions, but we must watch undue speculation as to precisely <u>how</u> they will come about (*i.e.*, **hail and fire mixed with blood** [Revelation 8:7] are atomic fallout). The <u>what</u> and <u>intent</u> are clear, as well as the fact these reference <u>actual</u> events; the <u>how</u> is not that clear.

One final introductory remark—why these woes? In Revelation 15:1, John notes that the bowls of wrath are clearly expressions of God's judgment, poured out on the unrepentant (Revelation 16:2). But prior to that are the trumpets—both judgments and an attempt to drive sinful humankind to repentance before the End (Revelation 9:20; 16:11).

¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, it appears that the content of **the seventh seal** (Revelation 8:1) is the seven trumpets, which is also tied into the content of the opened scroll itself.

Beckwith, *op. cit.*, pg. 549.

The narrative of the punishments unleashed with the blowing of each successive trumpet (8:1-9:21 and 11:15-18), similar to that of the pouring out of the seven bowls or cups of God's wrath (15:1-16:21), is an *eschatological* application of the ten plagues inflicted on Egypt by God (Exod 7-12)" (David Aune, *op. cit.*, pg. 499).

• Trumpets are sounding not doom, but warning. The majority of mankind is allowed to survive, being shown God's wrath against sin, and given the chance to repent. Paradoxically, therefore, the miseries are really kindnesses. The seals showed the suffering Church pleading for justice to be done. But the trumpets show the wicked world being offered mercy. 168

REVELATION 8:1-6—

When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour (vs. 1). It is not clear as to what is meant by silence...for about half an hour. 169 It is most likely "a dramatic pause that makes even more impressive the judgments about to fall upon the earth." 170 "The thirty minute silence in heaven probably is the 'silence before the storm.' It serves to heighten the suspense and leaves a sort of breathless expectation as men tremble in anticipation. The silence may also serve as a reverent hush to hear the important prayers which precede the trumpet judgments." 171

Before the first trumpet is sounded (Revelation 8:7), John experiences a significant theological interlude (vv. 3-5) involving another angel, who had a golden censer... [who] was given much incense to offer (vs. 3). In this picturesque interlude, it becomes very clear that the judgments that are about to be released on the Earth are in direct response to the prayers of all God's people (vs. 3; cf. Ezekiel 10:2). The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God's people, went up before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth (vv. 4-5). "The censer filled with fire from the altar, which the angel casts down to the earth, symbolizes the punishment of humanity that will follow the blowing of each of the trumpets." God's people refers to the Church's pray-ers throughout the centuries, not just to those of some special group of Great Tribulation martyrs. The imagery is from the Old Testament altar of incense and the coals of the brazen altar—a mixture of worship and judgment.

In response to the prayers being thrown there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake (vs. 5). These clear symbols of theophanic

¹⁶⁸ Wilcock, op. cit., pg. 95.

¹⁶⁹ **The seven angels** seen standing before God "are probably to be understood as the seven archangels who occupy a very particular role in the angelic hierarchy" (David Aune, *op. cit.*, pg. 509).

¹⁷⁰ Mounce, op. cit., pg. 170.

¹⁷¹ Pickerill, *op. cit.*, Notes on Revelation 8-9.

¹⁷² Aune, *op. cit.*, pg. 546.

judgment harmonize worship with the righteous purposes of God. The prayer of all God's people must always be, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). The Church's longing for judgment against sin must not be in a self-righteous way, but from a heart that loves righteousness and hates wickedness (cf. Hebrews 1:9). The seven trumpets are now ready to be blown (vs. 6).

REVELATION 8:7-13—

The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, ¹⁷³ and it was hurled down on the earth (vs. 7). Fire here likely refers to lightning rather than atomic fallout. This woe is very similar to the seventh plague on Egypt (the Lord sent thunder and hail, and lightning flashed down to the ground [Exodus 9:23]), and aims at destroying vegetation and environment—a third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up (vs. 7). ¹⁷⁴ Nature seems to be turned against itself. A third of the earth is an obvious increase from a fourth of the earth (Revelation 6:8), meaning the woes of the trumpets are still limited, but increasing in intensity and extent from those of the seals.

The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood... (vv. 8-9A; cf. Psalm 46:2). Something like a huge mountain, all ablaze most likely refers to "extraordinary volcanic activity such as the tragic eruption of Vesuvius on 24 August A.D. 79." This woe bears resemblance to the first plague (all the water [of the Nile] was changed into blood [Exodus 7:20]), and is aimed at destroying marine life and commerce—a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed (vs. 9).

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entirely metaphorical, describing God's judgment of an evil kingdom.

¹⁷³ **Mixed with blood** is problematic. It could refer to literal **blood** raining from heaven; to the destruction of human beings and animals, secondary sufferers in this woe; or "to the awesome color of the storm rather than the fire and destruction that the lightning would cause" (Robert Mounce, *op. cit.*, pg. 178).

¹⁷⁴ See also Joshua 10:11 where **the Lord hurled large hailstones down** on the Gibeonite army. ¹⁷⁵ Aune, *op. cit.*, pg. 519. See also Beale, *op. cit.*, pp. 475-476 for the view that it is not literal but rather

The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star,¹⁷⁶ blazing like a torch,¹⁷⁷ fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water (vs. 10; *cf.* Isaiah 14:12-14; Jeremiah 9:14). This judgment is aimed at destroying humankind's most basic resource of life, water—a third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter (vs. 11).

• This is probably a combination of judgments taken from Daniel 8:10 which refers to falling stars, the bitter waters of Marah for murmuring (Exodus 15:23-24) and the commentary in Jeremiah 9:15, "I will feed this people with wormwood, and give them poisonous water to drink," because of idolatry and godlessness. 179

The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark (vs. 12). Although we cannot know for sure what this means, it resembles the ninth Egyptian plague ("Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness spreads over Egypt—darkness that can be felt" [Exodus 10:21]); it is most definitely aimed at decreasing humankind's vision and productivity through a loss of intensity of Earth's light sources—a third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night (vs. 12). It also shows a reversal of what is seen in Joshua 10:13, when the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till [Israel] avenged itself on its enemies.

• The fourth trumpet is the logical climax and emphasis of the first four trumpets and an emblem of the hardened unbeliever's spiritual separation from God. The darkness here is also figurative and refers to all those divinely ordained events intended to remind the church's idolatrous persecutors, and those within the church who have aligned themselves with the idolatrous culture, that their idolatry is vain, and that they are separated from the living God, and that they are already undergoing a beginning form of judgment. All four trumpets are concerned with sufferings imposed on the ungodly that indicate their separation from God and the beginning of their judgment. ¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ **The name of the star is Wormwood** (Revelation 8:11) links the star with its destruction. "The name of the star is *Wormwood*, a very bitter substance...wormwood as we know it is not poisonous...some suggest that he is taking the bitterness of the taste as in itself suggesting poison" (Leon Morris, *op. ti.*, pg. 124).

¹⁷⁷ This may refer to "a great meteorite set afire as it plunges through the earth's atmosphere" (Robert Mounce, *op. cit.*, pg. 180).

¹⁷⁸ "I will make this people eat bitter food and drink poisoned water" (TNIV).

¹⁷⁹ Pickerill, *loc. cit.*

¹⁸⁰ Beale, op. cit., pg. 485.

These four woes deal with natural catastrophes that then affect humankind. The remaining three (trumpet seven constituting the plagues of the bowls) deal directly with human beings. They are worse; therefore, before the fifth is sounded, there is a brief interlude in which the horribleness of the remaining trumpets is heralded. **I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: "Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth,**¹⁸¹ because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!" (vs. 13). "Flying in midair always refers to creatures whose appearance anticipates the judgment at Christ's second coming (an angel in 14:6; birds in 19:17). The creature is able to address the entire habitation of 'earth dwellers' from its metaphorical cosmic zenith point." ¹⁸²

REVELATION 9

• John required but six verses to set forth the first four trumpet-plagues (8:7-12). But now he is about to devote over three times that space to the next two plagues. This added emphasis corresponds to the seriousness of the calamities that follow. People who earlier were merely discomforted by judgments upon the world of nature are now directly subjected to torments that arise from the underworld. 183

REVELATION 9:1-12—

The sounding of the fifth trumpet corresponds to the first **Woe** of the eagle (Revelation 6:13; vs. 12). The fifth trumpet portrays an utterly gruesome, hideous judgment, meant to purposely shock the imagination and drive mortals to repentance (Revelation 9:20-21). In the vision, John says, **I** saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss (vs. 1). In light of the activity in which the star participates, it is most likely that by a star John is referring to some unidentified angelic being, rather than to a literal star or meteor. ¹⁸⁴ Abyss (bottomless pit [NRSV],

¹⁸¹ **The inhabitants of the earth** is a favorite expression in Revelation to describe the unregenerate (*cf.* Revelation 6:10).

¹⁸² Beale, op. cit., pg. 489.

¹⁸³ Mounce, op. cit., pg. 184.

¹⁸⁴ Comparing this with previously mentioned places in Revelation in which stars are likely literal astral phenomenon, we once again see the fluidity of apocalyptic language. The NRSV translates Revelation 9:1—I saw a star...and he was given the key (emphasis mine). See also Revelation 9:2—when he opened the Abyss (TNIV).

Greek, *abussos*) is the place of the dead (*cf.* Romans 10:7), the place of the Antichrist's origin (Revelation 20:3), the place of Satan's millennial imprisonment (Revelation 20:3) and the place of demons' imprisonment (*cf.* Luke 8:31). It is an all-encompassing term, used to describe the "home" of those forces opposed to God and His reign. The fact that John notes **the star was given** (grammatically, a divine passive) **the key** again reinforces this judgment is from God; it also shows that even **the Abyss** is under His sovereign control.

When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. And out of the smoke locusts came down on the earth (vv. 2-3). Some commentators see this as the release of physical locusts; the majority of scholars, however, see locusts here as representative of demonic spirits and influences released against unredeemed humankind in an attempt to drive people to repentance (Revelation 9:20-21). "The locust army is a symbolical representation of judgment of a superhuman kind...neither the smoke nor the locusts are literal." "God uses the evil results of men's sins to call them to repentance...it is God's chastening, and God's chastening is not aimless. Rightly received it should lead men to amendment." 186

The description of their invasion is fashioned after Joel 2:4-10, where it is said that a locust plague will precede the Day of the Lord. Historically, God has judged with literal locusts, and no doubt the reference point is the eighth Egyptian plague (Exodus 10:12-20). It is their description and activity here, however, that make it clear they are symbolic.¹⁸⁷ Their appearance symbolizes—

- 1. that which is spiritually evil ([they] were given power like that of scorpions of the earth [vs. 3]);
- that which is strong (the locusts looked like horses prepared for battle [vs. 7]);

¹⁸⁵ Scott in Walvoord, op. cit., pg. 160.

¹⁸⁶ Morris, op. cit., pg. 126.

¹⁸⁷ Realizing the difficulty of equating this description with literal **locusts**, some commentators say they are specially created locust/scorpion type insects designed just for this assignment. Again, however, this is ignoring the major intent of the section (Revelation 9:5-6), and fails to remember that apocalyptic literature is fluid in its use of symbolism.

- 3. that which is successful (on their heads they wore something like crowns of gold [vs. 7]);
- **4.** that which is intelligent (their faces resembled human faces [vs. 7]);
- 5. that which is fierce (their teeth were like lions' teeth [vs. 8]);
- 6. and that which natural man is powerless to overthrow (they had breastplates like breastplates of iron [vs. 9]).

Their mission is to harm...only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. They were not allowed to kill them but only to torture them for five months (vv. 4-5). Torture here refers to any type of woe—disease, enmities, insecurities, etc.

• The tribulation will be a time of the beginning of the wrath of God upon a rebellious society, a time of fearful persecution of the church by the beast, and, as this trumpet shows, a time of demonic activity. God's wrath will fall only on the worshipers of the beast (16:2), and God's people will be sheltered by a divine protection from demonic activity. 188

It will be so horrible that during those days people will seek death but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them (vs. 6).

The command **not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree** (vs. 4) is likely intended to confirm that they will not be involved in normal locust activity; they will not be doing what locusts would ordinarily do were they real locusts. Some use this prohibition to substantiate their argument that these are literal locusts. Their argument is good, but literal locusts do not fit the overall context, especially vs. 11. "It is a great mistake to take this literally. It does, however, seem to show the ferocious demonic forces which will afflict men prior to the coming Christ." ¹⁸⁹

They had as king¹⁹⁰ over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek is Apollyon (vs. 11). This special king is mentioned nowhere else in the Bible, but is obviously a part of the demonic hierarchy referenced in Ephesians 6:12. His **Hebrew** name means, "Destruction" and his **Greek** name means, "Destroyer."

Though the purpose is to bring repentance, many (most?) do not (Revelation 9:20-21). The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come (vs. 12).

¹⁸⁸ Ladd, op. cit., pg. 132.

¹⁸⁹ Pickerill, *loc. cit.*

¹⁹⁰ Interestingly, Proverbs 30:27, referring to natural locusts, says **locusts have no king**.

REVELATION 9:13-19—

The sixth angel sounded his trumpet (vs. 13). This is the second Woe of the eagle (Revelation 11:14). The fact that in response to the blast John notes, I heard a voice coming from the four horns of the golden alter that is before God. It said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet... (vv. 13-14), reiterates that this judgment is another response to the prayers of the saints (cf. Revelation 8:2-5). What the voice says is, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates" (vs. 14). The fact that the four angels...are bound seemingly indicates they are leaders of the angels who fell in the satanic rebellion, who did not keep their positions of authority (Jude 6).

The mention of **the great river Euphrates**, along with the fact the plague involves **mounted troops** (vs. 16), has given rise to numerous speculations as to what this woe represents.¹⁹¹ Although scholars are not certain, **the great river Euphrates** most likely symbolically represents the origin of that which is destructive, that which is opposed to God's way (*cf.* Isaiah 8:7). "The River Euphrates formed the limits of the Promised Land (Genesis 15:18; Joshua 1:4, etc.). Beyond the river would be the unknown pagan forces which might sweep down on the civilized world. This river became a symbol of the evil forces that could overflow and bring judgment on Israel (Isaiah 7:20; Jeremiah 46:10)."¹⁹²

The four angels then are releasing evil forces (mounted troops...the horses); they are not coming from beyond the great river Euphrates, as much as they are coming from the Abyss. This is supported further by the fact that it is neither the horses [nor] riders (vs. 17) that carry out the destruction; it is the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur coming out of the horses' mouths (vs. 18). It misses the point then to try to make these horses...riders John's best attempt at describing the modern weaponry of a vast Oriental army.

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¹⁹¹ The most common interpretation among popular prophecy teachers and many dispensational scholars is that this speaks of a literal Oriental army, the Orient being beyond **the great river Euphrates**. "Literal armies from the East move toward national Israel in preparation for the Battle of Armageddon" (Coleman Phillips, *op. cit.*, pg. 1973). Again, this assumes that Revelation 6 *ff* is largely about evil's rampage against national Israel, an assumption not at all clear in Revelation.

¹⁹² Pickerill, *loc. cit*.

¹⁹³ **Fire**, **smoke and sulfur** are symbols of hell itself (*cf.* Revelation 14:10; 20:10); one could legitimately say that with this trumpet, "All hell breaks loose against sinful humankind."

• The cavalry armies are, like the rest of this scene, not to be taken literally. No age in history has yet seen the devastating coincidence of, on the one hand, pagan idolatry as the dominant religion (vs. 20), and on the other, 200 million fire-breathing, snake-tailed horses rampaging out of Mesopotamia. Nor is the passage to be treated as symbolism of the kind which merely encloses words in quote marks, so that "the horses' mouths" are flamethrowers, the "horses' tails" bombers, and so on; and the "Euphrates" from which all this military paraphernalia comes is Russia, or China, or whatever the current bogey may be 194

The number of mounted troops was two hundred million (vs. 16). The Greek literally reads, "a double myriad of myriads." John no doubt drew from Psalm 68:17—the chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands; it is intended to represent an innumerable number, supported by the fact John could not count them. He had to be told the number (vs. 16B).

The fifth trumpet then sees the release of demonic hordes for the purpose of tormenting unregenerate humankind (Revelation 9:5); the demonic horde of the sixth trumpet primarily kills (a third of the people were killed by the three plagues [vs. 18]), although it too torments (their tails were like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury [vs. 19]).

REVELATION 9:20-21—

As stated earlier, the intent of the first woe is to try to get unrepentant humankind to repent of the works of their hands...worshiping demons and idols...murders...magic arts...sexual immorality...thefts (vv. 20-21). "Once the heart is set in its hostility toward God not even the scourge of death will lead people to repentance...such is the delusion of sin." But there is also a good lesson for the Church.

 John was not writing to or for the pagan world. He was writing for the Christian church. Believers must live in this world, not an imaginary world of their own choosing. John is making plain to a little group of persecuted believers that they must not expect to live in a world that understood them and

¹⁹⁴ Wilcock, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-99. We would do well at this point to remember that although the prophetic writers and initial readers did not always clearly understand the fullest implications of a prophecy, a fundamental rule of conservative hermeneutics is, "A text cannot mean what it never meant" (Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth – Second Edition*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI., 1993, pg. 26). In other words, demonic hordes would have been recognizable to the initial readers; modern tanks would not.

¹⁹⁵ Mounce, *op. cit.*, pg. 198.

welcomed their witness. No matter how severe the judgments of God on it, the world continues with its idolatries and its manifold sins. Believers must not delude themselves. This world that John depicts, with sinful men resisting God to the limit no matter how much they hurt themselves in the process, is the world believers must live in. There is no other. ¹⁹⁶

• God has meted out punishment to those who do not bear the seal of God on their foreheads. It is important to remember that God's own people are protected during this time from the plagues that fall on the rest of the human race. Believers will endure the tribulation that comes from a world controlled by a different set of values, but they will never be touched by the wrath of God. Their protection is not physical but spiritual. 197

REVELATION 10

Once again John interrupts the events of Revelation for an important interlude. Between the breaking of the sixth and seventh seals, he stopped to reassure the Church of her secured position before God, both during the Great Tribulation and in the consummated kingdom (Revelation 7). Here, between the woes of the sixth and seventh trumpets (which is the great wrath of the bowls), the interlude (Revelation 10:1-11:14) reassures John of his mission and its nature (Revelation 10), and outlines the preservation and future salvation of national Israel (Revelation 11:1-14; Paul's **all Israel will be saved** [Romans 11:26]). The interlude also serves to demonstrate a valuable truth to the Church.

• As in the case of the seals, there is an interlude between the sixth and the seventh trumpets. In both cases the effect is to set off the seventh visitation as particularly important. We are all keyed up for the climax, but it does not come. We are kept in suspense. This is not simply a literary device. It is part of life. Men cannot predict how God's judgments will operate. They take unexpected courses. There are delays which give opportunity for repentance. 198

¹⁹⁶ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 132.

¹⁹⁷ Mounce, op. cit., pg. 199.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pg. 136.

REVELATION 10:1-7—

In this part of the interlude, John saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs like fiery pillars (vs. 1). Although this bears resemblance to the description of Christ in Revelation 1, this is clearly not Christ; Christ is never termed an angel in the New Testament, nor would Christ swear by Him who lives for ever and ever (vs. 6). The angel's glorious description serves to emphasize the importance of the event, as does the fact that he raised his right hand to heaven. And he swore by Him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heaven and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it (vv. 5-6).

The angel was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand (vs. 2). The fact that he planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land (vs. 2) indicates the message he was bringing involves the whole world; it is universal. With a loud shout (vs. 3), the angel sets off the seven thunders (vs. 3) that somehow give a message to John (vs. 4). He was about to record this message when he heard a voice from heaven say, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down" (vs. 4). Some things are for John's understanding only. We are not told why. The voice from heaven is likely that of either the Father or Jesus Christ. 199

What is clear is what the **mighty angel** swears. "There will be no more delay! But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as He announced to His servants the prophets" (vs. 7). In other words, with the sounding of the seventh trumpet (Revelation 11:15), the final events of history that lead to the End are set into motion; God will not wait forever for sinful humankind to respond and repent. The final judgment of evil and eschatological salvation will surely come at a marked point in history; they will not be indefinitely postponed. The perplexities of history will be answered as God's will, prophesied for centuries by **the prophets**, is finally actualized (*cf.* Revelation 6:9-11).²⁰⁰

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Human nature being what it is, expositors have tried to identify *the* seven thunders (emphasis mine) and speculate what it is they said to John. Both are vain; although the Greek specifically says **the** seven thunders, these thunders appear nowhere else in the Bible and John does not elaborate further.

²⁰⁰ **TECHNICAL NOTE**: The KJV translation of Revelation 10:6B, **there should be time no longer**, is misleading in English in terms of representing the intent of the statement. More accurate is the NKJV, **there should be delay no longer**.

There is some discrepancy among scholars as to the meaning of **the mystery of God** being fulfilled (vs. 7). Some dispensationalists see this as correlating with Daniel 9:24, "the finishing of God's final purpose concerning national Israel and the city of Jerusalem. Even though national Israel is promised deliverance, she must first experience suffering and judgment." Again, this is based on the assumption Revelation 6 *ff* is primarily about national Israel vs. evil (the State/society). Most scholars do not agree with this premise and see vs. 7 in a broader light. **Mystery** (Greek, *musterion*) denotes something people can never know by their own understanding; it demands a revelation. This includes God's thoughts and plans. According to Romans 16:25-26, **mystery** refers primarily to God's plan of redemption, given in veiled form in the Old Testament but seen as fulfilled by John. "The 'mystery of God' is His total redemptive purpose, which includes the judgment of evil and the eschatological salvation of His people." John then is using this phrase to speak of the final events of the End that yet remain—the Beast, the bowls of God's wrath, the rise and doom of Babylon, Christ's return, the Millennium, the Age to Come, etc. It begins with the blowing of the seventh trumpet.

REVELATION 10:8-11—

The key to Revelation 10 is the little scroll that John is instructed to "...take [from] the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land" (vs. 8). When John took the little scroll, the angel said, "Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but 'in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey" (vs. 9). Similar to the experiences of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 15:16) and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 2:8-3:3), this symbolic act demonstrated the necessity of John being completely involved in his message.

• This all sounds odd and mysterious until we remember it is highly dramatic symbolism and is based largely on passages in the Old Testament. In Ezekiel 2:8-3:3, a similar experience is recorded. "Be not rebellious...eat what I give you...a hand was stretched out to me, and, lo, a written scroll was in it...and there were written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe...and He said to me, 'Eat...and go speak'...Then I ate it; and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey." It is clear that both Ezekiel and John are ingesting and

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²⁰¹ Phillips, op. cit., pg. 1974.

²⁰² Ladd, *op. cit.*, pg. 145.

assimilating God's Word to them. So the scroll represents the message they are to speak—the Word of God. 203

John notes that eating the little scroll was a bittersweet experience. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour (vs. 10). The revelation of God's Word to him on Patmos was indeed a privilege, but when it came to understanding the implications of its woes, it was bitter. John "must prophesy again," realizing the fullest implications of God's wrath upon a rebellious humankind.

• Here is an important truth for all who proclaim the word of God. The full counsel of God contains a word of judgment as well as mercy, and the messenger of the gospel must be faithful to both aspects of his message. But the man who knows the love of God and the compassion of Christ can never take delight in preaching the wrath of God or find satisfaction of spirit in proclaiming divine judgments. He must always do this with a broken heart, with a bitter spirit, following the example of his Lord who wept over those upon whom God's judgment was to fall.²⁰⁴

The universality of the message as symbolized in the angel's stance on the sea and on the land (vs. 8) is reiterated in vs. 11—then I was told, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings" (i.e., "he is commanded to denounce the wickedness of those who have not responded to the Christian gospel"). ²⁰⁵ In that John was in his 90s while in exile on Patmos, this most likely has reference to what he wrote in Revelation. We have no indication that John had an itinerate ministry following his exile, although such is possible. ²⁰⁶

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²⁰³ Pickerill, op. cit., Notes on Revelation 10.

²⁰⁴ Ladd, op. cit., pg. 147.

²⁰⁵ Aune, *op. cit.*, pg. 575.

²⁰⁶ **TECHNICAL NOTE:** This is why the TNIV and most modern translations translate the Greek preposition *epi* in Revelation 10:11 as **about** (TNIV; NRSV) or **concerning** (NASB), rather than **before** ("**Thou must prophesy again before many peoples...**" [KJV]). **About/concerning** and **before** are legitimate translations of *epi* but **about/concerning** seems most accurate contextually and historically.

REVELATION 11

If there is one thing that commentators agree on regarding the first thirteen verses of Revelation 11, it is that they are difficult!! Interpretations are vastly varied with very little consensus. "In turning to the matters in 11:1-13, we come to a passage that is universally recognized as difficult to interpret. Part of the problem stems from the necessity of having to take a rather clear-cut position on the interpretation of apocalyptic language." We must, therefore, willingly admit that it is unscholarly to be overly dogmatic, especially with reference to whether or not the two witnesses are literal or symbolic.

• The chapter is extraordinarily difficult to interpret, and the most diverse solutions have been proposed...it seems to me important that the whole section (verses 1-13) is to be taken symbolically. It is plain enough that the sanctuary of verse 1 is symbolical, but most expositors proceed to take the witnesses and the holy city literally. Then difficulties multiply. They are fewer when we see all as symbolism and a coherent pattern emerges.

REVELATION 11:1-3—

In this scene, John becomes an active participant. **I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Go and measure..."** (vs. 1). The imagery here draws from Ezekiel 40 and Zechariah 2. To **measure** something is to mark it off as God's property—either for preservation or destruction (*cf.* 2 Samuel 8:2). Contextually, that which is measured here is to be preserved.

John was told to "...measure the temple of God and the altar, with its worshipers" (vs. 2). Here is the first point of debate. Dispensationalists interpret the temple as referencing a literal end-times Temple, which the Jews will construct on Mount Moriah and which God will have preserved during the final wars, although the remainder of Jerusalem will be destroyed (vs. 2). "Vv. 1, 2 depict Jewish temple worship restored in the first three and one-half years of the Great Tribulation, also known as Daniel's Seventieth Week...this is followed by 'the abomination of desolation,' a time when the Beast will demand that temple sacrifices cease, and his image be placed in the temple to

²⁰⁷ Mounce, *op. cit.*, pp. 211-212.

²⁰⁸ This would be the view of Ladd; see note #485 below.

²⁰⁹ Morris, op. cit., pg. 144.

be worshiped."²¹⁰ Non-dispensationalists disagree. "A theological objection to the futuristic literalist view is that a future temple with an altar represents the revival of the OT sacrificial system, whereas Heb. 10:1-12 affirms that Christ's sacrifice typologically fulfilled and abolished that system forever."²¹¹

The Greek word used for **temple** (*naos*) describes the building proper, the place where the Jewish people assembled. It did not include the outer court of the Gentiles (**the outer court**), which John was told not to measure (vs. 2). It is best, therefore, to see **the temple** as symbolic. But symbolic of what? Mounce proposes that both **the temple** and **the outer court** "represent the church from two different perspectives" and that the intent of the passage is "that during the difficult period lying immediately ahead the people of God will be kept safe from demonic assault although they will suffer at the hands of the unbelieving world."

Ladd disagrees, noting that in measuring **the temple** for preservation John was being told to symbolically measure the Jewish remnant of the last days.²¹³ Revelation 7 sees the sealing of the Church from God's wrath; Revelation 11 sees God's intent to deal with national Israel, an intent that has as its goal the ultimate salvation of those who accept the message of Jesus' messiahship (Revelation 11:13B; see also Romans 11:26).²¹⁴

The strongest argument for the fact that John is measuring a Jewish remnant for preservation through acceptance of Jesus Christ the Messiah is found in the remainder of vs. 2—"But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city²¹⁵ for 42 months." The holy city

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²¹⁰ Phillips, *loc. cit.* It is not difficult to believe that the Jews would build such a Temple once again (although this is not clear biblically); what is difficult to believe, in light of the Book of Hebrews' analysis of the former covenant and its objects, is that God would want it/need it built for the purpose of consummating His kingdom and redeeming "all Israel."

²¹¹ Beale, *op. cit.*, pg. 560.

²¹² Mounce, *op. cit.*, pp. 212-213.

²¹³ See Ladd, *op. cit.*, pp. 151-152.

²¹⁴ Romans 9-11 and Luke 21:24 clearly show that God has yet a dealing with national Israel; however, it will not be through a resuscitated sacrificial system or rebuilt Temple, but through the gospel message as proclaimed by the Church and the two witnesses.

²¹⁵ "When in contrast to the city as a whole, the temple proper and its worshipers are preserved, the contrast

²¹⁵ "When in contrast to the city as a whole, the temple proper and its worshipers are preserved, the contrast seems to be between the Jewish people as a whole and a remnant who are true worshipers of God" (George Ladd, *op. cit.*, pg. 152).

references the Jewish people that includes the remnant (**the temple**) as well as non-believing Jews.²¹⁶

- I understand the temple to represent the remnant within national Israel. The holy city (Revelation 11:2) or Jerusalem is naturally associated with the Jewish nation (cf. Isaiah 40:12; Matthew 23:37). Notice in Revelation 11:8 that Jerusalem is symbolically called Sodom (for its sins) and Egypt (for its bondage). The full theological discussion of Israel is given in Romans 9-11. The nation is in unbelief and rebellion (Romans 9:21; 11:23), but within Israel there is a "remnant according to the election of grace" (Romans 11:5). Although the nation is an enemy of the gospel, they are still beloved because of God's ancient promises (Romans 11:28-29). So a time is coming when "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26); John seems to be talking about these events in Revelation 11. He pictures the remnant in the form of the temple and those who worship God there (Revelation 11:1). Many feel that this means a literal temple rebuilt in Jerusalem. This is not clear to me and in my opinion should not be pressed.²¹⁷
- **42 months** poses another difficulty. Again, dispensationalists take this literally, with many seeing this as applying to Jerusalem's occupation and destruction during the last 42 months of the Great Tribulation (Daniel's Seventieth Week).
 - Forty-two months as a time frame shows perfect harmony between Daniel and Revelation. Daniel speaks of "70 weeks of years" (9:24-27), revealing that all prophetic history for this age will culminate in a final seventieth week of years. During this final seven-year period, every prophecy concerning national Israel and Jerusalem would be fulfilled literally. However, he spoke about this final week of years as being divided into two distinct three and one-half year periods (Daniel 9:27), the last half being the Great Tribulation. This is the significance of Revelation's 42 months (11:2), 1,260 days (11:3; 12:6) and "time and times and half a time" (12:14).

There are, however, other options. Because of the frequent appearance of **42** or its equivalent in Revelation, it is best taken symbolically to refer to a limited time of calamity. It is synonymous in concept to **the times of the Gentiles** (Luke 21:24), the time of satanic opposition that will climax under the Antichrist. "42 months…is the

²¹⁶ "The most natural meaning of Jerusalem is that it stands for the Jewish people. When Jesus spoke of the trampling of Jerusalem by the gentiles (Luke 21:24), he meant to designate the city as representative of the entire people" (George Ladd, *loc. cit.*).

Pickerill, *op. cit.*, Notes on Revelation 11.

²¹⁸ Phillips, *loc. cit.*

conventional period in apocalyptic literature for the temporary triumph of evil before the end of the age."²¹⁹

The symbol of three and one-half years is taken from Daniel 7:25, "He (Antichrist) will speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out (persecute) the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law (uproot religion and be a law unto himself); and they shall be given into his hand for a time, two times, and half a time." It is interesting that history itself has a period which seems to prefigure this prophecy. A Greek ruler named Antioch Epiphanes tried to stamp out Judaism. He invaded Jerusalem and desecrated the temple. Pigs were offered in sacrifice, a Temple to Zeus was erected, and prostitutes put in the sacred chambers. The temple's desecration lasted almost exactly three and one-half years, from June 168 BC to December 165 BC. To this day, Jews celebrate this deliverance as Hanukkah. I do not understand the three and one-half years to be an exact calendar time, but a symbol of the concentration of evil at the end time. That the number is symbolic is suggested by the fact that the bodies of the two witnesses lie in the streets of Jerusalem for three and one-half days, a miniature three and one-half years (Revelation 11:9).²²⁰

What John is saying, then, is that during the events of the End there will be released against the Jewish people great opposition that will last for an undetermined amount of time. In spite of this opposition, there will be preserved a remnant; the original olive tree will assume its rightful place as an undetermined number of biological Jews accept the gospel message.

Hence, God's **two witnesses**. "I will appoint My two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth" (vs. 3). As noted by Morris above, ²²¹ many scholars feel it is best to stay consistent and see these **two witnesses** not as two literal persons, but as representative of the Church during this time. "It is likely that the two witnesses represent the Christian Church in its prophetic witness."

• The two witnesses, identified as the two olive trees and the two lampstands, are symbols of the witnessing Church militant (see Zech. 4:1-4, 6, 10, 14), proclaiming the gospel accompanied by signs and wonders. They are purposely not identified as individuals, although they are reminiscent of Zerubbabel and Joshua (see Zech. 3:1-4:14), as well as Elijah (see I Kin. 17:1; 2 Kin. 1:10) and Moses (see Ex. 7-12).

²¹⁹ Mounce, *op. cit.*, pg. 215. See also Daniel 7:25 and note #146 above.

²²⁰ Pickerill, *loc. cit.*

²²¹ See note #470.

²²² Aune, *op. cit.*, pg. 631.

²²³ Morey, op. cit., pg. 1974.

However, because apocalyptic literature can be fluid, John could now be shifting to two actual individuals.

• The description of the two witnesses and the character of their ministry is given in such detail that it seems more likely that John conceived of these two witnesses as two actual historical eschatological personages who will be sent to Israel to bring about her conversion. Possibly there is a blending of the symbolic and the specific...the two prophets may represent the witness of the church to Israel throughout the age, which witness will be consummated in the appearance of two prophets in the time of the end. The flexibility of apocalyptic symbolism must allow for such possibilities.²²⁴

REVELATION 11:4-14—

The nature of the mission of the two witnesses occupies this section. As noted in Revelation 11:3, they will **prophesy**. The fact that they are backed by divine authority and have a close dependence upon God and His Spirit is stated in imagery drawn from Zechariah 4—they are "the two olive trees" and the two lampstands, and "they stand before the Lord of the earth" (vs. 4). "The language is meant to describe the Witnesses as the agents of God working in the might which He supplies." Their message will be authoritative and God intends that it be successful to the end—if anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die (vs. 5).

In language reminiscent of the ministries of Elijah and Moses, we are next told that they have power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want (vs. 6). Because Moses and Elijah wielded such authority literally, many scholars believe that this is to be interpreted literally too and the fluidity of apocalyptic allows such. It is difficult to know with

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²²⁴ Ladd, op. cit., pg. 154.

²²⁵ Beckwith, op. cit., pg. 593.

certainty. At any rate, they will face martyrdom when they have finished their testimony (vs. 7).²²⁶

John next introduces the beast that comes up from the Abyss (vs. 9), meaning he is satanic in origin. He is quite clearly the eschatological Antichrist, the man of lawlessness (2 Thessalonians 2:3), foreshadowed in Jewish history by Antiochus Epiphanes (another horn, which started small but grew in power [Daniel 8:9]), and in Church history by the Roman Titus ('the abomination that causes desolation' [Mark 13:14]). As for the two witnesses, the beast...will attack them, and overpower and kill them (vs. 7).

Adding insult to injury as it were, the people do not allow the witnesses' bodies to be buried (an abomination in the Middle East); furthermore, those opposed to their mission then have a major celebration in Jerusalem over their death (vv. 8-10). The fact that **people...will gaze on their bodies** (vs. 9) does not necessarily indicate that people all over the world will view this via television; more likely, this is John's way of stating that Gentiles and Jews alike in Jerusalem at that time **will gloat over them** (vs. 10).

The celebration is quickly reversed, however, as God releases a special miracle (cf. Ezekiel 37). In the sight of their spectators, the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet...and they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on (vv. 11-12).²²⁷ This is followed by a limited catastrophe (vs. 13A), and what many consider a coerced acknowledgement of God's sovereignty (similar to that of King Nebuchadnezzar)—the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven (vs. 13B).²²⁸

The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon (vs. 14). This will begin with the sounding of the seventh trumpet, the wrath of the bowls.

²²⁶ It is this verse that makes it difficult to see the two witnesses as symbolic of the Church during this period; the New Testament nowhere speaks of the total destruction of the Church, even if only for a short time (Revelation 11:9).

²²⁷ "Come up here" (Revelation 11:12) marks the Church's Rapture for those holding to a mid-Tribulation Rapture view. This is also sometimes referenced as "the pre-wrath rapture."

Aune has a different perspective. "There is strong evidence that **gave glory to God** is an idiom for *conversion*" (David Aune, *op. cit.*, pg. 628).

REVELATION 11:15-19—

The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven (vs. 15). The interlude is over and the events are resuming. Before dealing with the verses

specifically, let us again focus the matters at hand—

It is a frequent misreading of the author's plan to find in it the promise of the End as destined to follow at once upon the sounding of the seventh trumpet...on the contrary, the seventh trumpet introduces, not a single vision merely, but a long series reaching to and including the End. The song of praise which bursts forth from heaven upon the sounding of the trumpet hails this signal as announcing the consummation of the kingdom, but the third woe and all the other events which enter into the last act of the drama must intervene before that consummation is reached.²²⁹

"Trumpets 1 to 4 proved God's power over the earth the wicked inhabit; trumpets 5 to 7 are the three woes which prove His power over them themselves—He has power to hurt them, to kill them, and finally (which should give them the greatest cause to fear [Matthew 10:28]) to damn them."²³⁰ We see then what was established earlier. The content of the seventh trumpet is the events leading up to the final consummation, especially the intensified wrath of the seven bowls (Revelation 15-16).

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Messiah, and He will reign for ever and ever" (vs. 15). The Earth, primarily under the authority of satanic/human rulership, will pass into the hands of the Father and the Son in the consummated kingdom (cf. Revelation 12:10; 19:16). Historically, this refers to the time from the Millennium on into the Age to Come. In response to this proclamation by unspecified loud voices in heaven (vs. 15), the twenty-four elders...fell on their faces and worshiped God (vs. 16). Realizing that righteousness and peace have finally kissed each other (cf. Psalm 85:10), they acknowledge God's eternality and the fact that He has taken His great power and begun to reign (vs. 17). That which Satan was permitted to have at the Fall is permanently taken from him.

²²⁹ Beckwith, *op. cit.*, pg. 606.

²³⁰ Wilcock, *op. cit.*, pg. 108.

²³¹ "This means not that God did not previously reign as king but rather that his kingship has now become effective over the world. While Jews and Christians had usually assumed that God was ultimately the sovereign ruler of his creation, his rule had not yet been recognized or accepted universally" (David Aune, op. cit., pp. 646-647).

The praise of Revelation 11:15-19 is proleptic in terms of its actualization on the time-line of historical

events.

• All authority and power belong to God, but He in His sovereign wisdom has permitted satanic powers to exercise great authority in the world, and He has allowed godless nations to defy the divine sovereignty with apparent impunity. Now, at the consummation of His redemptive work, God, the Eternal One, has wrested this authority from both demonic and human hosts and is about to enter upon His triumphant reign. ²³³

Referring to Psalm 2:1-6, **the twenty-four elders** then declare that **"the nations were angry, and Your wrath has come"** (vs. 18). Once again, we see the necessity of God's wrath destroying hostile forces before the End is possible. Accompanying the consummate events of His established rulership will be three other events—

- 1. the dead throughout all history will be judged (vs. 18);
- 2. God's servants will be rewarded (vs. 18);
- **3.** the rebellious who are alive at the time will be destroyed (vs. 18).

Vs. 19 is difficult if details are pressed literally. However, if we read it within the guidelines of apocalyptic genre and grasp the essence, it is clear—

- **1. then God's temple in heaven was opened** symbolizes that God will dwell with men in His consummated kingdom (*cf.* Revelation 21:3);
- **2. within His temple was seen the ark of His covenant** symbolizes the fact that He is a God of covenant promises and is faithful to those promises;
- 3. there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm symbolize that judgment is a part of this entire process; God is both majestic and powerful.
 - How much do we really care that right should triumph and that evil be defeated? It is the sanctimonious fashion in our violent age to recoil from violence. But how much of our dislike of the violence of Revelation is really little more than a blindness to the blacks and whites of the situation, a lack of hatred for Satan and his works and a lack of concern for the glory of God?²³⁴

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²³³ Ladd, *op. cit.*, pg. 162.

²³⁴ Wilcock, op. cit., pg. 108.

REVELATION 12

Looking at Revelation 12, we need to once again remember that Revelation abounds in awesome symbolism. It also abounds with truths that transcend specific events in history. Unfortunately, the richness and eternal significance of Revelation 12 are sometimes lost in looking for specific historical events associated with each event in Revelation 12. "No part of Revelation is more difficult to interpret in detail. While we may speak with some confidence of the main thrust of this vision, the significance of many of the details eludes us. We must not expect too much."235

Coming as it does before the final events of the Great Tribulation (cf. Revelation 10:6), Revelation 12 describes the spiritual battles going on behind the scenes of life that manifest themselves in the difficulties of Earth—especially Satan's temptation of the Messiah and the persecution of the Church. John purposely uses mythological characters so we will see the essence, over trying to identify specific events (although some specific events are recognizable). Though the implications of these truths are played out on Earth, he clearly notes that all of this is ultimately happening in heaven (Revelation 12:1), i.e., in the spiritual realm; the events then largely transcend time and space. God wants His Church to thoroughly understand why she is facing the difficulties she is, especially during the Great Tribulation. "The scenes explain the true cause of the present distresses and those yet to come, while at the same time they presage the certain outcome in the deliverance of the saints."²³⁶ Mounce puts it well—

Chapter 12 marks a major division in the book of Revelation. Before the seven last plagues of chapter 16, in which the wrath of God is finished (15:1), John turns aside to explain the underlying cause for the hostility about to break upon the church...it is the age-long conflict between God and Satan that accounts for the persecution the church is to experience. Although the crucial battle was won when Christ arose victorious over death and the grave, the adversary continues his struggle...by laying bare the root cause of persecution John would encourage believers to hold fast in the coming tribulation.²³⁷

²³⁵ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 155.

²³⁶ Beckwith, op. cit., pg. 620. ²³⁷ Mounce, *op. cit.*, pg. 229.

REVELATION 12:1-6—

A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven (vs. 1). Sign (portent [NRSV]; Greek, semeion) means something of great significance, a striking phenomenon, "a token of God's purpose" (Ford). What John sees then is highly significant in terms of granting insight to God's people about life's realities. The great and wondrous sign [is] a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head (vs. 1). The woman symbolizes God's ideal people, especially (in this section) the faithful remnant of Old Covenant Israel; she is "Mother Zion" as it were (cf. Galatians 4:26). "The woman is the messianic community, the ideal Israel." Her magnificent description is designed to describe her glory, as she stands in direct contrast to the great prostitute (Revelation 17:1). John wants his readers to realize God's people are glorious, regardless of the conflicts they are experiencing.

Her Child...a male Child (vv. 4-5) is obviously a key player. The male Child is clearly the Messiah. He appears as Satan's first primary target (vv. 2-6). The sign begins by noting that she was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth...[and] she gave birth to a Son, a male Child (vv. 2-5), whom we know to be Jesus Christ. The fact that John goes immediately from the birth to her Child being snatched up to God and to His throne (vs. 5) indicates he was not interested in our getting bogged down in specific historical events at the cost of spiritual insights. Rather, he wants us to see that Satan's ploy is not successful—though the dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her Child the moment He was born (vs. 4), the Child who "will rule all the nations with an iron scepter," is sovereignly and victoriously snatched up to God.

The central figure in contest with the **Child** is revealed to John by way of **another sign...in heaven** (vs. 3)—an **enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads** (vs. 3). This mythological creature is modeled after the Old Testament **Leviathan** (Psalm 74:14)²³⁹ and **the monster of the deep** (Job 7:12; **the**

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, pg. 231

²³⁹ **Leviathan** was a seven-headed serpent in ancient Near Eastern mythology used here metaphorically to denote evil forces of the universe (particularly Egypt in this psalm).

Dragon [NRSV]).²⁴⁰ **Seven heads** bespeak his authority; **ten horns** his strength; and seven crowns on its heads his leadership. We are told its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth (vs. 4). Drawing upon terminology from Daniel 8:10, it shows that Satan's existence is a force with which one must reckon. In some regards, he is to be feared for his fierceness. Sweeping the stars from heaven to earth also indicates that behind earthly difficulties (especially against God's people) are spiritual battles.

We would do well to not make too much of the fact that the woman fled into the wilderness (vs. 6). "The woman's flight into the wilderness (vs. 6) is hardly that of Jews to Petra; again, the essence here takes place 'in heaven.' The wilderness was always a place of escape for people in Palestine; that is its symbolism here. Recall how Israel fled the persecution of Egypt for the wilderness." ²⁴¹ The important point is that **the** wilderness [is] a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days (vs. 6).²⁴²

REVELATION 12:7-12—

John is still looking behind the scenes of Earth's realities. "Our struggles are not to be shrugged off as insignificant. They are part of the great conflict between good and evil." ²⁴³ Not only is God's Church struggling against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:12), but angelic forces are fighting demonic forces!244

And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, 245 and they lost their place in heaven (vv. 7-8).²⁴⁶ Michael is most likely mentioned because

²⁴⁰ The monster of the deep was a character from Mesopotamian mythology that was viewed as a force of evil and sometimes interchangeable with Leviathan.

²⁴¹ Pickerill, *op. cit.*, Notes on Revelation 12-16.

²⁴² See notes above on Revelation 11:1-3 for the significance of 1,260.

²⁴³ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 160.

²⁴⁴ See also Daniel 10:13.

²⁴⁵ "V. 7 explains the heavenly counterpart to Christ's victory at the cross and resurrection" (G. K. Beale, *op. cit.*, pg. 652).

246 See note #251 below.

he was Israel's picturesque defender (*cf.* Daniel 12:1). This is not a reference to the primordial casting of Satan from heaven; nor is it a reference to a specific eschatological battle.²⁴⁷ Rather, God is showing John that Satan and his angels and their evil works are contested, especially since the time of Jesus Christ; he has been bound and toppled from his place of uncontested spiritual power by the life of Jesus Christ and His work on the Cross (*cf.* Matthew 12:28; Colossians 2:15).

• Satan's effort to destroy the Messiah is frustrated (12:4-5). Instead, he is himself cast down from his place of power as a result of a spiritual conflict that is pictured as a battle between the Dragon and Michael. The language in which this victory over Satan is described (12:10-12) suggests that we should interpret this victory not as an eschatological event but as the victory won by Christ over satanic evil...because of this defeat of the Dragon, he is more infuriated and tries even harder to destroy the woman. 248

The ongoing effects of this "binding" are then seen as advanced in the Earth by His Church—they triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death (vs. 11; cf. Luke 10:18). "The single intent of the passage is to assure those who meet satanic evil on earth that it is really a defeated power, however contrary it might seem to human experience."

The great dragon is next described (vs. 9). **That ancient serpent** is a reference to Genesis 3:1-5, an appropriate designation since the enmity between Satan and the "seed of the woman" goes back to Genesis 3. **The devil** is his Greek name meaning, "Accuser" or "Slanderer." **Satan** is his Hebrew name meaning, "Adversary" (*cf.* Zechariah 3:1). He is also he **who leads the whole world astray** (*cf.* 1 John 5:19).

In response to the realization of Satan's defeat, John heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who

²⁴⁷ Walvoord disagrees, noting, "Satan and his hosts are excluded from the third heaven, though their temporary dominion over the second heaven and the first heaven continues...it is clear that this does not come chronologically after the seventh trumpet. Rather, the fall of Satan may be predated to the time of the seals in chapter 6, or even before the first seal. His fall begins the great tribulation" (John Walvoord, *op. cit.*, pg. 192).

²⁴⁸ Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament, pg. 676.

²⁴⁹ Ladd, A Commentary on the Revelation of John, pg. 171.

accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down" (vs. 10).²⁵⁰ This praise is both proleptic and immediate in application. It is proleptic in that the consummated conquering of Satan (which Jesus fully purchased on the Cross) awaits the End to be released into history (*cf.* Revelation 11:15); it is immediate in that Christ's reign has begun and Satan's power is currently curtailed (*cf.* Luke 10:18; Hebrews 2:14). As Oscar Cullmann says, "He's bound, but with a long rope!"

The accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night (vs. 10) is a reference to Job 1:6 and Zechariah 3:1. Its purpose is to again reassure the Church, particularly during the time of the Great Tribulation, that Satan is not able to disturb her innocence before God. "The best commentary here is Romans 8:31-39. We still endure all sorts of trials and will face them in the future; but, 'Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?""²⁵¹

Reiterating the fact that the battle has been won spiritually but is yet being fought terrestrially, the **loud voice** proclaims, "But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short" (vs. 12). His time is short is not to be measured so much chronologically; it is rather a reference to the fact that his days are numbered. "The troubles of the persecuted righteous arise not because Satan is too strong, but because he is beaten. He is doing all the harm he can while he can. But he will not be able to do this for much longer."

REVELATION 12:13-17—

Realizing his plans to destroy Messiah and his ability to accuse Christians have been foiled, this section tells of Satan's more direct attack against God's Church, especially during the Great Tribulation, when he gives **the beast his power and his throne and great authority** (Revelation 13:2). John begins by noting in a generic way that though satanic attack is waged against the ideal people of God (**the woman**), God protects His people amidst all attack (vv. 13-14; *cf.* John 10:28B). The fact **the woman was given**

²⁵⁰ **Has been hurled down** (Greek, *ballo*) has the idea of a judicial punishment (*cf.* John 12:31) rather than a change of location. This statement, along with that in Revelation 12:8—they lost their place in heaven—reinforces that "the presence of the power of the Kingdom of God on earth in the persons of Jesus and his disciples meant the toppling of Satan from his place of power (see Luke 10:18)" (George Ladd, *ibid.*, pg. 172).

²⁵¹ Pickerill, *loc. cit.*

²⁵² Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 163.

the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach (vs. 14) is likely a reference to Exodus 19:4, "I carried you [Israel] on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself." John is describing the intense spiritual attacks and divine protection in graphically symbolic language (vv. 15-16), 253 in which "the dragon does his best to destroy the woman by drowning her in a flood, but the forces of nature work toward her salvation...creation is for God's people and against the dragon."254

Turning from general principles focused on the ideal people of God, the sign shifts to Satan's attacks against the Church in history—especially during the Great Tribulation. Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus (vs. 17). Then the dragon was enraged is obviously picturesque language to denote a turning point in the sign; he has been angry with her all along. We can expect, then, that the symbolism of the woman is about to broaden. It does, for we now meet her offspring (believers in general)—

• actual Christians who constitute the empirical church on earth. John turns from the ideal to the actual—from the vision of the overthrow of Satan in heaven to the reality of his persecution of the saints on earth. The spiritual conflict is the backdrop for the actual struggle on earth between the church and Antichrist. In the face of the time of great tribulation, John has assured the church that Satan has already been defeated and cannot win the victory over the church. Nevertheless, he can inflict fearful persecution; and this final persecution is reflected in the war on the rest of her offspring. This clearly paves the way for chapters 13ff and satanic persecution by the Beast. 255

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²⁵³ The flood is a common metaphor in the Old Testament for overwhelming evil (*cf.* Psalm 18:4). Most likely John did not have any particular historical or eschatological event in mind. If there was any intended historical reference, "the episode could refer to the attempt on the part of the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem to stamp out the early church (Acts 8:1-3)" (Robert Mounce, *op. cit.*, pg. 241). ²⁵⁴ Pickerill, *loc. cit.*

²⁵⁵ Ladd, op. cit., pp. 174-175.

REVELATION 13

Revelation 12:18 (found in some English versions) rightly belongs with Revelation 13, which is why it is part of Revelation 13:1 in most modern translations. Furthermore, although there is a slight textual problem with Revelation 12:18/Revelation 13:1, the TNIV (the dragon stood on the shore of the sea) is likely better than the NKJV (then I stood on the sand of the sea). The dragon is seen as standing at the seashore to summons up his Great Tribulation instrument, ²⁵⁶ a beast coming out of the sea (Revelation 13:1).

REVELATION 13:1-4—

Who is this **beast coming out of the sea [with] ten horns and seven heads** (vs. 1)?²⁵⁷ Drawing upon descriptions from Daniel 7, John explains that the beast wields universal political authority and sovereignty (**ten crowns on its horns** [vs. 1]). The fact that he notes that **the beast...resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion** (vs. 2) emphasizes that he is a conflation of the Daniel 7 beasts to show he embodies, as it were, all the authority and power that have characterized various empires/rulers throughout history. Wilcock notes, therefore, that the beast represents "the State out of control"; he goes on to note that the Bible teaches that the State can function either "properly under divine authority...or illegitimately as divine authority."²⁵⁸ John's original readers would have likely referenced Rome, but the beast is clearly more than Rome. "We may well see in the Empire a preliminary manifestation of the evil that will one day be realized to the full in the Antichrist. But there is much more to the beast than ancient Rome."²⁵⁹

• There is little doubt that for John the beast was the Roman Empire as persecutor of the church. It comes onto the land from the sea, just as the Roman troops did when they invaded the eastern Mediterranean. The beast is that spirit of imperial power which claims a religious sanction for its gross injustices. Yet the beast is more than the Roman Empire. John's vision grew

²⁵⁶ "What the dragon was described as doing in ch. 12 he actually does through his servants portrayed in ch. 13" (G. K. Beale, *op. cit.*, pg. 681).

^{257 &}quot;As with the dragon's horns and heads, so here the number of *seven* heads and *ten* horns emphasizes the completeness of oppressive power and its worldwide effect" (G. K. Beale, *ibid.*, pg. 684).

²⁵⁸ Wilcock, *op. cit.*, pg. 124.

²⁵⁹ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 165.

out of the details of his own historical situation, but its complete fulfillment awaits the final denouement of human history. The beast has always been, and will be in a final intensified manifestation, the deification of secular authority. It is a "counterfeit power" that is self-centered, behaves as if it were fully autonomous, and demands total allegiance and excessive praise...in combining characteristics of Daniel's beasts, which in Daniel represented four historic kingdoms hostile to the people of God (Dan 7:17, 23), John sets forth the Antichrist as the epitome of bestial opposition to the seed of the woman.

On each head [was] a blasphemous name (vs. 1) does not mean the beast swears against God; rather, this is John's symbolic way of stating he claims divine authority and prerogative (cf. Daniel 7:25; 2 Thessalonians 2:4). Coming out of the sea has given way to various interpretations; the simplest is probably to see this in its ancient terms, whereby the sea was often the source of evil and mystery; it can, however, mean that he rises from the masses (sea) of humanity (cf. Revelation 17:15).

Of utmost importance to John is the beast's source of power—the dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority (vs. 2). He is more than a "stick figure enemy"; he is formidable, backed by the authority of the dragon himself. One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed (vs. 3) is very difficult and subject to diverse understanding. Seemed to have had a fatal wound (emphasis mine) is misleading; the Greek construction is the same as that in Revelation 5:6, a Lamb looking as if it had been slain (emphasis mine), and we know the Lamb was actually slain. One of his heads then is wounded to the point of death but is then healed. Some scholars try to separate the death of one of the heads from the death of the beast itself, seeing here the death of "one of the Roman emperors...later brought back from the dead as the embodiment of satanic evil. Support for this view has been sought in the so-called myth of Nero redivivus." However, according to Revelation 13:12, 14, it is the beast himself who receives the mortal wound. It is best, therefore, to see one of the heads as inseparable from the beast himself, and to take the statement to mean (at least with reference to the eschatological Antichrist) that

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²⁶⁰ Mounce, *op. cit.*, pg. 246.

²⁶¹ Ladd, *op. cit.*, pp. 178-179.

prior to his final enthroning, he receives a mortal wound and comes back to life.²⁶² "He combines all the corruption and animal like qualities of human history, as pictured in Daniel 7:4-6. He is like Christ in that he has a death-resurrection quality. But he is Anti-Christ in that he opposes God and His people (Revelation 13:4-7)."²⁶³

This miracle, the nature of which we can only guess, causes **the whole world** to follow him (vs. 3). **The whole world** here is synonymous with the recurring **the inhabitants of the earth** (*cf.* Revelation 13:14) and means unredeemed humankind. The height of their wonder, and the true intent of what goes on with the mortal wound, is stated in vs. 4—**people worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can make war against it?"** Although **the dragon** and **the beast** are ruling through a political system, their truest intent is to claim divinity. **The dragon** wants to be worshiped, a ploy as old as before Eden and one which he tried against Jesus (*cf.* Luke 4:5-7). Through various rulers throughout history, he has succeeded to a degree (i.e., the pharaohs and Caesars); but for a brief time in eschatological history, he shall succeed on a worldwide scale (*cf.* Revelation 13:7B-8).

REVELATION 13:5-10—

The depth of the audacity of the beast is recorded in vv. 5-6—the beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise its authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander His name and His dwelling place and those who live in heaven. John is again drawing from Daniel 7 and 8. Blasphemies refers to violating God's glory by seeking self-glory; as Satan's mouthpiece, the beast will exalt himself above God and His people (those who live in heaven). Forty-two months again teaches this will be only a brief period; he will not rule forever.

Revelation 12:17 reads—then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring. John picks this idea up here, noting—it

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²⁶² "John does not say how the beast received its wound...he does not even say whether it received the wound after it came to land. John's interest is not in how the wound came to be inflicted but in the fact that a wound which appeared to be mortal was healed. He does not tell us how it was healed. He concentrates his attention on the fact that it was healed...parodying Christianity" (Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 167). ²⁶³ Pickerill, *loc. cit*.

was given power to make war against God's people and to conquer them (vs. 7). Exactly how he persecutes (to make war against God's people) is not defined, although Revelation 13:11-18 gives some indication. To conquer them refers to martyrdom; the beast thinks he has won by killing the saints; from God's standpoint, however, the martyrdom is really a victory—whoever has ears, let them hear. "If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity they will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword they will be killed" (vv. 9-10). John focuses us here with two biblical realities—1) if God's will for you as a Christian is that the beast martyrs you, do not resist the martyrdom. It guarantees a place before the throne (cf. Revelation 7:13-17); and 2) the beast, who is killing with the sword, will himself "be killed" when God rises in final victory. Divine retribution is indeed guaranteed. All this requires, however, patient endurance [steadfastness] and faithfulness on the part of God's people (vs. 10).

REVELATION 13:11-18—

Another beast...[came] out of the earth...it exercised all the authority of the first beast on its behalf (vv. 11-12). He acts like an executive officer in getting the earth and its inhabitants [to] worship the first beast (vs. 12). This second beast turns out to be a satanic religious cohort, the false prophet (Revelation 16:13). He is portrayed as powerfully seductive, enticing, deceitful and beguiling; a wolf in sheep's clothing, John notes it had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon (vs. 11; cf. Matthew 7:15). History has proven that when religion supports the civil system, the civil system soon becomes the focus of worship.

He captures the religious loyalty of the earth and its inhabitants, not by rhetoric, but by performing great signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to the earth in full view of everyone (vs. 13).²⁶⁶ This is the same thought Paul expresses in 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10—the coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how

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display designed to dazzle. He is a parody of Elijah and a fulfillment of Deuteronomy 13:1.

²⁶⁴ "In John's day the reference would be either to the local priests of the imperial cult or to the provincial council responsible for enforcing emperor worship throughout Asia...in the final days of Antichrist the false prophet stands for the role of false religion in effecting the capitulation of society to the worship of secular power" (Robert Mounce, *op. cit.*, pg. 256).

²⁶⁵ "The horns do not allude to the seven-horned Lamb of 5:6. In the parody that runs throughout this section it is the first, not the second, beast who corresponds to the Lamb" (Robert Mounce, *ibid.*, pg. 255).

²⁶⁶ Causing fire to come down from heaven here does not refer to fire for destruction, but a miraculous

Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing.

The false prophet then does not represent dead, formalized religion; nor does he represent denominations or even the papacy. He represents cultic, satanic religions that demonstrate great power by the authority of Satan. The magicians of Egypt who entered into contest with Moses would be forerunners.²⁶⁷

Because of the signs it was given power to perform on behalf of the first beast, it deceived the inhabitants of the earth. It ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived (vs. 14). The idolatrous worship led by the false prophet finds supreme manifestation in erecting a statue of the beast to be worshiped. The image is extraordinary; it actually talks and simulates life, for the beast was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed (vs. 15).²⁶⁸ The scene here is similar to the construction of King Nebuchadnezzar's image, which the Hebrew children were asked to worship (Daniel 3:5-6). Refusal on behalf of God's people is apparently a reason for the massive martyrdom spoken of earlier in the chapter.

• There are many stories of speaking images in the ancient world. Kiddle reminds us that "the breath of life" (life here is pneuma, "spirit" or "breath") is associated with the Creator-God, and continues, "When the priests of Antichrist have thus animated their idol, they have acted a blasphemy exceeding that of all previous idolaters; this is the magician's most impious usurpation of God's power."²⁶⁹

In parody of the divine sealing in Revelation 7, it forced all people...to receive a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads (vs. 16). Again, it is not clear whether or not this is a literal mark.²⁷⁰ The point is that at this time the two distinct classes of people that have always characterized humanity—those who belong to God and those who

²⁶⁸ If John had any immediate historical fulfillment in view, it is lost to us. Perhaps it is best to see <u>this</u> particular as happening only during the time of the eschatological false prophet.
²⁶⁹ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 172.

²⁶⁷ See note #265.

²⁷⁰ Because this is a mark for human beings to see to make certain decisions, it is most likely literal. "The origin of the mark is variously explained. It could derive from the practice of branding disobedient slaves or soldiers defeated in battle. Religious tattooing was widespread in the ancient world, and devotees of a particular god were often branded to indicate their loyal devotion...some see a reference to the X of Christ's name (in Greek) and suggest that the mark of the beast was a parody of the practice of making the sign of the cross on the forehead of the new Christian" (Robert Mounce, *op. cit.*, pg. 259).

belong to Satan—will be clearly delineated. No one will escape their spiritual loyalty being marked.

The purpose for the satanic marking is so that they could not buy or sell unless they had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name (vs. 17). The religious marking will have economic repercussions. What this is saying eschatologically is that during this brief time of Antichrist's rule, it will be impossible for Christians to get food through normal commercial channels. Thus, starvation could be another means of martyrdom. It will not totally destroy the Church, however.

The meaning of the number of its name is elaborated in vs. 18—this calls for wisdom. Let those who have insight calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man. That number is 666. This verse has lead to all sorts of wild speculations. "What does the number of the beast mean? Any amount of ink has been spilt over this fascinating, and misleading, question. The number is said to stand for Nero, or Caligula, or Domitian, or the Caesars in general, or the Roman Empire...or Mohammed, Cromwell, Napoleon, Martin Luther..."271

John is apparently employing an ancient practice called *gematria*. "Gematria was widely used in apocalyptic because of its symbolic and enigmatic quality. It served as a precaution against the charge of sedition."²⁷² Gematria is a system whereby letters stand for various numbers; anyone's name can be converted to numbers or a numeric total through gematria; hence—this calls for wisdom. Let those who have insight calculate.... For example, if A=1, B=2, C=3, etc., then Gary would be 7-1-18-25 for a total of 51. We know what John is doing; however, we cannot specifically identify the represented name, for we do not know what system of gematria he was using.

Wilcock, op. cit., pg. 128. Aune maintains that 666 could well be "the total of the numerical value of the letters spelling 'Nero Caesar' in Aramaic' (David Aune, *op. cit.*, pg. 780). ²⁷² Mounce, *op. cit.*, pg. 261.

REVELATION 14

A major key to understanding Revelation 14 is to realize that it does not advance the events of the narrative. It is a series of visions of assurance and clarification that are only loosely connected. They are proleptic, giving us a vision of what will chronologically happen in Revelation 17-22. "Just before the outpouring of the bowls of God's wrath and the coming of the end, John is again assured that the consummation is in God's hands; that the wicked, godless civilization of the beast will fall under divine judgment, and that the saints will be brought into their eternal salvation."

REVELATION 14:1-5—

The first vision is that of the triumphant Lamb and His redeemed—then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with Him 144,000 who had His name and His Father's name written on their foreheads (vs. 1). In as much as Mount Zion and Jerusalem are often interchangeable terms, this is most likely a proleptic vision of Jesus Christ in the new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2). The 144,000 again represent the Church, especially the Great Tribulation saints (cf. Revelation 7:9-17), reassuring those martyred that they shall be with the Lamb in God's consummated kingdom, even though they be victims of the beast's rampages (cf. Revelation 13:10). The divine names written on their foreheads stand in direct contrast to the name of the beast or the number of its name written on the right hands or on [the] foreheads of its followers (Revelation 13:16-17).

John further enhances the ultimate victory of the **144,000** who had been redeemed from the earth by showing them praising the Lamb in consummated worship (vv. 2-3). The three-fold description of their voice (like the roar of rushing waters...like a loud peal of thunder...like that of harpists playing their harps [vs. 2]) shows their reverence for the Lamb, in sharp contrast to the beast's blasphemies (Revelation 13:5-6). The fact that no one could learn the song except the **144,000** (vs. 3) shows that the talking image of the first beast (Revelation 13:15) cannot join in this beautiful worship.

²⁷³ Ladd, op. cit., pg. 188.

These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they remained virgins (vs. 4) symbolically zeroes in on the martyrs symbolized in the 144,000, seeing them as spiritual virgins; they have not given allegiance to spiritual harlotry (cf. Revelation 17-18). They are "perfect, uncomplaining disciples" (Ladd), and they follow the Lamb wherever He goes...[and] no lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless (vv. 4-5). The fact that they are described as first fruits to God and the Lamb (vs. 4) indicates the redeemed belong to God, not to the beast; John uses this phrase generically in the same way as James (James 1:18).

REVELATION 14:6-8—

John's second vision is that of another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth (vs. 6). The ambiguous phrase an eternal gospel makes it difficult to know whether John is referencing the *kergyma* or the immediate message of impending judgment upon the unrepentant. Vs. 7 seems to indicate it is the latter, for "fear God and give Him glory...worship Him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water" (vs. 7) is again not genuine conversion but coerced acknowledgement of God's sovereignty (*cf.* Revelation 11:13), even as we saw with King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4). The angel's urgency is reinforced by noting that "the hour of His judgment has come" (vs. 7).

The third vision is that of a second angel [who] followed and said, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great,' which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries" (vs. 8). Again, this is proleptic for Babylon's fall is yet to come (Revelation 17-18). Babylon was Israel's constant enemy (cf. Isaiah 21:9) and became a proverbial name for this world's government system in rebellion (cf. 1 Peter 5:13). The fact that the angel states that [she] made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries has reference to the fact that governments in rebellion, especially the government of the Antichrist, deceive and seduce people to worship other than the Lord God through enticements of wealth and luxury.

REVELATION 14:9-13—

These verses comprise two personal challenges. The first (vv. 9-11) comes from a third angel who followed and said in a loud voice (vs. 9). His message—"If anyone

worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand, they, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of His wrath" (vv. 9-10)—plays on the motif of Babylon's wine in Revelation 14:8; to receive the mark of the beast and to drink of "the maddening wine of her adulteries" will bring about the drinking of "the wine of God's fury." "Poured full strength into the cup of His wrath" (vs. 10) has reference to the ancient practice of mixing wine with spices to make it more palatable; in other words, God's final wrath will be undiluted; it will not be tempered with mercy or grace (cf. John 3:36).

"They will be tormented with burning sulfur" (vs. 10) describes the horror and terror of this banishing wrath in terms commonly associated with the final resting place of the unrepentant (cf. Revelation 19:20; 20:10, 15). Jesus Himself used such terminology (Matthew 25:46; Mark 9:48). The focal point of the torment is that it is "in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb" (vs. 10). In other words, it is not so much that unredeemed humankind's spirits will be tormented with literal fire, as it is that they will know and feel eternal banishment from the presence of God ("the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever" [vs. 11]). "...the punishment of the wicked is made more grievous because they can behold the bliss of the righteous and the heavenly beings...yet the most poignant factor in the pain of the wicked will be the sight of the triumph of the Lamb, against whom as worshipers of the Beast they had made war." 274

The second personal challenge (vv. 12-13) is directed to the people of God who keep His commands and remain faithful to Jesus (vs. 12). It is another call for endurance and comes from a voice from heaven. The challenge is really a reminder—"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on" (vs. 13)—endorsed by the Spirit Himself, "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them" (vs. 13). There will be no escaping the beast's persecution (cf. Revelation 13:10); yet, there is assurance of the end result—"they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them"; their testimony will outlast their martyrdom.

REVELATION 14:14-20—

The final two visions are again proleptic (Revelation 19-20), and deal with the eschatological judgment of the wicked through two different metaphors. The first

²⁷⁴ Beckwith, op. cit., pg. 658.

metaphor (vv. 14-16) draws upon Daniel 7:13, Joel 3:13 and Matthew 13:37 ff and 25:31 ff. John says, I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like a son of man with a crown of gold on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand (vs. 14). This is most obviously Jesus Christ preparing to reap the final harvest (the earth was harvested [vs. 16]); He is accompanied by angels (vs. 15), a common feature in the eschatological, messianic harvest. A crown of gold draws attention to His consummate triumph.

The second metaphor (vv. 17-20) is that of crushing grapes; it draws from Isaiah 63:2-4 and Matthew 25:41. "Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe." The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath (vv. 18-19). The main agents are another angel [who] came out of the temple in heaven (vs. 17), and yet another angel [who] came from the altar (vs. 18). These two references show that the eschatological judgment is God's (came out of the temple in heaven), and is in response to the prayers of the saints (came out from the altar [cf. Revelation 8:3-5]). The fact that the second angel is said to have charge of the fire (vs. 18) probably indicates that he is carrying out a purging type judgment.

The intensity and all inclusiveness of this final judgment are graphically portrayed in vs. 20—they were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia.²⁷⁵ Symbolically describing God's final eschatological judgment, John notes that the judgment will be complete and awesome. "The explicit mention of the treading of the grapes in the great winepress of God's wrath (v 19), with its reference to the blood high as a horse's bridle, refers to God's climactic victory in the final eschatological battle (see 19:17-21 and 20:7-10)."²⁷⁶

The fact that **they were trampled in the winepress outside the city** indicates that the final judgment of the wicked includes their banishment from the presence of God, who is said to dwell in the city (Jerusalem).²⁷⁷ A distance of 1,600 stadia is approximately the

²⁷⁵ For a distance of about two hundred miles (NRSV).

²⁷⁶ Aune, *op. cit.*, pg. 849.

²⁷⁷ It is also an allusion to Joel 3:12-14 and 4:11-12 which depict the judgment of the nations as taking place in the valley of Jehoshaphat.

length of Israel. This symbolic reference, therefore, acts as a common focal point, measuring something substantial and inclusive. Today, we in the United States would probably say something like, "from Los Angeles to New York."

REVELATION 15

REVELATION 15:1-4—

Revelation 15 is the last interlude before the outpouring of the wrath of the seven bowls, the contents of the seventh trumpet. The seven bowls are said by John to be another significant sign (*cf.* Revelation 12:1, 3)—I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them God's wrath is completed (vs. 1). Because with them God's wrath²⁷⁸ is completed does not mean His wrath is exhausted; God has yet to banish the devil and the unrepentant to the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-21; 20:11-15). Is completed (Greek, *teleioo* [to bring to an intended goal]) means here that the plagues of the seven bowls complete God's wrath poured out on sinful humankind with only the final judgments of evil left.

This **great and marvelous sign** actually begins in Revelation 16:1; in the meantime, there is another reassurance of the ultimate victory afforded the martyrs (vv. 2-4), and a reassurance of the fact that the plagues of the seven bowls are the result of God's strict justice (Revelation 15:5-8).

In this interlude, John sees those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name (vs. 2). This clearly shows the victory of the martyrs, a victory that frustrates the purposes of the beast. They are celebrating their victory through worship—they held harps given them by God and sang (vv. 2-3; cf. Revelation 14:2). Their worship is said to be the song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb (vs. 3). Grammatically, this seems to indicate that they are singing two different songs—the song of God's servant Moses (cf. Exodus 15; Deuteronomy 32) and the song of...the Lamb, a new song of redemption. However, as the content of both

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²⁷⁸ **God's wrath** is an Old Testament judgment metaphor (see Isaiah 51:17-23).

songs is found in vv. 3-4, it appears that they are singing only one song—a song of deliverance/redemption that both Calvary and the Exodus symbolize.

The song is modeled loosely after various Psalms and Old Testament passages and extols three attributes of God: His power ("Great and marvelous are Your deeds, Lord God Almighty"); His justice ("Just and true are Yours ways, King of the nations") and His universal sovereignty ("Who will not fear You, Lord, and bring glory to Your name? For You alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before You"). In all this, the martyrs are declaring that God is more powerful than the beast, that their martyrdom is within the confines of strict, divine justice and that the consummation of the kingdom will see God's position rightly proclaimed.

• In this time of great tribulation when the beast seemed to have unlimited power to enforce his demonic purpose upon men and persecute the saints—in the darkest hour of human history when it truly seemed that Satan was the god of this age, the martyrs sing a hymn of praise to God, recognizing that He is the true and living God. They exalt the name of God because, contrary to outward appearance, He is indeed the King of all the ages, including the time of martyrdom.²⁷⁹

REVELATION 15:5-8—

John now switches to a scene that again establishes that the plagues are from God and constitute strict justice. The focal point is the opening of **the temple—the tabernacle of the covenant law** (vs. 5). This is an illusion to the Exodus "tent of meeting"²⁸⁰ and the Old Testament Temple, both of which symbolize the presence of God in all His holiness. What is about to transpire, then, is clearly emanating from the holiness and faithfulness of God. The previously mentioned angels (Revelation 15:1) once again appear—**out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests** (vs. 6). Their attire symbolizes splendor and the truth that the plagues of judgment issue forth from God's purity, not human vengeance. They symbolize righteousness in action.

²⁷⁹ Ladd, op. cit., pg. 205.

²⁸⁰ "This references the tent that Moses pitched outside the camp before the Tabernacle was built (Ex. 33:7). After the tabernacle itself was built, it also was often called by this name ('tent of meeting'), signifying the meeting of God with His people" (*Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary, op. cit.*, pg. 1220). It disappeared with the building of Solomon's Temple.

We are next told that one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever (vs. 7). Three points of importance should be noted—

- 1. the fact that the four living creatures are elsewhere said to be before the throne (Revelation 4:6) indicates the seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God come backed by full divine sanction;
- 2. the fact that bowls here is the same Greek word used in Revelation 5:8 to describe golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people shows that the final judgments are again in answer to the saints' prayers (cf. Revelation 8:1-5);
- **3.** the fact that God is said to live **for ever and ever** (literally, "into the ages of the ages") indicates that He alone is eternal and His purposes cannot be ultimately frustrated.

The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed (vs. 8) is modeled after Exodus 40:36 and 1 Kings 8:10. It emphasizes the majesty and glory of God, and offers the final appeal to the fact that God's greatness is behind the final scenes of the Great Tribulation. His kingdom is indeed coming in all its fullness; nothing can stop His consummate judgment.

REVELATION 16

REVELATION 16:1—

Having come through the breaking of the seven seals and the sounding of the six trumpets, the command to "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath²⁸¹ on the earth" (vs. 1) is not difficult to understand—either conceptually or in terms of content. Many of the bowl plagues resemble the trumpet and Egyptian plagues.²⁸² As with the

²⁸¹ "The LXX uses the same Greek words for 'pour out God's wrath' to indicate judgment, against either covenant-breakers or those who have persecuted God's people (Ezek. 14:19; Jer. 10:25)" (G. K. Beale, *op. cit.*, pg. 812).

²⁸² See notes on Revelation 8 for a fuller discussion. An excellent chart comparing the plagues is found in *Revelation for Laymen*, James McKeever, Omega Publications, Medford, OR., 1980.

plagues of the seals and the trumpets, it is difficult to know how literally to take each detail of the plagues; also, as before, much of the "how" is not clear; we should again avoid undue speculation.²⁸³

These final judgments are more intense than the previous ones and, along with the destruction of Babylon, constitute the contents of the seventh trumpet (Revelation 11:15); with these events, "There will be no more delay!...the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as He announced to His servants the prophets" (Revelation 10:6-7).

The woes are directed against the people who bore the mark of the Beast and worshiped its image (16:2). In this last terrible hour, men and women will have to stand on one side or the other. Martyrdom may await the followers of the Lamb, but the wrath of a holy God awaits those who submit to the Beast. 284

REVELATION 16:2—

The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly, festering sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped its image. This is similar to the sixth Egyptian plague (Exodus 9:10-11). It is apparently just exactly what it says it is—ugly, festering sores/abscesses. "The punishment matches the crime: those who receive an idolatrous mark will be chastised by being given a penal mark."²⁸⁵

REVELATION 16:3—

The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead person,²⁸⁶ and every living thing in the sea died. This is similar to the plague of the second trumpet (Revelation 8:8-9), but there is a marked increase from the destruction of a third of the living creatures in the sea (Revelation 8:9) to a larger destruction.

²⁸⁵ Beale, op. cit., pg. 814.

²⁸³ The fact that these judgments happen in rapid succession with no interlude, are followed by the End and use more stereotypical apocalyptic motifs than previous plagues seems to indicate John's reference is purely eschatological rather than historical and eschatological. Note also that the first plague is specifically for those who take on the eschatological mark of the beast, meaning they are truly acts of judgment upon the generation of the beast with no opportunity for repentance being extended (cf. Revelation 13:8).

²⁸⁴ Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament, pg. 677.

The meaning here is that the water becomes as stagnant and defiled as a corpse.

REVELATION 16:4-7—

The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood (vs. 4). This is similar to the plague of the third trumpet (Revelation 8:10-11) and the first Egyptian plague (Exodus 7:17-21). We are not told what happens as a result of the water becoming **blood**, but the assumption is that there will be great suffering and death. The angel in charge of the waters then interprets the events of this bowl as proclaiming the retributive justice of God, whose judgments are just and in response to the fact that they [followers of the beast] have shed the blood of Your people and Your prophets (vv. 5-6). The altar that gives confirmation to this (vs. 7) is most likely that of the Old Testament altar of incense, again showing that this plague is in response to the martyrs' cries (Revelation 6:9) and the prayers of the persecuted (Revelation 9:13). "This bowl plague is accompanied by a 'judgment doxology' sung by a mysterious angel of the water, emphasizing the justice of God in avenging the death of his prophets and saints (vv 5-7)."²⁸⁷

REVELATION 16:8-9—

The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was allowed to scorch people with fire (vs. 8). This plague has no parallel in either the trumpet or Egyptian plagues. It is obviously God's overruling of nature (the sun was allowed), resulting in what appears to be fierce sunstroke—people [were scorched] with fire (vs. 9). The stubbornness of the hearts of those who follow the beast, as well as their recognition of the Source of and reason for the plagues, is clearly stated in vs. 9B—they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent²⁸⁸ and glorify Him.

REVELATION 16:10-11—

The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness (vs. 10) is similar to the fourth trumpet (Revelation 8:12-13) and the ninth Egyptian plague (Exodus 10:21-23). It is obviously some sort of a direct

²⁸⁷ Aune, *op. cit.*, pg. 903.

²⁸⁸ See discussion under Revelation 14:7 above.

blow against the center of the Antichrist's rule. Although we are not told why this particular response, John explains the reaction of humankind to this plague—people gnawed their tongues in agony because of the pain it caused (vs. 10).²⁸⁹ They too cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and they refused to repent of what they had done (vs. 11).

REVELATION 16:12-16—

The sixth bowl is different in that it is not aimed directly at people—the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up (vs. 12). It has some similarities to the sixth trumpet (Revelation 9:13-19) in that it involves the great river Euphrates (vs. 12). As stated in the above section on the sixth trumpet, the great river Euphrates marked the border of the Promised Land. The drying up of the great river, therefore, symbolizes the removal of any barrier holding back evil. Hence, its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East (vs. 12; emphasis mine). It appears from the overall context that John intends us to see these kings as commanders of literal armies (cf. Revelation 19:17-21), but identifying who they are is difficult because their identity and role are not clarified. Are they the ten kings of Revelation 17:12? We cannot be sure. 290 From the overall context (vv. 12-16), it appears that the kings from the East are symbolic of the leaders of the confederations that will constitute the pagan forces of the kings of the whole world in the final battle on the great day of God Almighty (vs. 14).²⁹¹ The great day of God Almighty is another term for "the Day of the Lord" (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:1), that time in human history just prior to the Millennium in which God's redemptive purposes against evil are accelerated (with consummation following the Millennium).

The confederation is clearly demon driven—then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are demonic spirits (vv. 13-14). This

²⁸⁹ "The text does not indicate the cause of the distress and pain that led men to **gnaw their tongues** in agony. We may suppose that the intense darkness served to magnify the pain inflicted by the preceding plague, which had brought upon them **pain and sores**" (George Ladd, *The Revelation of John*, pg. 212). ²⁹⁰ "As many as fifty different interpretations have been advanced" (John Walvoord, *op. cit.*, pg. 236).

Mounce disagrees noting, "The kings of the East (v. 12) who will lay siege to Rome (17:15-18 and chap. 18) are distinct from the kings of the whole world (v. 14) who will wage the final war against Christ and the armies of heaven (19:11-12)" (Robert Mounce, *op. cit.*, pg. 298).

"unholy trinity" rallies the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty (vs. 14). They lure them by performing signs (vs. 14), a concept previously seen and discussed under Revelation 13:11 above.

Vs. 15 is rightfully in parentheses or indentation in most modern Bibles; it is a word of warning and assurance to the Church from Jesus Himself as His Return approaches. "I **come like a thief!**" serves to remind the Church that the world is not going to expect His Parousia. It will take them unaware (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3). To the spiritually diligent, however, it will be a blessed time. Hence, Jesus' call to spiritual diligence right up to the Return—"Blessed are those who stay awake and keep their clothes on, so that they may not go naked and be shamefully exposed." "Stay awake" means "to not lose sight of the ultimate issues of life and assume that security is to be found on the human level instead of in terms of one's relationship to Christ."292

Vs. 16 resumes the narrative with further description of the battle at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon (Harmagedon [NRSV]).²⁹³ It is the place of the final struggle between the evil coalition and the kingdom of God (Revelation 19:11 ff). Perhaps John chose the city of Megiddo because of its affinity with the Valley of Jezreel, which was the sight of many Old Testament battles and victories (cf. Judges 5:19; 2 Kings 23:29).

Wherever it takes place, Armageddon is symbolic of the final overthrow of all the forces of evil by the might and power of God. The great conflict between God and Satan, Christ and Antichrist, good and evil that lies behind the perplexing course of history will in the end issue in a final struggle in which God will emerge victorious and take with him all who have placed their faith in him. This is Har-Magedon.²⁹⁴

REVELATION 16:17-21—

The final bowl plague is that of the overthrow of Babylon. It is more fully described in Revelation 17-18. The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!" (vs. 17). The bowl is

²⁹² Ladd, *op. cit.*, pg. 215.

²⁹³ See Mounce, op. cit., pp. 301-302 for the technical arguments behind the different renderings of **Armagedon** and **Harmagedon**. ²⁹⁴ Mounce, *ibid.*, pg. 302.

most likely **poured out...into the air** because that represents the abode of the demonic spirits which are inspiring Babylon. "It is done!" is again proleptic.

This display of God's judgment is accompanied by phenomena associated with His mighty presence—then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since the human race has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake (vs. 18; cf. Haggai 2:6; Hebrews 12:26-27). With this the great city²⁹⁵ split into three parts...God [having given] her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of His wrath (vs. 19); in its eschatological fulfillment, this refers to the Antichrist's overthrow (cf. Revelation 14:8), his coalition government being toppled as the cities of the nations collapsed (vs. 19).

Vv. 20-21 are apocalyptic descriptions of the final destruction of this Age's known order, so as to pave the way for the new Earth and final judgment.

• The pouring out of Bowl 7 sweeps away time and history, and replaces them by eternity. When that day comes, it is not only the islands and mountains of God's earth which will vanish. The cities, the civilization which is the achievement of man's demon-driven pride, will collapse also. The "great city" is no doubt Babylon, the symbol of the whole satanic structure. She will be remembered, she who now says in her heart, "God has forgotten," and under the storm of God's anger she will disintegrate: "Hail will sweep away the refuge of lies" (Isaiah 28:17). With this the divine punishment is done (vs. 17). Bowl 6 brought wholesale destruction; bowl 7 brings total erasure.²⁹⁶

The weight of the **huge hailstones—each weighing about a hundred pounds** (vs. 21)—is literally, "each weighing about a talent." Guesses as to the weight of a talent range all the way from forty pounds to over one hundred pounds. The TNIV and NRSV take it to be **about a hundred pounds**.

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²⁹⁵ Historically, "the great city that is split into three parts is undoubtedly to be identified as Rome" (Robert Mounce, *op. cit.*, pg. 303). However, like the beast, it also has a consummate fulfillment—eschatological Babylon.

²⁹⁶ Wilcock, op. cit., pg. 150.

REVELATION 17

REVELATION 17:1-6A—

Revelation 17 is actually a fuller explanation of the plague of the seventh bowl (Revelation 16:17-21). One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits by many waters" (vs. 1). The great prostitute²⁹⁷ is the great Babylon.

She stands for civilized man apart from God, man in organized but godless community...it is significant that in the present passage the term is whore, not adulteress. John is not speaking of the people of God, but of a secular power. It is a secular power of low standards, one which has both committed horrible evils and seduced others into sharing her guilt. Every Bible reader knows about Babylon. We remember the tower of Babel and the boastful words in Genesis 11:4, "Let us build us a city and a tower whose top may reach to heaven...and let us make us a name." Also, we recall the proud remark of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4:3, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the glory of my majesty?" In 586 BC, the Babylonians destroyed the city of Jerusalem and carried the people into captivity. The city itself was one of the most beautiful in the ancient world and was the center of what we would call "civilization." It seemed to control the destiny of the world. Thus it stood as a symbol of all that man does outside God. It was based on pride and power, and it became corrupt and evil. As Merrill Tenney says, "It is the sum total of pagan culture, social, intellectual and commercial, that opposed and oppressed the people of God from time immemorial."298

The angel will later call her "the great city that rules over the kings of the earth" (Revelation 17:18). "Who sits by many waters" means that this is a world empire exercising dominion over many subject nations (cf. Revelation 17:15). 299 She is called the great prostitute because she prostitutes everything (including spiritual fidelity) for commercial gain (cf. Ninevah in Nahum 3:4), a gain in which many nations opt to participate—"with her the kings of the earth committed adultery, and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated [victimized] with the wine of her

²⁹⁷ The great whore (NRSV).

²⁹⁸ Morris, *op. cit.*, pp. 202-203.

²⁹⁹ To John's original readers, the most immediate reference would have been "Rome, that citadel of pagan opposition to the cause of Christ" (Robert Mounce, *op. cit.*, pg. 306).

adulteries" (vs. 2).³⁰⁰ John had been promised he would see Babylon's judgment; this must wait. First, he was given a vision—then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness (vs. 3).³⁰¹ What he saw is the harlot's alleged beauty and relationship to the beast (vv. 3-4).

- Recall that the Book of the Revelation consists of four main visions, introduced by the formula "in the spirit" (Revelation 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10). The four divisions are
 - i. The first vision on the earth of Christ and His message to the seven churches (Revelation 1:9-3:22). This is Christ in the Church.
 - ii. The second vision in heaven of the throne of God and what happens on earth because of it (Revelation 4:1-16:22). This is Christ in the cosmos.
 - iii. The third vision in the wilderness of the judgment against Babylon and the final conquest of all evil (Revelation 17:1-21:8). This is Christ in conquest.
 - iv. The fourth vision on a high mountain of the New Jerusalem and the eternal inheritance of the people of God (Revelation 21:9-22:5). This is Christ in consummation. It is apparent that visions three and four are in direct contrast. The harlot Babylon as the godless community of the Antichrist with all its awful consequences is compared to the bride of Christ and the New Jerusalem with all its glorious aspects. 302

John sees the prostitute sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns (vs. 3). The beast is obviously the beast of Revelation 13,³⁰³ who is here termed scarlet because of his association with the red dragon (Revelation 12:3). Again, the blasphemous names are an allusion to his attempts at self-deification. The fact that she is seen sitting on [the] scarlet beast indicates that the Antichrist is supporting (running) this godless, organized community.

³⁰³ Again, John's original readers would have likely interpreted this as the Emperor of Rome.

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³⁰⁰ A limited number of commentators, citing an Old Testament use of **adultery**, endeavor to make Babylon in Revelation 17 either apostate Christianity or some other ecclesiastical entity. This is not at all clear biblically, and does not account for the fact that she **rules over the kings of the earth** (Revelation 17:18). **Kings** symbolize those who rule politically, not religiously (although in ancient Israel they sometimes overlapped). Demonic religion will undoubtedly play a vital role in the End, as seen in the interconnection of the beast and false prophet (Revelation 13), but to separate eschatological Babylon into an ecclesiastical entity (Revelation 17) and a political entity (Revelation 18) is missing the overall intent. "In the context of Revelation 17 and 18 the imagery is not that of religious profligacy but of the prostitution of all that is right and noble for the questionable ends of power and luxury" (Robert Mounce, *ibid.*, pg. 308).

³⁰¹ **Wilderness** here most likely symbolizes a solitary place, outside the lure of the prostitute, where proper insight into her true nature can be gained.

³⁰² Pickerill, *op. cit.*, Notes on Revelation 17:1-19:10.

That she was seated upon many waters reflects her relationship to the nations of earth; that she is seated upon the scarlet beast reflects her relationship to the Antichrist. As the seat of godless civilization, the great harlot has achieved her glory because she has been made great by the beast and is completely dependent upon it 304

As to the great prostitute herself, the woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries (vs. 4). Purple and scarlet symbolize her splendor and luxury, for only the wealthy could afford items of these colors; the fact that she is glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls symbolizes the depth of her enticement. Who would not want such great wealth? The golden cup gives the appearance that she has something wonderful and delightful to offer; however, it is filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries, meaning that the reality behind-the-scenes is foul and impure.

Vs. 5 presents a bit of a translation difficulty due to the obscurity of the Greek text. Is it to be translated and on her forehead was written a name, a mystery:... (NRSV) or this title was written on her forehead: MYSTERY... (TNIV)? Scholars are divided, but most agree that **mystery** is not part of her name. Rather, it appositionally defines name (cf. NRSV), telling us that insight into the realities of Babylon is a mystery requiring divine revelation in order to be understood. In other words, the significance of "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth" (vs. 5) is not readily understood; only through knowledge of God's overall Word do we come to understand that eschatological **Babylon** is the ultimate personification/epitome of selfdeified civilization opposing God and His people. Hence—and I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of God's people, the blood of those who bore testimony to **Jesus** (vs. 6). "The harlot is influential (vs. 1), evil (vs. 3), attractive (vs. 4) and repulsive (vs. 6)."³⁰⁶

³⁰⁴ Ladd, op. cit., pg. 223.

The inscription on the forehead of this female figure suggests that, in addition to being a whore, she is 'a whore of the most degraded kind, a tattooed slave'" (David Aune, *op. cit.*, pg. 936). Wilcock, *op. cit.*, pp. 159-160.

REVELATION 17:6B-8—

In response, John says—I was greatly astonished (vs. 6B). Made fully aware of Babylon, he wondered—"Where is her promised judgment?" Then the angel said to me: "Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns" (vs. 7). Would that the angel's explanation were that easy! This is a section where expositors disagree greatly. Vs. 9 warns us that this explanation "calls for a mind with wisdom"; we must, therefore, not be hasty or over-speculative.

The confusion is due partly to obscure Greek phrases and partly to the introduction of "new players" (Revelation 17:9-12). Furthermore, the symbolism does not seem to be consistent. "It is not easy to understand all that we are told. Part of our difficulty lies in the fact that the symbolism seems to have different meanings. This is probably because the beast is fundamentally the principal henchman of Satan (the great red dragon) and Satan's work is done in different ways at different times." 307

The mystery begins with "the beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, 308 and will come up out of the Abyss and go to its destruction" (vs. 8). This verse is tough and various theological perspectives are advanced. Most scholars feel it is another way of looking at what John said about Antichrist in Revelation 13:3 (see text and notes). But it may well have a broader application as well. "In the broadest sense the beast is that satanically inspired power which, although having received the stroke of death, returns to hurl himself with renewed fury against the forces of God."309 John then seems to be saying that prior to the first century AD, the Antichrist existed in various "beast-type" world leaders (i.e., various pharaohs, Antiochus Epiphanes, etc.; the beast, which vou saw, once was); at the time of the writing no such "beast-type ruler" was around (not all rulers are inherently bad), especially not the Antichrist (now is not); but, during the events of the End there will be an eschatological fulfillment in the Antichrist, who will be the consummation of all historical "beast-type" (satanic) rulers (the beast...will come up out of the Abyss).

³⁰⁷ Morris, op. cit., pg. 208.

³⁰⁸ Some commentators take this as another parody of God who is, and who was, and who is to come (Revelation 1:4). 309 Mounce, *op.* cit., pg. 314.

The scarlet colored animal represents the Antichrist. It is the same beast with ten horns and seven heads that comes up out of the sea at the call of Satan (the powerful red dragon) in Revelation 13:1-10. It is important to note that John in Revelation 17 is giving what might be called a complete historical commentary—the past, the present and the future of the Antichrist. Here we need to recall a very important comment in 1 John 4:3 where John speaks of "the spirit of antichrist, of which you heard that it was coming, and now it is in the world already." In other words, the spirit of antichrist or an antichrist attitude has always been in the world and expresses itself through world civilization. Empires have been built more on "man" than on God. The spirit of antichrist, however, is not the Antichrist. John wants to make this clear in this chapter. His main point seems to be the same as Paul makes in 2 Thessalonians 2, that Rome itself is not the Antichrist. Apparently the early Christians, under the persecution of Nero and Domitian, wondered if they were living under the Antichrist. Both John and Paul correct this mistaken idea. Rome is one of the "heads" of the beast, but is not the personal Antichrist. In fact, in light of the historical unfolding of Daniel 7, Rome is no doubt the controversial "restrainer" or detainer of the Antichrist according to 2 Thessalonians 2. The Antichrist or man of sin is the last manifestation of human civilization. Thus, he could not appear until Rome (representing orderly government in general) "is taken out of the way." 310

REVELATION 17:9-14—

Vs. 9 introduces the new players—"the seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits." As noted above, historically John's original readers would have likely interpreted this as Rome. It is important to note that the seven heads are both seven hills and seven kings—"seven mountains...are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come" (vv. 9-10). John seems, therefore, to have something beyond ancient Rome in mind. What is most likely meant by seven hills is seven empires (cf. Psalm 30:7), with seven kings being the rulers of these seven empires. The heads of the beast then represent worldwide imperial power. The fact that "five have fallen" likely refers to the fall of ancient Greece, Persia, Babylon, Assyria and Egypt. The fact that "one is" refers to first century Rome; the fact that "the other has not yet come" refers to the future empire of the beast (eschatological Babylon). 311

• The great harlot sits upon a succession of empires. She found her embodiment in historical Babylon, in the first century in historical Rome, and at the end of

³¹⁰ Pickerill, *loc. cit.*

³¹¹ An excellent discussion of this entire matter can be found in Walvoord, *op. cit.*, pp. 251-254. See also Aune, *op. cit.*, pg. 948 for the view that seven may be apocalyptic symbolism rather than a reference to seven specific kings/empires.

the age in eschatological Babylon. This may well be what John intended in speaking about the "mystery of the woman" (vs. 7). No simple identification with any singly historical city or empire is possible. The woman has formed an adulterous connection in every epoch of her history with the then existing world power. ³¹²

"But when he does come, he must remain for a little while" (vs. 10) refers to the fact that both the Antichrist and his empire will be short lived.

"The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction" (vs. 11) is very difficult and subject to various interpretations.³¹³ It seems to be primarily eschatological in its focus, implying three realities—

- 1. As noted above, there have been antichrist governments in the past, but the eschatological Antichrist was not on the scene at the time of John's writing—
 "the beast who once was, and now is not."
- 2. The eschatological Antichrist will definitely arise out of the world's kingdoms—"the beast...is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven."
 - Now we arrive at the heart of the riddle. The beast himself is an eighth king who is at the same time one of the seven...he is Antichrist, not simply another Roman emperor. He is not a human ruler through whom the power of evil finds expression—he is that evil power itself. He belongs to the cosmic struggle between God and Satan that lies behind the scenes of human history. 314
- 3. His final destiny is sure—"[He] is going to his destruction."

"The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast" (vs. 12).

• The picture of ten horns on a beast is taken from Daniel 7:20-24. The number ten may stand for completion; hence, the ten kings may be a symbolic way of describing the power of the Antichrist himself. On the other hand, ten may be more literal, referring to the way human government will structure itself in the last days of harlot civilization. 315

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³¹² Ladd, *op. cit.*, pg. 228.

³¹³ "The most satisfactory explanation of the seven kings [may be] that the number seven is symbolic and stands for the power of the Roman Empire as a historic whole" (Robert Mounce, *op. cit.*, pg. 317). ³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 317-318.

³¹⁵ Pickerill, *loc. cit.* Dispensationalists are adamant that ten refers to this latter—a literal government alliance of ten European nations. "When God put it in the hearts of the Norwegians to reject membership (in the Common Market), they failed to ratify their treaty. The Common Market dropped from ten nations to nine. This action delayed the formation of the seventh head until Greece became the tenth member on

Although details here are not clear, what is clear is—1) the final evil reign will be short lived ("for one hour"; cf. vs. 10); 2) "they have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast" (vs. 13) to "make war against the Lamb" (vs. 14; cf. Revelation 19:17-21); and 3) they will lose, for "the Lamb will triumph over them because He is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with Him will be His called, chosen and faithful followers" (vs. 14).

REVELATION 17:15-18—

This final paragraph presents quite a shift; it speaks of the beginning of the demise of the eschatological coalition government through civil war. Totally without explanation as to what prompts it on the human scene, the angel notes that "the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire" (vs. 16). This is graphic language for utter destruction.³¹⁶

• The prophets sometimes foresaw an eschatological state of chaos among the enemies of God when every man's sword will be against his brother (Ezek. 38:21; Hag. 2:22; Zech. 14:13). In Daniel's vision of the beast with ten horns, the little horn which boasted antichristlike pretensions attained to his place of power by destroying three of his colleagues (Dan. 7:24).

The ultimate why behind this is divine providence—"for God has put it into their hearts to accomplish His purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God's words are fulfilled" (vs. 17). God is indeed the God of history. The angel concludes by saying that "the woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth" (vs. 18). Apparently the woman is at once historical Rome, the consummation of godless society and the capital city of the eschatological Antichrist government.³¹⁸

January 1, 1981. These nations of the Common Market will bring forth the Antichrist once the Church is caught away" (Hilton Sutton, op. cit., pg. 178).

³¹⁶ It is difficult to find any historical event in ancient Rome, indicating that John's reference is likely eschatological. If there is any historical reference, "this prediction may reflect the rumor that Nero would return from the east with Parthian allies to conquer Rome" (David Aune, *op. cit.*, pg. 957).

³¹⁷ Ladd, *op. cit.*, pg. 233.

³¹⁸ See notes #308 and #312 above.

• The woman is "the great city" because of the way people organize themselves outside God. The destruction of the harlot woman by the beast and his ten kings is at first surprising. But this is one of the most important points to the vision. Civilization cannot survive on an antichrist basis. It destroys itself. Sin has its own built-in judgments. Society will produce the Antichrist in that he comes out of the sea (Revelation 13:1), but it will be self-destructive. God will not be mocked. It is a part of His "purpose" that all life outside His way be destroyed. 319

REVELATION 18

• In Revelation 18:1-19:10 seven voices describe the fall of Babylon as an accomplished fact, some in thanksgiving and others in dismay. Babylon in the New Testament is a symbol of sinful humanity and its capacity for self-delusion, ambition, sinful pride, and demonized depravity. It thus represents world culture in rebellion against God. Babylon stands in contrast to the Church as a society that persecutes God's people and thus inevitably will be destroyed.³²⁰

REVELATION 18:1-3—

Revelation 18 draws largely from Ezekiel 26-28, Isaiah 13-14 and Jeremiah 50-51; it further describes the destruction of **Babylon**. Yet a fuller explanation of the wrath of the seventh bowl (Revelation 16:17-19), it concentrates especially on the destruction of the eschatological capital city³²¹ as described in Revelation 17:16—"the beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire."

Revelation 18 opens with John seeing another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. With a mighty voice he shouted: "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!" (vv. 1-2). This is the same message which was proleptically announced in Revelation 14:8. Drawing upon Old Testament descriptions of the fall of Babylon, Edom and Ninevah, the complete destruction of the eschatological city (and hence ultimately the society she represents) is described in terms of its total desertion by people ("she has become a dwelling for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit") and its occupation by carnivorous birds and

³²⁰ Morey, *op. cit.*, pg. 1985. See also notes #296 and #299 above.

³¹⁹ Pickerill, *loc. cit.*

³²¹ Remember that Babylon describes both the society itself and the capital city of Antichrist's coalition government.

various animals ("a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable animal" [vs. 2]).

• There are many coincidences of language with the description of the fall of Tyre (Ezk. xxvi-xxviii) and that of Babylon (Is. xiii, xiv, xxi; Je. l, li). But there is more than similarity of language. John has caught the spirit of the prophetic doom songs. As Kiddle puts it, "We cannot grasp anything like the full power of John's words unless we are familiar with the passages to which he alludes. The song in REVELATION is a resounding echo of the passionate faith and stormy exulting in the doom-songs of the great prophets...chap. xviii. is at once a 'new song' in the sense that it has passed through the fire of the prophet's imagination, and also a summary of all prophetic oracles on the doom of unrighteous peoples." 322

As in Revelation 17:12, the reason for her overthrow is her destructive wantonness—
"for all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of
the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich
from her excessive luxuries" (vs. 3).³²³

REVELATION 18:4-8—

The heartbeat of Revelation 18 is vv. 4-8 as another voice from heaven (vs. 4) warns believers not to get caught in the snare of Babylon—"Come out of her, My people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues" (vs. 4). The voice also again announces God's justice in destroying her—"for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes. Give back³²⁴ to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Pour her a double portion from her own cup" (vv. 5-6). Phillips accurately renders this last phrase, "Mix her a drink of double strength!"

The fact that the core of Babylon's evil is her self-glorification, her impious pride, is clearly stated in vs. 7—"in her heart she says, 'I rule as a queen; I am no widow, and I will never see grief'." Contrary to her boast, however, she is frail before the judgment of God; her true frailty is seen in the swiftness with which God brings her down—

Luxuries (Greek, *strenos*) has the idea of extreme sensuality, self-indulgence and luxurious arrogance.

³²² Morris, *op. cit.*, pp. 213-214.

²²⁴ Give back (Greek, *strenos*) has the idea of extreme sensuanty, self-indulgence and luxurious arrogance.

324 Give back (Greek, *apodidomi*) has the idea of giving recompense or requital; it is a fulfillment of Romans 12:19—"It is Mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord—as God moves in response to the cry of the martyrs under the altar (Revelation 6:9-11).

"therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her" (vs. 8).

REVELATION 18:9-19—

Zeroing in on some specifics of Babylon's destruction, John continues to describe her downfall and the reaction of some of those affected. First, the political leaders—when the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her (vs. 9). These are the ten kings spear heading Babylon's self-destruction. Their mourning is very guarded and self-centered, however; they hope to escape her judgment—they will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say—"Woe! Woe to you, great city, you mighty city of Babylon! In one hour your doom has come!" (vs. 10).

Next is the reaction of the economic leaders—the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her (vs. 11); again, it is not for Babylon that they weep, but for themselves because no one buys their cargo anymore (vs. 11). The local sellers—the merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her—will also selfishly lament, as they too will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn (vs. 15). They enjoyed making money off an alliance with her harlotry, but they do not want to share in the conflagration. Again and again the true frailty and transitiveness of what seems to be a great system is repeated—the merchants…every sea captain…will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out: "Woe! Woe to you, great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin!" (vv. 15, 17 and 19). Eschatological Babylon, that system which depicts humankind's attempt to be self-sufficient and to make it without God, will find its ultimate destruction as the events of the Great Tribulation draw to a close.

REVELATION 18:20-24—

Recognizing the complete justice of this overthrow, as well as the triumph it represents for God and His kingdom, vs. 20 reads—"Rejoice over her, you heavens! Rejoice, you people of God! Rejoice, apostles and prophets! For God has judged her with the judgment she imposed on you." Justice is being established, which will find its

consummation in the Great White Throne judgment (Revelation 20) and the coming of the new Heaven and new Earth (Revelation 21-22).

This is not a gleeful song of personal vengeance, but an announcement of the vindication of God's justice and righteousness. It must always be kept in mind that background for such a song of vindication is the question whether God's rule or Satan's deceptive power is to triumph in human affairs. The time of the great tribulation (7:15; Matt. 24:21) will be a period when Satan will be allowed to do his worst. He will be incarnate in the beast, who in turn will be allowed to exercise his will as never before in human history, with the faithful followers of Jesus the main objects of his venom...as terrible as this period is, it will be only temporary, and the destruction of Babylon will mean that God, the eternal Judge, has finally given judgment for His people against Babylon.³²⁵

Typical of his style to forcefully reiterate matters, John now once again describes Babylon's overthrow, but from a different angle. This description deals not with the reaction of Babylon's leaders and merchants, but with the depth of cessation of life within (vv. 21-24). This description is executed as a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: "With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again" (vs. 21). Ceasing shall be "the music of harpists and musicians, pipers and trumpeters" (vs. 22); ceasing shall be the activities of "[a] worker of any trade...the sound of a millstone...the light of a lamp...the voice of bridegroom and bride" (vv. 22-23); ceasing also shall be the deception of all nations by her magic spell and the shedding of the blood of prophets and of God's people (vv. 23-24). She shall truly become a dead city, as shall the entire beast system of whom she is an ally.

³²⁵ Ladd, op. cit., pp. 241-242.

REVELATION 19

The highlight of Revelation 19 is the literal return of Jesus Christ (Revelation 19:11 ff). First, however, there is a celebration of the fall of Babylon (Revelation 19:1-10), which is a continuation of the theme of Revelation 18. Revelation 20 will deal with the binding of Satan and the millennial reign.

REVELATION 19:1-10—

After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting (vs. 1). In a mighty anthem, led by what appears to be a host of angels (cf. Revelation 5:11), there is a shout of "Hallelujah!" over the prostitute's destruction—"He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of His servants...Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever" (vv. 1-3; cf. Isaiah 34:10). Hallelujah! is a transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning, "Praise Yahweh." This word of praise again reminds us of the fact that the removal of all corrupting elements is a necessary prelude to the bringing of His kingdom in consummation (cf. Revelation 14:8).

This anthem of praise is affirmed by the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures (cf. Revelation 4:4, 6), who then fell down and worshiped God...and cried: "Amen, Hallelujah!" (vs. 4). Amen is their affirmation of Babylon's overthrow; Hallelujah! is their own added praise to Yahweh. Then a voice came from the throne (likely that of one of the living creatures nearest the throne), summoning God's people on Earth to join the anthem of praise—"Praise our God, all you His servants, you who fear Him, both great and small!" (vs. 5).

The consummation of the kingdom of God, already proleptically announced in Revelation 11:15, is proleptically announced again as John heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns" (vs. 6).³²⁶

³²⁶ Although the TNIV and many English versions say **our Lord God Almighty reigns**, this is not the best rendering of the Greek verbal tense. Known technically as an "inceptive acrist," the verb should be more accurately translated, "**The Lord our God...has begun to reign**" or "**The Lord our God...has entered on His reign**" (NEB); it stresses the fact that God has ushered in the next phase of His reign through the return of Christ.

The consummate uniting of Christ and His Church is then proleptically announced in vv. 7-8 through the imagery of the uniting of a bride and bridegroom. At this point, we must take care not to over press details. **His bride** (vs. 7) is obviously the Church (*cf.* Ephesians 5:27); yet, in Revelation 21:2, 9 **the new Jerusalem** is called the bride. This is because of the fluidity of the metaphor, and the fact that Jerusalem and God's people are very closely linked (*cf.* Matthew 23:37). The fact that "fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear" (vs. 8) refers to a Christian's imputed righteousness which then shows up in their lives (fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's people [vs. 8]). 327

• Where a distinction has had to be made between the whore and the beast she rides, it has seemed increasingly that the latter represents godless society as an institution, while the former symbolizes its ideology or message. The bride, however, seems to be a single figure uniting both concepts, since she represents nothing if not a society, and is thus the counterpart of the beast, as well as being obviously the counterpart of the whore, Jerusalem over against Babylon. 328

The consummated union of Christ and His Church is next restated by **the angel** in terms of guests **invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb** (vs. 9), emphasizing that to be part of God's eternal inheritance is a true blessing—"Blessed are those who are **invited...**" (vs. 9).

• The event heralded in vss. 6-11—the marriage of the Lamb—is a propleptic announcement of an event which actually takes place at the coming of Christ when He is united with His Church on earth. It is John's custom to proclaim redemptive events which he nowhere actually describes...in the present pericope John heralds the marriage supper of the Lamb, but he does not actually describe the event; he merely announces it. The messianic consummation is pictured not only as a marriage supper but as a joyous banquet. Jesus said that many would come from the east and west and sit at the table with the patriarchs in the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 8:11). He told His disciples at the last supper that He would not drink of the fruit of the vine until He should drink it with them in the Kingdom of God (Matt. 26:29). 329

Is this supper a literal meal? Not all conservative Christian scholars agree on this point; neither do they agree on its time in history. Most likely it is not referencing a literal

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³²⁷ See also Morris' argument that this may be an inaccurate translation (Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 227).

³²⁸ Wilcock, *op. cit.*, pg. 172.

³²⁹ Ladd, *op. cit.*, pp. 249-250.

meal, but a post-Parousia, consummate union. "The marriage supper of the Lamb is the fellowship of eternal blessedness, foreshadowed by the Lord's Supper, rather than a literal meal." "The 'supper' intensifies the idea of intimate communion expressed in the marriage metaphors, since suppers were the occasion of close table fellowship." "331

"These are the true words of God" (vs. 9) is intended to show God's faithfulness as opposed to the beast's lies and unfaithfulness. Overwhelmed with awe at the angel's announcement, John fell at his feet to worship him (vs. 10). The angel would not allow this, however—"Don't do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers and sisters who hold Jesus' testimony. Worship God!" (vs. 10). God alone holds claim to worship.

"For the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy" (vs. 10) most likely means that all true prophetic messages bear witness to Jesus; this also further reiterates the fact that the angels are not objects of worship, but prophetic messengers who bear witness to Jesus.

REVELATION 19:11-21—

The final two paragraphs of the chapter deal with Jesus' return and the defeat of the beast and false prophet. Vv. 11-16 concern themselves with a description of the returning, conquering Christ; vv. 17-21 describe the carnage of **the great supper of God**.

Drawing loosely from Isaiah 63:1-6, John notes that **he saw heaven standing open** and there before [him] was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice He judges and makes war (vs. 11). Whereas the rider of the white horse in Revelation 6:2 is somewhat disputed, there is no doubt that this is Christ Himself riding forth to execute the next phase of victory over evil won previously on the Cross. John goes on to describe Christ in terms similar to that of Revelation 1—

³³⁰ Morey, *op. cit.*, pg. 1987.

Beale, op. cit., pg. 945. Dispensationalists on the other hand insist that this marriage supper is a literal meal in heaven in which the raptured Church participates during the Great Tribulation on Earth. "The marriage supper of the Lamb (vv. 7-10), an actual meal in heaven, is the final manifestation of the marriage of Christ and His wife. This culminates their initial relationship, likened to an engagement, which was a legal arrangement in Jewish culture. This follows the coming of Christ as Bridegroom in the Rapture of the church before the Great Tribulation and precedes His return seven years later to establish His millennial kingdom" (Coleman Phillips, op. cit., pg. 1987; see also Walvoord, op. cit., pg. 270).

- Christ's all-searching gaze is reaffirmed (His eyes are like blazing fire [vs. 121);
- His royalty is ascribed (on His head are many crowns...on His robe and on His thigh He has this name written: King of kings and Lord of lords [vv. 12, 16]);
- His warrior-like strength is stated (coming out of His mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter" [vs. 15]);
- His right to execute judgment is given (He will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty [vs. 15]);
- and the fact that He is the embodiment of God's redemptive plan is clearly spelled out (His name is the Word of God [vs. 13]).

In addition, John makes the statement that He has a name written on Him that no one knows but He Himself (vs. 12). This most likely means that there are aspects of Jesus' personhood the depths of which the human mind cannot fully understand. We are also told that the armies of heaven were following Him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean (vs. 14). These are most likely angels, whose clothes symbolize they participate in His victory; angels are said elsewhere to accompany Jesus when "He comes in His Father's glory" (Mark 8:38). It is interesting to also note that there is no mention of either weapons or a fight; they are simply said to accompany Jesus.

According to Revelation 17:14, Christ is also accompanied by "called, chosen and faithful followers." "As the Lamb, Christ is followed by the saints (17:14); as the heavenly Warrior. He is followed by the angels."332 This is also likely the time of the Rapture of the Church. "This is best seen as the time of the Rapture, as the church triumphant rises to meet Christ and the other returning saints (who have died) in the air at His return. The raptured saints shall then immediately return to Earth with Christ and the others."333

³³² Ladd, *op. cit.*, pg. 255. ³³³ Morey, *op. cit.*, pg. 1988.

Christ's victorious Return is pictured next in terms of birds gathered to feast on the carnage of war victims; it is called the **great supper of God** (vs. 17; cf. Ezekiel 39:17-20). The absolute decisiveness and all inclusiveness of the Second Coming's victory is depicted in the summons—"Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and the mighty, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, great and small" (vv. 17-18). John's attention goes immediately to the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the Rider on the horse and His army (vs. 19). This is apparently at Armageddon (cf. Revelation 16:16); however, no battle is described.³³⁴ "He sees the hostile forces in array, but gives no description of battle; nothing is said of the clash of armies, or of a hard-won victory; in fact nothing of the kind enters into the conception; all is achieved in an instant by the miraculous power of the warrior Messiah."335 "Like other battles in the narrative of Revelation, this one omits any reference to the conflict itself and emphasizes only the capture or decimation of the enemy (cf. 17:14; 20:7-10)."336

In this same vein, vs. 21 says the rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the Rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh. This is the same truth the apostle Paul explains in 2 Thessalonians 2:8—then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of His mouth and destroy by the splendor of His coming. As to the Antichrist and false prophet, John notes that the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet...the two of them were [then] thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur (vs. 20). This is John's main point; using metaphorical language, he indicates the complete removal and punishment of these two through eternal banishment from God's presence. Revelation 20 will discuss the lake of burning sulfur in greater detail.

³³⁴ In spite of John's silence on the matter of the battle, dispensationalism has reconstructed an elaborate Armageddon involving a literal battle over the fate of national Israel. "Demonic spirits, under the control of Satan, Antichrist, and the False Prophet, work deceptive miracles and manipulate the rulers of the world, against national Israel...West of Jordan, in the plain of Jezreel called Megiddo, the military forces of the Beast and False Prophet will be totally destroyed by the return of Christ. Anti-Semitism will reach a level not previously seen in history. The kings of the earth will gather against national Israel in great numbers...Christ then leaves heaven with His saints and angels...He fights for Israel to consummate the Battle of Armageddon" (Coleman Phillips, op. cit., pp. 1984, 1988-1989).

³³⁵ Beckwith, *op. cit.*, pg. 287. ³³⁶ Aune, *op. cit.*, pg. 1065.

REVELATION 20

Revelation 20 deals with a great white throne judgment (Revelation 20:11-15) and with what is commonly termed the Millennium (Revelation 20:1-10). 337 Schools of interpretation are greatly divided on the meaning of Revelation 20:1-10.

One of the most hotly debated questions in the conservative interpretation of Revelation is that of the Millennium. The doctrine is usually rejected not on exegetical but on theological grounds. The Revelation nowhere expounds the theology of the millennial kingdom. Why must there be a temporal kingdom on this Earth before the eternal kingdom on the new Earth?³³⁸

Conservative scholars generally follow one of three views—³³⁹

- 1. Pre-millennialism—the view that Revelation 20:1-10 is entirely eschatological; by this, scholars mean that though it contains symbolic imagery (i.e., binding Satan with a great chain), the verses are to be understood literally and sequentially. This view sees the return of Christ as followed by a 1,000 year³⁴⁰ intermediate reign, which includes the further curbing of Satan's power; the "first resurrection" (the dead saints who, along with the newly raptured saints, will reign on earth with Christ for 1,000 years); the subsequent loosing of Satan; his final attempted coup; and his destruction in the lake of fire and sulfur. With slight variation, this is also the view of Dispensationalism.
- 2. Postmillennialism—the view that there will be an end time period which is distinctly different than the rest of the Church age; however, its difference lies not in the fact that Christ is here ruling and reigning over an intermediate kingdom for 1,000 years, but in the fact that the Church is enjoying its "Golden Age" (which may or may not be a literal 1,000 years). Christ does not return until after the Millennium, at which time He raises the dead; judges the world: and issues in the new eternal order.³⁴¹
- 3. Amillennialism—the view that the Millennium is not a literal 1,000 year earthly, eschatological reign of Christ following His return; rather, the 1,000 years symbolizes the current "Church age." The Millennium is, therefore, now in the process of being realized; Revelation 20:1-3 describes the fact that Satan's destructive activities on Earth have been curbed as a result of Christ's

Millennium is a term derived from the Latin for 1,000 (see a thousand years [Revelation 20:2]).

³³⁸ Pickerill, *op. cit.*, Notes on Revelation 20.

³³⁹ For an excellent analysis of each of these views, see Wilcock, op. cit., pp. 175-182 or Robert P. Lightner, The Last Days Handbook, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN., 1990.

Pre-millennial scholars disagree as to whether or not the 1000 years is a literal or symbolic number. See

³⁴¹ This view sees Revelation 19 as describing the triumph of Christian truth through the Church, rather than Christ's literal return.

first coming, a curbing which the Church then implements on a day to day basis until the Age to Come, which begins with Christ's Parousia (Revelation 20:4 ff). 342

There is no doubt that the problem is a difficult one. The difficulty lies not only along the lines of the theological implications of a Millennium, but in the fact that nowhere else in the Bible is a temporal, earthly reign of Christ mentioned. The totality of the Bible's evidence seems to indicate that though the Day of the Lord describes a series of events, its climax is Christ's Parousia, followed immediately by the climaxed new order. And yet, exegetically, Revelation 20:1-10 seems so clear that it is difficult to make it merely a symbolic reference to the Church Age or a testimony to the triumph of the end times Church. It seems best, therefore, to see Revelation 20:1-10 as describing a literal, intermediate reign of Christ on Earth prior to the coming of the Age to Come.

WHY A MILLENNIUM?

Before examining the events of the Millennium, a word on "Why A Millennium?" seems in order. This is important for "why" is not self-evident; Revelation 20 gives no indication, simply stating this temporal reign as a necessity to the consummation of Christ's reign. We must, therefore, look for biblical *inferences* for our understanding of its necessity. There are two key implications as to "why," however, that are biblically sound—

1. As things now stand, Christ is already exalted as Lord (*cf.* Philippians 2:9), reigning at the right hand of God (*cf.* Acts 2:33-36) and enthroned as King (*cf.* Revelation 3:21); Jesus Christ brings kingdom blessings to His people now (*cf.* Romans 14:17) and people enter His kingdom now (*cf.* Colossians 1:13). However, all of this is in the midst of the reign of evil powers in this Age. His reign is partial, veiled to unbelievers; yet, Paul says, **He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet** (1 Corinthians 15:25). The Millennium then will apparently be the time of His universally recognized

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³⁴² This view was first taught by Augustine who "held that the thousand-year period was to be taken as the interval between the first advent and the final conflict" (Robert Mounce, *op. cit.*, pg. 368). Prior to Augustine, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus and other of the earliest church fathers were millenarians. Most of the Reformers followed Augustine's understanding.

reign on Earth (*cf.* Philippians 2:9-10) prior to the time of the Father's all encompassing dominion on the new Earth (*cf.* 1 Corinthians 15:28). This will also be the time of the saints' rule over the nations (*cf.* Revelation 2:26-27; 5:9-10).

- There should be no objection to the idea of such a temporal kingdom in principle, for the New Testament is quite clear that we are already experiencing a temporal reign of Christ in the church age...one of the unifying centers in the diversity of New Testament theology is the tension between experienced and futuristic theology. If then in the present age there is a real overlapping of the two ages so that while we live in the old age, we experience the powers of the age to come, there should be no objection in principle to the idea that God in His redemptive purpose may yet have an age in which there is an even further interaction between the powers of the new age and the present evil age. 343
- 2. The second important aspect to the Millennium has to do with further establishing God's justice in the final judgment. At the end of Christ's magnificent, unparalleled rule of righteousness over the Earth, the loosed Satan will still be able to cause human hearts to respond to his enticements (Revelation 20:7-9). Because of the incredibly wonderful environment in which they respond to satanic enticement, sinful humankind will truly be without excuse when finally judged. God will be able to tangibly establish once and for all the justice of His judgments (*cf.* Romans 3:4; 2 Timothy 4:8). Every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God (Romans 3:19). The Millennium, then, acts as a sort of theological backdrop to the Great White Throne judgment that follows.
 - O The Word of God has much to say about the justness and righteousness of God's judgments (Romans 2:1-6; 3:4; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-6; 2 Timothy 4:8; Revelation 16:5, 7; 19:2)...if then there is yet to be, in the sovereign wisdom of God, an era in history when evil is restrained, when righteousness prevails as it never has before in this age; if there is to be a time of social and political and economic justice when men dwell together under the government of Christ in peace and prosperity; if before the final judgment God grants to men a time when their social environment is as nearly perfect as possible; and yet, after such a period of righteousness, the hearts of unregenerate men prove still to be rebellious against God, in the final judgment of the Great White Throne, every mouth will indeed be

³⁴³ Pickerill, *loc. cit.*

stopped and every excuse voided, to the vindication of the glory and the righteousness of God. There are theologians today who insist that the love of God demands that hell be evacuated of every human being, that God cannot be a righteous and just God if a single soul finally perishes. The very idea of eternal punishment is utterly repugnant to the modern mind. There is indeed a need to vindicate the judgment of God, as well as to display His unlimited love. The "sterner aspects of God's love" cannot be diluted into sentimentality which does not take sin seriously. 344

REVELATION 20:1-3—

Using highly graphic and symbolic language, John describes the next phase of the curbing of satanic power (cf. Matthew 12:29; Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14-15). The execution is carried out by an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him (vv. 1-3). It is obvious that this is symbolic; a great chain could not hold a spirit being. Although we are not told exactly how this radical curbing of Satan's power will come about, we are told its purpose—to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended (vs. 3). "Apparently a thousand years of confinement does not alter Satan's plans, nor does a thousand years of freedom from the influence of wickedness change people's basic tendency to rebel against their creator." 345

What does this imply? Scholars differ.

• ...this binding is different from the binding of Satan accomplished by our Lord in His earthly ministry; the latter had special reference to demon exorcising by which individuals were delivered from satanic bondage (Matt. 12:28-29). We must remember that the very idea of binding Satan is a symbolic way of describing a curbing of his power and activity; it does not mean his complete immobility. His incarceration in the abyss does not mean that all of his activities and powers are nullified, only that he may no longer deceive the nations as he has done through human history and lead them into active aggression against the saints during the thousand years. 346

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.* See Mounce, *op. cit.*, pg. 369, who sees the Millennium as a great reward solely for those martyred during the Great Tribulation.

Mounce, op. cit., pg. 363. See also Revelation 20:7.

³⁴⁶ Ladd, *op. cit.*, pg. 262. See also Beale, *op. cit.*, pg. 986. Walvoord does not agree with reference to the extent of Satan's binding. "Whatever the physical character of the chain, the obvious teaching of the passage is that the action is so designed as to render Satan inactive. The intention is not to represent Satan as merely restricted but as rendered completely inactive. In confirmation of this, verse 3 states that he is

As to the length of **the thousand years** (vs. 3), pre-millennial scholars do not agree here either. Though seeing the time as actual—

• ...it is likely that we should take this [number] symbolically. One thousand is the cube of ten, the number of completeness. We have seen it used over and over again in this book to denote completeness of some sort, and this is surely the way we should take it here. Satan is bound for the perfect period. 347

REVELATION 20:4-6—

John next sees souls who came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years (vs. 4). He terms this the first resurrection (vs. 5). In as much as we are told that these souls are seated on thrones, judgment is committed to them and they reign with Christ, it is quite clear that these are the souls of dead saints. This is what John further infers when he says—the rest of the dead (unbelievers)³⁴⁸ did not come to life until the thousand years were ended (vs. 5).

Because the Greek behind vs. 4 is somewhat obscure, there has been quite a bit of debate over the identity of those seated on thrones. Most likely, they are all the saints of Church history. The martyrs are then a singled out subgroup of the larger group—I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God (vs. 4). John's main point is clear, however—blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them... (vs. 6).

REVELATION 20:7-10—

As previously stated (Revelation 20:3), Satan's curbing during the Millennium is temporal—when the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison

cast into the abyss, which by its character is a place of confinement. The angel uses the key and shuts him up in the abyss. If God wanted to show that Satan was totally inactive and out of touch with the world, how could He have rendered it more specifically than He has done in this passage?" (John Walvoord, *op. cit.*, pp. 291-292).

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pg. 235.

Contra Mounce. "The rest of the dead who did not come to life until the close of the thousand years would be all the faithful except the martyrs, plus the entire body of unbelievers" (Robert Mounce, *op. cit.*, pg. 370).

³⁴⁹ See Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, pg. 679 for an excellent discussion of the three groups John identifies.

(vs. 7). 350 His intent will be to go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog (vs. 8). Although much of this material sounds like that of Ezekiel 36-39, John is not describing the fulfillment of the Ezekiel passages. The differences are too great.³⁵¹ Gog and Magog here symbolize all the nations allied in hostility toward Jesus and His Church following the Millennium.³⁵² The purpose of the deception of the nations is to gather them for battle (vs. 8). However, once again there is no recorded battle; instead, John notes that fire came down from heaven and devoured them (vs. 9). "Consistently John thinks of the power of God as so overwhelming that there cannot even be the appearance of a battle when He wills to destroy evil."353

Moving immediately to his main point—Satan's punishment—John notes that the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown (vs. 10). The lake of burning sulfur³⁵⁴ is a place of eternal banishment from the presence of the Lord where...they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever (vs. 10); John will later call it the second death, noting that death and Hades³⁵⁵ were thrown into the lake of fire as well (Revelation 20:14). "Death and Hades have completely lost their power." 356

Theologians do not agree as to whether or not the fire is to be taken literally or figuratively.

The fact that this language cannot be interpreted in terms of physical fire is shown by the fact that death and Hades are also cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death (Rev. 20:14). Our Lord spoke of final punishment in terms of fire (Matt. 13:42, 50; 25:41) or of darkness (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; cf. II Pet. 2:17; Jude 13). While both fire and darkness are picturesque ways of

^{350 &}quot;Perhaps the most reasonable explanation for this rather unusual parole is to make plain that neither the designs of Satan nor the waywardness of the human heart will be altered by the mere passing of time" (Robert Mounce, *op. cit.*, pg. 371).

Solution 351 For a detailed analysis, see Walvoord, *op. cit.*, pp. 303-304.

^{352 &}quot;In chapter 19 the kings of the earth and their armies were killed with the sword of Messiah (19:19-21). Yet now in chapter 20 the nations are pictured as still in existence. Since apocalyptic eschatology does not require the chronological precision of narrative, this overlapping of scenes and repetition of figures causes no real problem" (Robert Mounce, op. cit., pg. 363).

³⁵³ Morris, op. cit., pg. 239.

The lake of burning sulfur is an alternate name for Gehenna and hell. It is to be distinguished from Hades/Sheol. **Sulfur** is a symbol of that which cleanses or rids the Earth of all evil.

³⁵⁵ **Hades** is a temporary place (as opposed to the permanence of hell) of gloom, darkness, misery, futility and death where God's anger burns (Deuteronomy 32:22) and where there is no rest (Revelation 14:11). Beale, *op. cit.*, pg. 1035.

speaking of final punishment, they describe the fearful punishment of banishment from the presence and blessings of God in Christ (Matt. 7:23; 25:41).³⁵⁷

The majority of conservative Christian scholars sees the description as literal.

REVELATION 20:11-15—

Revelation 20 closes with judgment at a great white throne. Then I saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it (vs. 11); this is quite obviously the Father, although in other passages there is reference to the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10; *cf.* also Matthew 25:31 *ff*; Romans 9:10). Dispensational expositors see two different judgments—the judgment seat of Christ for believers (which they say is during the Great Tribulation, following the Church's pre-Tribulation rapture [Revelation 4:1]), and a great white throne post-millennial judgment of the Father, which deals with unbelievers. This is not clear biblically, however. The Bible seemingly indicates only one post-millennial judgment time that will involve both believers and unbelievers; John is silent about the believers' place at this great white throne.³⁵⁸

His concern is the dead, great and small who are said to be standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life (vs. 12), which determines their eternal destiny—all whose names were not found written in the book of life were thrown into the lake of fire (vs. 15). Although their eternal damnation is determined by rejection of Jesus Christ during their life time, John also notes that the dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books…everyone was judged according to what they had done (vv. 12-13). This is difficult and almost contradictory to the overall message of the New Testament. In the broad picture, however, it seems to be indicating that God's judgment is just; they could have responded to Christ, but did not. John's statement may also carry the idea that there will be different levels of punishment for the unredeemed in the lake of fire.

• The great white throne judgment is not arbitrary but based on the evidence written by the life of every person. Books are opened, and the dead are judged on the basis of what they have done as recorded therein. The teaching of judgment by works runs throughout both the OT and the NT (Jer. 17:10; Rom.

³⁵⁷ Ladd, The Last Things, pg. 95.

³⁵⁸ For a complete discussion of this matter, see Ladd, *op. cit.*, Chapter VIII.

- 2:6; 1 Pet. 1:17)...the issue is not salvation by works but works as the irrefutable evidence of a person's actual relationship with God. Salvation is by faith, but faith is inevitably revealed by the works it produces. 359
- The absolute justice of God is revealed in this judgment of works. Even for those who have spurned the Lord Jesus Christ there is differentiation in degrees of wickedness and apparently variation in punishment. While works are never a ground of salvation, they are, nevertheless, considered important before God. Smith finds forty-two instances in Scripture where man is said to be judged according to his works...though men are judged according to their works, the book of life is introduced as the deciding factor as to where they will spend eternity. 360

The fact that John says the sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them (vs. 13) is simply picturesque language to state that all the unredeemed dead are raised in the "second resurrection" to be a part of the final judgment. The spirit/soul of dead unbelievers are apparently in Hades until the time of the final judgment.

• The battle is over. Begun is Eden, ended is Armageddon, with a hundred thousand fearful skirmishes in between. The dust of a legion of horses has settled. The smoke of conflict has cleared. The stench of death has dissipated. The universe for the first time since creation is silent with relief from the conflict. And John the seer, John the painter, draws the curtain on that mural of defeat of the hosts of wickedness. The lights lower and then come up again brighter than before. The spotlight bares a great white throne, the sole object in that vast scene. In fact it's the throne itself that throws out the light that brightens the scene, the throne and the presence of One who sits upon it—splendid presence, indescribable presence. That light from the throne illuminates the magnificent biblical scene. We're at the edge of the second resurrection and we learn great lessons about life and history from being there. ³⁶¹

³⁵⁹ Mounce, *op. cit.*, pg. 376.

³⁶⁰ Walvoord, op. cit., pg. 307.

³⁶¹ Hubbard, David, *Thoughts From The Edge of the Second Resurrection*, Fuller Theological Seminary Chapel Sermon, Pasadena, CA.

REVELATION 21

• The fourth and final vision of the Book of the Revelation is without doubt the most wonderful picture in the entire Bible. In Revelation 17-18, the third vision, we were introduced to Babylon, the capital city so to speak, of the Antichrist (the Beast). Now, we are privileged to look at the new Jerusalem, the capital city of Christ (the Lamb). It seems appropriate that John saw the holy city from "a great, high mountain" (Revelation 21:10). In contrast, he saw Babylon while he was "in the wilderness" (Revelation 17:3). Also, it is of interest that one of the seven angels who had the awful bowls of judgment showed him the city (Revelation 21:9). Does this suggest that redemption can only come through judgment? That justice alone brings salvation?³⁶²

REVELATION 21:1-8—

These verses deal primarily with the announcement of the consummation of God's habitation with His redeemed people. They also preview "a new heaven and a new earth," which were already proleptically announced in Revelation 20:11.

John's statement that **there was no longer any sea** (vs. 1) indicates two realities—1) the **new earth** will be radically different from the current one; we do not know to what extent this is true. Apart from the symbolic description of the new Jerusalem which is given in detail (Revelation 21:9 ff), John does not offer detailed explanation of the new earth; "I am making everything new" (vs. 5) seems to indicate some sort of renovation of the existing order; and 2) the eradication of **the sea** (from which the beast is said to ascend [Revelation 13:1]) symbolizes the eradication of evil in the new order. "We must bear in mind that in antiquity men did not have the means of coping successfully with the sea's dangers and they regarded it as an unnatural element, a place of storms and danger...in the end this seething cauldron, fraught with unlimited possibilities of evil, will disappear."³⁶³

John's next point of concentration is the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband (vs. 2). This new Jerusalem is described in detail beginning in Revelation 21:9. It is interesting to note that by calling this eschatological city Jerusalem, John is maintaining some continuity with previously known order; on the other hand, by describing it as holy and new, he is indicating that it is distinctly different from the present known order. The

³⁶² Pickerill, op. cit., Notes on Revelation 21:9-22:5.

³⁶³ Morris, op. cit., pg. 243.

obvious purpose for the descent of the city is announced by a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people" (vs. 3). This portrays the consummate union of God with His people that has been proleptically announced using marriage and marriage supper terminology (Revelation 19:6-9). The intimate bonding that will occur is described by noting that "He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God" (vs. 3). The ultimate goal of redemption will finally be recognized. "This is reality which we cannot visualize; but direct, unmarred fellowship between God and His people is the goal of all redemption." 364

John next describes some immediate benefits of this consummated union. First, all human sorrow and tragedy will be eradicated—"He will wipe every tear from their eyes" (vs. 4). Secondly, "there will be no more death" (vs. 4); the ultimate effect of the Fall is reversed. Finally, all that burdens and curses human beings will be done away with as "there will be no more...mourning or crying or pain" (vs. 4). In summation—"the old order of things has passed away" (vs. 4).

In one of the rare occasions in which John was directly addressed by **He who was seated on the throne**, Yahweh says, "I am making everything new!" (vs. 5). This is the consummation addressed in 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Romans 8:21. The Bible makes it clear that salvation includes more than the redemption of the human spirit/soul; it includes the redemption of the body and creation as well. "...these words are trustworthy and true" (vs. 5) cements the fact the promise is unquestionably dependable.

Continuing His conversation, God says—"It is done"—meaning that everything redemption signifies as summarized in vv. 3-5 has come to pass; the basis for the completion is the fact that God is "...the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End"; He alone is the final reality; He alone in all the universe has the final say.

A major part of the consummation will be the fulfillment of humankind's deepest spiritual longings—"To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life" (vs. 6). Without grudge, God is willing to meet any person who thirsts after Him and His ways. Humankind may drink of a golden cup...filled with

³⁶⁴ Ladd, *The Revelation of John*, pg. 277.

abominable things and the filth of...adulteries (Revelation 17:4), or they may drink of **the spring of the water of life**. The choice is humankind's.

This matter of God's willingness and humankind's choice is then reiterated from both a positive and negative perspective in vv. 7-8. If people remain loyal to God by faith in His Son ("those who are victorious"), God promises they "will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be My children" (vs. 7). On the other hand, they who deny God's Son, especially in the face of the beast, shall meet with eternal doom "in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death" (vs. 8). We must be very careful to interpret vs. 8 in light of its context and the totality of Scripture. Those listed in vs. 8—the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—symbolize those who do not thirst after God, who have grounded their lives in the beast system. It does not describe the truly justified person, who may slip into any one of these conducts from time to time (cf. Romans 8:1). This is why the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile head the list. "It is not without its importance that the 'cowardly' head the list...to be cowardly before the enemies of God at the last is finally to lose the things of God. John is not speaking of natural timidity and fear, but of that cowardice which in the last resort chooses self and safety before Christ."365

REVELATION 21:9-14—

From Revelation 21:9-22:5 John gives a detailed description of **the Holy City**, **Jerusalem**, which he has already seen **coming down out of heaven from God** (Revelation 21:2). The description is obviously symbolic, ³⁶⁶ but even at that there are problems.

• The description presents some difficulties, in that it does not seem to represent a situation in which all things have been made new and God's new order purged of all evil. On the contrary, the earth is seen as being inhabited by nations who walk in the light of the city, who apparently are not residents of the city itself, and by kings who bring their glory into it (vs. 24). The leaves of the tree of life are for the healing of the nations (22:2)—a strange statement with reference to a redeemed, glorified humanity. Furthermore, a verse in the

³⁶⁵ Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 246.

³⁶⁶ Sutton takes great exception to this, noting that the description of the city is to be interpreted literally. See Sutton, *op. cit.*, Chapter 20.

epilogue, looking back to the holy city, pictures dogs and sorcerers and fornicators as cowering outside the city walls, excluded from the city itself; in the new Jerusalem and the new earth, all evil will have been completely purged from the new creation. Such considerations have led some scholars to the conclusion that this is a description of the Jerusalem of the millennial kingdom with its mixed conditions in earthly affairs, not the eternal city. This solution raises more difficulties than it solves. John nowhere else mentions a millennial Jerusalem, and there is no particular difficulty in concluding that John is using earthly language and idiom to describe the Jerusalem of the eternal order.³⁶⁷

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb" (vs. 9), which turns out to be the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God (vs. 10). This vision is again the result of a spiritual ecstasy—he carried me away in the Spirit (vs. 10).

Of tantamount importance to John is the fact that the city **shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal** (vs. 11). It embodies God's full presence and personhood. As in his description of God's presence in Revelation 4, John endeavors to describe the indescribable through the use of precious stones. Ancient **jasper** is not the stone we know by that name today; it refers to any transparent, precious stone. It may even be referring to a diamond.

The city has a great, high wall (vs. 12), symbolizing the fact that it is secure and inviolable. With twelve gates...three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west (vv. 12-13) shows the city is easily accessible and open to everyone who has rightfully inherited it through the Lamb.

Twelve angels [stand] at the gates (vs. 12) to mark its dignity; on the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel...the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (vv. 12, 14). This description obviously symbolizes the fact that God's final order includes both Old and New Testament saints. It is the consummation of His reign throughout redemptive history.

³⁶⁷ Ladd, *op. cit.*, pg. 280.

REVELATION 21:15-21—

This paragraph gives the city's measurements. In Revelation 11:1, John was given a reed like a measuring rod with which to measure the temple of God and the altar, with its worshipers. Here, the angel...had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls (vs. 15). This measuring is most likely to show the city's magnificence. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide (vs. 16); its length and height are each 12,000 stadia (vs. 16). This truly transcends any known architecture of this age. It is symbolic of ideal symmetry, perfection, vastness and completeness.

Next is the measurement of **its wall...144,000 cubits** ³⁶⁹ **thick, by human measurement** (vs. 17); it is not clear if this is its height or width. It quite possibly describes the wall's height, to show that the walls are not the source of the city's security. "The walls of the City are not for defense—for there is no enemy at large any more (Isaiah 54:14)—but serve for delimitation." The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass (vs. 18). The fact that John is seemingly struggling to describe the nearly indescribable is seen in the fact that gold as we know it is opaque, not transparent. (See also vs. 21.) The essence of the message is clear, however. God's glory makes for an incredible surrounding. The foundations of the city walls are described in terms of exceedingly precious stones (vv. 19-20); the twelve gates which would also be 144,000 cubits high if vs. 17 describes the wall's height are each...made of a single pearl (vs. 21). The description intentionally staggers the imagination and transcends this Age. "The Apocalyptist struggles here by the use of symbols and marvelous imagery to represent Jerusalem's vastness, its symmetry, and its glorious perfection." "371

• The pictures of the new Jerusalem are taken partly from the way cities were in ancient times and partly from Old Testament prophecies. Many ancient cities looked like a box perched on a hill top. They did not spread out like modern cities, for their main protection was the walls. Ancient cities had no humane societies, so packs of wild dogs ran city streets. John says that in the new Jerusalem, the dogs will be outside the city (Revelation 22:15). He means, of course, malicious men. He is seeing the city in terms that people would have understood. To properly grasp the vision, one should read Genesis 2-3,

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³⁶⁸ About 1,400 miles.

³⁶⁹ About 200 feet.

³⁷⁰ Swete in Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 251.

³⁷¹ Beckwith, op. cit., pg. 289.

Ezekiel 40-48 and Isaiah 60. The vision abounds with Old Testament auotations. 372

REVELATION 21:22-27—

The final paragraph of Revelation 21 describes the city's light source—the city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp (vs. 23). This is a fulfillment of Isaiah 60:19, noting the fact that unsurpassed splendor radiates from both Yahweh and the Lamb. The fact that the glory of God gives it light presupposes God's imminent presence, a presence which John states is directly accessible without any sort of mediation—I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple (vs. 22).

As noted above, one of the problems is the presence of nations whose kings...bring their splendor into [Jerusalem] (vs. 24). The difficulty all but disappears, however, when we realize that this is John's way of describing God's universality in the new order, a universality acknowledged by world-wide homage—the glory and honor of the **nations will be brought into it** (vs. 26; cf. Isaiah 2:3, 60:3).

An adequate solution of the difficulty in these allusions to the heathen in our paragraph is found in the writer's use throughout the passage of familiar language and imagery occurring in the prophets and other Jewish writers. His picture is drawn on conventional lines. The terms and figures are those used everywhere in descriptions of the complete triumph of the messianic kingdom over all the earth in the last days. Incongruities of the kind appearing here lie for the time being entirely beyond the Apocalyptist's thought.³⁷³

The absolute safety of the city is seen in the fact that on no day will its gates ever be shut (vs. 25; cf. Isaiah 60:11). The fact that nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful (vs. 27) does not mean that such exist by this time; we are clearly in the full new order. This is simply John's use of earthly idiom to describe what the eschatological kingdom will lack; present in the city will be only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life (vs. 27).

³⁷² Pickerill, *loc. cit.*

³⁷³ Beckwith, *op. cit.*, pp. 769-770.

REVELATION 22

REVELATION 22:1-5—

This paragraph should rightfully be part of Revelation 21; it continues the description of the new Jerusalem. John next sees the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal (vs. 1), symbolizing the fact that eternal life reigns supreme in the new Age (cf. Psalm 46:4; Ezekiel 47:1-2). Death has been totally abolished. The river is seen flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb (vs. 1), symbolizing the fact that God and...the **Lamb** are the Sources of eternal life. There is but one throne with two appellations; this is another reminder that there is but one judgment throne as well.³⁷⁴

The centrality of life in the Age to Come is depicted by the fact that **the river [flows]** down the middle of the great street of the city (vs. 2). A concept familiar to Jewish apocalyptic, and one which traces its origin back to Genesis 2:9, is next noted—on each side of the river stood the tree of life (vs. 2). Again, the idea is that of life's presence. The tree of life represents the consummation of what Jesus brings humankind (cf. John 3:36), as well as defines the fact that humankind will have access, in the consummation of the kingdom, to that from which we were cut off in the Fall (cf. Genesis 3:22-24). Bearing twelve crops of fruit (vs. 2) is an allusion to Ezekiel 47:12 and symbolizes completeness; the fact that it is yielding its fruit every month (vs. 2) affirms the overwhelming presence of life and fertility.

As noted previously, the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations (vs. 2) at first seems problematic; it seemingly alludes to the presence of evil in the consummation. But we must remember John's intent—to describe the consummated in terms that can be understood now. "Rather than specifically meaning 'healing,' the Greek word used here should be understood as 'health-giving'; the word in its root meaning has the idea of serving or ministering. In other words, the leaves of the tree promote the enjoyment of life in the new Jerusalem, and are not for correcting ills which do not exist."³⁷⁵

This is confirmed by vs. 3—no longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city (vs. 3; cf. Revelation 21:3). We also learn that in

³⁷⁴ See notes on Revelation 20:11-15. ³⁷⁵ Walvoord, *op. cit.*, pg. 330.

the consummated order faith shall give way to sight for **they will see His face** (vs. 4; *cf.* Psalm 17:15). This is the fullest application of John 14:9—"Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father," as well as a reversal of what was said to Moses—"You cannot see My face, for no one may see Me and live" (Exodus 33:20).

John's final remark regarding the saints—they will reign for ever and ever (vs. 5)—is somewhat ambiguous; there is no indication over whom they will reign. It is likely a generic designation intended to convey the fact that the saints shall share in the royal office of Christ in the consummated kingdom.

REVELATION 22:6-21—

The remainder of Revelation 22 forms an epilogue; it is a series of miscellaneous observations designed to once again affirm the book's authority and the surety of Christ's return. John begins with another reminder from the angel that "these words are trustworthy and true" (vs. 6); he also reaffirms that the book is a prophecy and that God is the Author of its prophetic content—"the Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, has sent His angel to show His servants the things that must soon take place" (vs. 6; cf. Revelation 1:3).

"Look, I am coming soon! Blessed are those who keep the words of the prophecy in this scroll" (vs. 7) is Jesus speaking.

- The New Testament does not think of the difference between the presence of Christ here and now and His Second Advent so much in terms of a passage of time as the difference between the veiled and the unveiled. That is why the whole of the New Testament by an inner necessity of personal faith thinks of that day as imminent.³⁷⁶
- The prophecies of the Revelation were not written to satisfy intellectual curiosity about the future; they were written that the Church might be able to live in the will of God by keeping the words of prophecy. The Church of the first century, the Church of the last generation, as well as the Church of every age finds herself caught up in the struggle between Christ and Antichrist. John wrote this prophecy not only to inform the Church about the events of the consummation, but to admonish her to steadfast and unswerving loyalty to Jesus Christ in the face of demonic pressures and persecution. 377

³⁷⁶ Torrance in Morris, op. cit., pg. 258.

³⁷⁷ Ladd, op. cit., pg. 290.

John again identifies himself and the fact that he is the one who heard and saw these things through a mediatorial angel (vs. 8). As in Revelation 19:10, his reaction is to fall down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me (vs. 8), and once again as in Revelation 19:10 the angel corrected his zeal—"Don't do that!" The angel then told John—"Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this scroll, because the time is near" (vs. 10). To seal up a prophetic revelation means it has no immediate application (cf. Isaiah 8:16); the fact John is told **not [to] seal up the words of** the prophecy shows that Revelation has a message for Christians of all times.

"Let those who do wrong continue to do wrong; let those who are vile continue to be vile; let those who do right continue to do right; and let those who are holy continue to be holy" (vs. 11) is somewhat difficult. If read in a cursory way, it seems to abandon evildoers to doing evil; however, it is most likely a statement to the effect that if people have not heeded the warnings of Revelation by now, they most likely will not. "There is a tone of irony in the utterance; the time is short, no change in the wicked is to be looked for, let him continue in his wickedness, if he will; his penalty will soon fall."378 "He probably means that the Lord's coming will be so swift that there will be no time for change. As they are at the moment, so will the Lord find them. The words are clearly meant as an encouragement to believers. Though the evil continues to pursue their way, let them carry on. The Lord's return is sure and soon."³⁷⁹

Although the reasons for Jesus' return are many, from one perspective it is "to give to everyone according to what they have done" (vs. 12). The ground for Christ acting in this Judge role is the fact that He, like the Father, is "the Alpha and the Omega" (vs. 13; cf. Revelation 1:8; 21:6). In anticipation of Jesus returning to judge, John now contrasts the destiny of saints and unbelievers (vv. 14-15). "Blessed are those who wash their robes" (vs. 14) affirms the fact that freedom from banishing punishment is due to imputed righteousness (cf. Revelation 20:15). "Outside" (vs. 15) are the unredeemed; this does not mean they live outside the new Jerusalem. It is symbolic language, depicting the ultimate fate of the unredeemed; they will not "have the right to the tree of life" (vs. 14).

³⁷⁸ Beckwith, *op. cit.*, pg. 775. Morris, *op. cit.*, pg. 259.

Jesus speaks again, attesting to the authority of Revelation as given to John through the mediating angel—"I, Jesus, have sent My angel to give you this testimony for the **churches**" (vs. 16; cf. Revelation 1:1). Although Jesus identified Himself by His human name, He is speaking as more than just the man from Israel. He is the Messiah, "the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star" (vs. 16; cf. Isaiah 11:1; Numbers 24:17).

Vs. 17 switches abruptly to John recording a message from the Spirit and the bride. Their message is simply, "Come!" (vs. 17). Let those who are thirsty come; and let all who wish take the free gift of the water of life (vs. 17) indicates that the summons is that of the Holy Spirit (through the prophets [cf. Revelation 19:10]) and the Church to the world. It is another invitation to become part of God's plan in history.

There is next a solemn warning to those who receive the book throughout the Church age, a warning which further attests to Revelation's authority—I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If any one of you adds anything to them, God will add to you the plagues described in this scroll. And if any one of you takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from you your share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll (vv. 18-19). The warning is to those who might try to deliberately distort or pervert the message because of personal offense. The background here is Deuteronomy 4:2—**Do** not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you. "When the message of Scripture has been understood, then the believer no longer sits in judgment upon its truth but lets its truth judge and control his life and thinking. John assumes that all who have access to the tree of life and the holy city will treat his prophecy in this way."381

Jesus adds a final affirmation to the fact that all that has been written by John will be consummated—"Yes, I am coming soon" (vs. 20). John's response is that of affirmation—Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! (vs. 20). The book then closes with a typical

³⁸⁰ "This formulaic prohibition against 'adding to or deleting from' the book is an integrity formula, i.e., an idiomatic expression widely used in the ancient world to safeguard the contents and inviolability of tombs. treaties, and oracular revelations. John's use of this formula, combined in a unique and rhetorically skillful way with two conditional curses, indicates that the author viewed his composition as both complete and *inspired*" (David Aune, *op. cit.*, pp. 1237-1238). ³⁸¹ Ladd, *op. cit.*, pg. 296.

Christian salutation of the first century—the grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen (vs. 21).