

Notes on
Revelation
2003 Edition
Dr. Thomas L. Constable

Introduction

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The opening verses of the book state that "John" wrote it (1:1, 4, 9; cf. 22:8). From the first century to the present day almost all orthodox scholars have concluded that this means the Apostle John.¹ Two noteworthy exceptions were Luther and Zwingli.² Today many scholars who accept the divine inspiration of the book believe the Apostle John wrote it.

Some of the early church fathers (Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, Irenaeus, and Victorinus) wrote that the Apostle John experienced exile on the island of Patmos during Domitian's reign.³ They wrote that the government allowed John to return to Ephesus after this emperor died. Domitian died in A.D. 96. Consequently many conservative interpreters date the writing of this book near A.D. 95 or 96.

"Perhaps more than any other book in the NT, the Apocalypse enjoyed wide distribution and early recognition."⁴

Where did John get the revelation that he wrote down in this book? He said that he received it from Jesus Christ through angelic mediation (1:1). Most of the details of this revelation were undoubtedly new to John. However there are remarkable parallels between this revelation and the Lord Jesus' teaching in the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24—25; Mark 13; Luke 21). The Book of Revelation clearly builds on that foundation.⁵ The apocalyptic sections of certain books of the Old Testament—particularly Daniel, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Psalms—contain former revelation that God gave His prophets about the

¹See Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1—7: An Exegetical Commentary*, pp. 2-19, for extensive discussion of authorship. For discussion and defense of the apostolic authorship of Revelation, see John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. 11-14.

²David E. Aune, *Revelation 1—5*, p. lvi, believed that it is not possible to identify the writer-editor with any other early Christian figure named John with certainty.

³See the map located with my comments on 1:10-11. For a summary of this tradition, see Isbon T. Beckwith *The Apocalypse of John*, pp. 366-93; George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, p. 8; or Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1:lxviii-xcii.

⁴Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 36.

⁵See Alan Johnson, "Revelation," in *Hebrews-Revelation*, vol. 12 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 402; Austin Farrer, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, pp. 31-32; Henry B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, pp. cli-clii; Beckwith, pp. 139-40; and Louis A. Vos, *The Synoptic Traditions in the Apocalypse*.

end times.⁶ The revelation that Jesus gave in the Olivet Discourse and later to John on Patmos supplements that earlier revelation.

"Jesus in His [Olivet] discourse was clearly anticipating what He was to show John in much greater detail more than six decades later here on the island of Patmos."⁷

MESSAGE⁸

The subject of the Book of Revelation is Jesus Christ (1:1). It is an unveiling ("revelation") of Him. What does this book reveal about Christ? The Book of Revelation is the unveiling of the person of Jesus Christ, the power of Jesus Christ, and the program of Jesus Christ.

First, it is a revelation of the person of Jesus Christ. It unveils who He is and what He is. This book is the climax of Scriptural Christology.

Notice first what the Book reveals about who Jesus Christ is. Three emphases in the book clarify His essential being.

1. He is the same human Jesus Christ who was born on earth at His first coming. He is the same Jesus on whose chest John reclined (1:1, 2, 5). He is a "son of man," possessing a full human nature (1:13). Moreover He will always be that (22:20).
2. He is also fully divine, one with the Father (1:12-18; 3:14). He reveals God fully (19:13). He will share the throne of the universe with the Father eventually (22:1, 3).
3. He is the eternal God (1:8; 21:6; 22:13).

Notice also what the book of Revelation reveals about what Jesus Christ is. Seven titles give us a fuller appreciation of His place in history.

1. In the past He proved to be the Root of David, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the promised Messiah (3:7; 5:5; 22:16). This became clear at His baptism (Matt. 3:17).
2. In the past, also at His first advent, He proved to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (5:6, 12-13; 6:1). This became clear at His death.
3. In the past He proved to be the First-born from the dead, the victor over death and Hades (1:5-6, 2:8). This became clear at His resurrection.

⁶John also alluded often to Exodus, Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, and Zechariah. Swete, p. cxxxv, claimed that 278 of the 404 verses in Revelation contain references to the Old Testament. The United Bible Society's Greek New Testament (2nd ed., pp. 897-920) lists over 500 Old Testament passages. With all these allusions, however, there are no formal quotations from the Old Testament.

⁷Thomas, pp. 53-54.

⁸Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 2:2:210-226.

4. In the present He is the Lord of the churches (2:1; 3:1; cf. 22:20).
5. In the future He will prove to be the Judge of all mankind (2:12, 18; 3:14; 6:1; et al.). This is His primary role during the Great Tribulation.
6. In the future He will prove to be King of kings and Lord of lords (1:5; 17:14; 19:16). This is His primary role during the Millennium.
7. In the future He will prove to be the Morning Star (22:16; cf. 2:28). His second coming will signal the dawning of a new day in history. This will find its clearest revelation in the new heavens and earth. The Millennium will only be a foretaste of that day.

This book is also a revelation of the power of Jesus Christ. Individuals have various kinds of power. Jesus Christ has all kinds of power and all power of all kinds.

He has all personal power.

1. He has inherent power. We see this in His control of all other beings and forces (e.g., believers, unbelievers, Satan, the beasts, human armies, etc.). He wields the power Himself.
2. He also has acquired power. His Father has given Him this power (5:1, 6-7; cf. Matt. 28:18). He exercises all the power of the Godhead.

Second, He has all instrumental power. That is He has authority over all things as He executes His power. All things are His instruments or tools.

1. He has power over all material objects and forces. He controls the physical universe. We can see this in His using individuals, storms, earthquakes, and even the heavenly bodies to accomplish His will.
2. He also has power over all spiritual entities and authorities. He controls the angels, demons, and Satan. Every power in the universe is under His control (e.g., 13:15).

Third, He has all effectual power. That is He has power to accomplish anything. He can affect any changes He desires.

1. He has all destructive power. He can destroy anything that exists: individuals, systems (e.g., Babylonianism), objects, even the heavens and earth.
2. He also has all constructive power. He can create new human bodies (by resurrection), new systems (new religious and economic orders), and new cities (the new Jerusalem). He will even create new heavens and a new earth.

The Book of Revelation also reveals the program of Jesus Christ (1:19). It gives us much detail about God's program and how it will unfold in the future. However let me point out God's purposes that this program unveils.

Christ's immediate purpose is to defeat and destroy Satan and sin.

We see Him doing this in the church age in Revelation as He deals with believers in the seven churches (chs. 2—3). His purpose is to purify to Himself a people who will be a kingdom and priests to God (1:6).

We also see Him doing this in the Tribulation in Revelation. We see it in His judgment of those who have not believed on Him (chs. 4—18). His purpose is to pour out God's wrath on His enemies for their refusal to receive His grace (16:1).

Christ's ultimate purpose is to dwell among His people and experience intimate fellowship with them.

We see Him doing this in the Millennium to an extent never before attained in history (20:6).

We see Him doing this in the new earth perfectly and eternally (22:3-5). This has always been God's ultimate purpose (e.g., Adam, Noah, the patriarchs, Israel, the church, the Millennium). He will achieve it completely in the new earth.

The Book of Revelation then is an unveiling of Jesus Christ—His person, His power, and His program—for the rest of history. This is the message statement. We must never forget that He is the subject of this book as we seek to understand what He has revealed here.

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 - 2. Commendation 2:9
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- C. The letter to the church in Pergamum 2:12-17
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- E. The letter to the church in Sardis 3:1-6
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Exposition

I. THE PREPARATION OF THE PROPHET CH. 1

The first chapter contains a prologue to the book, which is similar to the one in John 1:1-18, the prologue to John's Gospel (cf. 1 John 1:1-4). It also relates a vision that God gave John that prepared him for what follows. This presentation has the effect of showing that Jesus Christ is the culminating figure in human history (cf. Heb. 1), and it prepares the reader for the revelation of His future acts that constitutes the bulk of this book.

A. THE PROLOGUE OF THE BOOK 1:1-8

1. The preface 1:1-3

The Apostle John wrote these opening verses to introduce to his readers the main subject dealt with in this book and his purpose for writing it.

1:1 "The revelation of Jesus Christ" is the subject of this book. "Revelation" means unveiling or disclosure and is a translation of the Greek word *apokalypsis* the transliteration of which is an alternative title for the book (i.e., the Apocalypse). Jesus Christ was the giver of this revelation (cf. Matt. 11:27; John 1:18; 5:19-23; 12:49; 17:8), and He is its main subject.⁹

"It will be vain to become occupied with 'sevens,' 'hundred-forty-four-thousands,' 'six-sixty-sixes,' the restoration of the Roman Empire, the person of the antichrist, the two wild beasts, the 'millennium,' or even the new Jerusalem; unless, along with God the Father, who has subjected all things unto *Him*, *Christ* is ever before our eyes!"¹⁰

God wanted the bond-servants of Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 2:18; 22:6) to have this revelation of things that will happen soon.

"If we are having difficulty with this blessed closing book of God's holy Word, let us surrender ourselves to Jesus Christ as His servants. *The book was written to bondservants.*"¹¹

The idea behind the Greek words translated "shortly" (*en tachei*) is probably that the events to be revealed will appear soon rather than speedily.

⁹The genitive in the Greek text is both objective and subjective. "Communicated" (Gr. *esemanen*) simply means "indicated" (cf. John 12:33; Acts 11:28); it does not mean "signified" in the sense that everything that follows is symbolic, though much of what Jesus communicated is symbolic.

¹⁰William R. Newell, *The Book of the Revelation*, p. 31.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 4.

". . . the view that sees *en tachei* meaning 'soon' and thereby focuses on the imminence of the predicted events is impressive. A major thrust of Revelation is its emphasis upon the shortness of time before the fulfillment. In the midst of persecution God's people do not have long to wait for relief to come. To say that the relief will come 'suddenly' offers no encouragement, but to say that it will come 'soon' does. . . .

"The presence of *en tachei* in 1:1 shows that for the first time the events predicted by Daniel and foreseen by Christ stood in readiness to be fulfilled. Therefore, John could speak of them as imminent, but earlier prophets could not."¹²

There are many similarities between how John wrote Revelation and how Daniel wrote the book that bears his name. Both prophecies deal with God's sovereign rule over the world.

Jesus Christ communicated this revelation to an angel (Gabriel? cf. Dan. 8:16; 9:21-22; Luke 1:26-31) who passed it on to the Apostle John.¹³ John used the traditional title of bond-servant (slave) to describe his relationship to Jesus Christ as did all the other apostles (cf. Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:1; James 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; Jude 1).

1:2 Forty-four times in this book John wrote "I saw" (1:12-13; 4:1, 4; 5:1, 2, 6, 11; 6:1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 12; 7:1, 2, 9; 8:2, 13; 9:1, 17; 10:1; 13:1, 3, 11; 14:1, 6, 14; 15:1, 2, 5; 16:13; 17:3; 18:1; 19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 11, 12; 21:1, 2, 8). He saw many things and passed this revelation ("all that he saw") on to the church. By the time the original recipients of this book had read it, the visions that he had seen, which the book describes, were in the past. John regarded the book as an inspired word from God, specifically from Jesus Christ (cf. v. 1).

"No other book in the Bible is so strongly supported as to its divine inspiration."¹⁴

The "word of God" may refer to God the Father's word to Jesus Christ. "The testimony of Jesus" probably refers to the Lord Jesus' faithful communication of God's word to John who passed it on to his readers.

¹²Thomas, pp. 55, 56. Cf. 22:6; Deut. 9:3; Ezek. 29:5 (LXX); Luke 18:8; Rom. 16:20.

¹³This is the first of some 67 references to angels in Revelation.

¹⁴J. B. Smith, *A Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 9.

Verses 1 and 2 summarize the contents of the Book of Revelation and present them as testimony that Jesus Christ bore.

- 1:3 Those who read, hear, and obey this prophecy will receive a special blessing from God. John put himself on a par with the Old Testament prophets (cf. 10:8-11) and distinguished this book from Jewish apocalyptic literature.¹⁵ This is the first of seven blessings that John mentioned in Revelation (14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14; cf. Luke 11:28).¹⁶ The Greek word translated "time" (*kairos*) describes a period of time rather than a point in time. The time when God will fulfill these prophecies was "near" when John wrote this book. "Near" is the translation of the Greek word *eggus* meaning at hand. It means relatively near in God's timetable in which a thousand years are as a day (2 Pet. 3:8).

"A 'revelation' of the end of history is given not for the satisfaction of curiosity, but to inspire living in accordance with the reality unveiled."¹⁷

2. The address and doxology 1:4-6

"As is true of NT epistles in general, the address of Revelation contains three elements: the writer, the addressees, and the greeting."¹⁸

- 1:4 John sent this letter to the seven churches mentioned in chapters 2 and 3, which were in the Roman province of Asia.¹⁹ The province of Asia lay in Asia Minor (modern western Turkey).

Since this book deals mainly with future events, John described the divine Author as God (the Father) who is, was, and is to come. This title occurs nowhere else in the Bible except in Revelation (4:8; cf. 11:17; 16:5; Exod. 3:14-15). This description stresses the continuity of God's dealings with humankind.

The phrase "seven Spirits" probably refers to seven principle angelic messengers (cf. v. 20; 8:2, 6; 15:1; 1 Kings 22:19-21; Heb. 1:14).²⁰

¹⁵See Hall W. Harris, "A Theology of John's Writings," in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 174; David Hill, "Prophecy and Prophets in the Revelation of St. John," *New Testament Studies* 18 (1971-72):401-18.

¹⁶John used the number seven, which commonly signified completeness, 54 times.

¹⁷G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 52.

¹⁸Thomas, p. 63. This author, pp. 28 and 59, argued convincingly that the *genre* of Revelation is prophecy written in epistolary style, though most scholars have classed it as apocalyptic. See Mounce, pp. 18-25, for a helpful discussion of apocalyptic. Beasley-Murray, pp. 12-29, argued for a combination of apocalyptic, prophecy, and epistle.

¹⁹The Apostle Paul also wrote letters to churches in seven places: Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and Thessalonica.

Another view is that the phrase refers to the Holy Spirit (cf. Isa. 11:2-3).²¹ If so, this title fills out a reference to the Trinity in this sentence (cf. 3:1, 4:5; and 5:6).

1:5 John described Jesus Christ as the "faithful witness (cf. 3:14; Ps. 89:37)."²²

"Jesus Christ is of the seed of David and will sit on the Davidic throne that will endure forever as the sun (Ps. 89:16)."²³

"Faithful witness" is Jesus Christ's present ministry of revealing what follows. John also called Him the "first-born from the dead" (cf. Ps. 89:27; Acts 2:29-32; 4:2; 26:23; Rom. 1:4; 1 Cor. 15:23). This title looks at the culmination of His past ministry when God raised Him to new life at His resurrection. He also referred to Him as the "ruler of the kings of the earth" (Ps. 89:27) That is His future ministry following His second coming (Matt. 2:6). The New Testament speaks much of believers entering into their rights as first-born sons of God and ruling with Jesus Christ in His millennial kingdom. This will be the privilege of faithful, obedient Christians (cf. 2 Tim. 2:12).²⁴

". . . the origination of all three expressions from Psalm 89 reflects a major authorial intent to direct attention to the fulfillment of the promises made to David regarding an eternal kingdom in 2 Samuel 7."²⁵

John ascribed eternal glory and dominion to Jesus Christ who is the subject and object of this revelation. He described Him as the One who always loves us and who loosed us from the bondage of our sins by His death.²⁶

1:6 Jesus Christ also has made us a kingdom (corporately) and priests (individually; cf. 5:10; 20:6; Exod. 19:6; Isa. 61:6; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9) to His

²⁰Smith, pp. 314-19; Mounce, p. 70; Aune, p. 34; et al. The apocraphal book of 1 Enoch (20:2-8) named seven angels who supposedly stand before God: Uriel, Raphael, Raguel, Michael, Saraqael, Gabriel, and Remiel.

²¹Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, p. 48; Newell, pp. 10-11; Johnson, pp. 420-21; Thomas, pp. 67, 68; Harris, p. 202; Beasley-Murray, p. 56; Ladd, p. 24.

²²This is the third and last time in the book that the double name "Jesus Christ" appears. Elsewhere we read "Jesus," which stresses His humanity (now glorified), or "Christ," which emphasizes His messianic identity.

²³Thomas, p. 69.

²⁴In these notes I am using the term "Christian" in its strict technical sense to refer only to believers who come to faith between Pentecost and the Rapture. There will be believers who are saved during the Tribulation, but these will be Tribulation saints, not "Christians."

²⁵Thomas, p. 70.

²⁶Some ancient Greek manuscripts have, He washed us from the stain of our sins.

God and Father, another evidence of His present love for us.²⁷ We are such now, but in the future faithful Christians, His bond-servants, will also reign with Jesus Christ on the earth (cf. 5:10).

"Amen" means "So be it!" Here it signifies the writer's assent to the truthfulness of these affirmations about Jesus Christ (cf. 1:7; 5:14; 7:12 [twice]; 19:4; 22:20)

It is interesting that John, the apostle of love, would emphasize God's love in this first doxology as the dominating divine emotion (cf. Deut. 4:37).

3. The theme 1:7-8

These verses contain the first prophetic oracle of the book. The only other one in which God speaks is in 21:5-8.

1:7 "Behold" (Gr. *idou*) indicates special divine intervention. This verse summarizes the main features of the revelation to follow. It is in this sense the key verse in the book.

"The theme of the book is the ultimate victory of Jesus Christ over all enemies and the establishment of His earthly kingdom."²⁸

Jesus Christ will return physically to earth as He ascended into heaven (1:4, 8; 2:5, 16; 3:11; 4:8; 16:15; 22:7, 12, 20 [twice]); Acts 1:9-11). "Every eye" of those alive at His second coming will see Him (Matt. 24:30; cf. Num. 11:25; Ps. 104:3; Isa. 19:1; Dan. 7:13). "Those who pierced Him" evidently refers to Jews particularly (Zech. 12:10, 12, 14; cf. John 19:37).²⁹ Another possibility is that these people stand for Jesus' enemies.³⁰ Representatives from all tribes on earth then will mourn (wail) because then the earth will be in rebellion against Him (cf. Matt. 24:30). These tribes represent all human beings, not just Jews.³¹

This great text announces the climactic event in Revelation, namely, the return of Jesus Christ to the earth at His second coming (19:11-16). All that intervenes between this verse and 19:11-16 leads up to that event. This verse does not refer to the Rapture as is clear from what John said will happen when it takes place. The Second Coming is a public gradual

²⁷John never spoke of God as the Father of believers in Revelation, only as the Father of Jesus (cf. 2:27; 3:4, 21; 14:1).

²⁸Harris, p. 175. See also Ladd, p. 14; Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 2:568.

²⁹See Kenneth G. C. Newport, "Semitic Influence in Revelation: Some Further Evidence," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 25:3 (Autumn 1987):249-56.

³⁰E.g., Ladd, p. 28.

³¹See Smith, p. 44; Thomas, pp. 78-79.

manifestation, but the Rapture will be a secret instantaneous coming (1 Cor. 15:52).

"The promise combines Daniel 7:13 with Zechariah 12:10 . . . Daniel 7 provides a key focus for John throughout the whole book (there are no fewer than thirty-one allusions to it)."³²

"Even so, amen," provides firm assurance that the coming of Christ will happen as prophesied in this verse.

1:8 God confirmed the preceding forecast with a solemn affirmation of His eternity and omnipotence. *Alpha* and *omega* are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet and signify here God's comprehensive control over all things including time.³³ John strengthened this point further with present, past, and future references (cf. 4:8; 11:17; Heb. 13:8). He is the originator and terminator of all things. God is not only Lord of the future. He is also powerful enough to bring what John just predicted to pass. He is the "Almighty."

"A weighing of evidence, especially in light of the OT 'flavor' of the expression and a recollection that the Father in the OT refers to Himself as 'I am' (i.e., the Tetragrammaton, Ex. 3:14; cf. Isa. 48:12), tips the balance ever so slightly to the side of concluding that God the Father speaks in v. 8. . . .

"God's declaration in v. 8 thus ends with a note of authority. The omnipotent one will surely implement what His prophet has predicted by way of future judgment."³⁴

"Almighty is a key name for God in Revelation (Rev. 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22)."³⁵

This whole introduction points to the main event of the following revelation, the return of Jesus Christ at His second coming (19:11-16). It also presents the triune God as Lord of time (past, present, and future), faithful to His promises, and powerful enough to bring these events to pass. In Genesis, Moses also emphasized God's power and faithfulness more than any other of His attributes. The last Bible book stresses these qualities of God as does the first Bible book.

³²Johnson, p. 422.

³³This may be a merism, a figure of speech in which two extremes represent the whole.

³⁴Thomas, pp. 80, 81. Cf. Harris, p. 182.

³⁵Wiersbe, 2:569.

B. THE COMMISSION OF THE PROPHET 1:9-20

John next explained a vision of the glorified Christ that God had given him (cf. Isa. 6; Ezek. 1). First, he related the circumstances of his first commission to write (vv. 9-11). Second, he provided a detailed description of the source of that commission (vv. 12-16). Third, he explained more about his commission and the one who gave it (vv. 17-20).

1. The first commission to write 1:9-11

1:9 John now addressed the seven churches to which he sent this epistolary prophecy directly. He described himself to his readers as their brother in Christ and a partaker with them in three things. These were, first, the religious persecution they were presently experiencing as a result of their faith in Jesus Christ.³⁶ Second, they shared in the future kingdom of Jesus Christ (cf. ch. 20; Luke 12:32; 22:29; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:5; James 2:5). Third, they were exercising perseverance as they remained steadfast in the midst of affliction.

"This illustrates the broad spectrum of other areas, besides afflictions, that are shared by believers, but fellowship in suffering is one of the most frequent, if not the most frequent, among the stock of primitive Christian ideas. This is an indispensable element of Christian discipleship and following the example of Jesus (1 Thess. 1:6; 1 Pet. 2:21; 4:13; cf. also 2 Cor. 1:7; Phil. 3:10; 1 Pet. 5:1)."³⁷

John was on Patmos as a result of his witness, not primarily to receive this revelation from God (cf. 6:9).³⁸ According to the writings of several early church fathers (i.e., Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, and Victorinus), the Romans sent John as a prisoner from Ephesus, where he pastored, to the island of Patmos in A.D. 95.³⁹ There he worked in the mines (quarries). Patmos stood in the Aegean Sea just southwest of Ephesus. It was 10 miles long and six miles wide at its widest (northern) end, and it served as a penal colony for political prisoners of Rome. John remained there until shortly after the Emperor Domitian died in A.D. 96. Domitian's successor, Nerva, allowed John to return to Ephesus.⁴⁰

³⁶This is a reference to the general tribulations that all Christians experience (cf. Matt. 20:22-23; John 16:33; Acts 12:2; 14:22; Rom. 8:17; 2 Tim. 2:12; 3:12), not to the Great Tribulation yet future (cf. 2:22; 7:14).

³⁷Thomas, p. 85.

³⁸Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 4:553.

³⁹See Beckwith, pp. 434-35; Smith, p. 49; Walvoord, p. 41; et al.

⁴⁰Johnson, p. 424.

Roman Emperors in New Testament Times⁴¹		
EMPEROR	IMPORTANT EVENTS	BIBLE BOOKS WRITTEN
Augustus (31 B.C.-A.D. 15)	Ordered the census that took Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem (Luke 2:1).	
Tiberius (A.D. 15-35)	Jesus' earthly ministry conducted during his reign (Luke 3:1; 20:22, 25; 23:2; John 19:12, 15).	
Gaius (A.D. 35-41)	Appointed Herod Agrippa I king over Palestine (Acts 12:1).	
Claudius (A.D. 41-54)	Extensive famines (Acts 11:28). Expelled the Jews, including Priscilla and Aquilla, from Rome (Acts 18:2).	James (A.D. 45-48) Galatians (A.D. 49) Matthew (ca. A.D. 50) 1 & 2 Thess. (A.D. 51)

⁴¹Source of dates for the emperors is J. B. Bury, et al., eds. *Cambridge Ancient History*, vols. 10 & 11.

Roman Emperors in New Testament Times⁴¹		
EMPEROR	IMPORTANT EVENTS	BIBLE BOOKS WRITTEN
Nero (A.D. 54-68)	<p>Paul appealed for trial before him (Acts 25:11).</p> <p>Favored Christianity early in his reign, but when Rome burned in A.D. 64 he blamed the Christians and thereafter persecuted them.</p> <p>Paul and Peter traditionally martyred by him.</p>	<p>1 & 2 Cor. (ca. A.D. 56) Romans (A.D. 57) Luke (A.D. 57-59) Prison Epistles (A.D. 60-62) Acts (A.D. 60-62) 1 Tim. & Titus (A.D. 62-66) Mark (A.D. 63-70) 1 Peter (A.D. 64) 2 Timothy (A.D. 67) 2 Peter (A.D. 67-68) Jude (A.D. 67-80)</p>
Galba (A.D. 68-69)		Hebrews (A.D. 68-69)
Otho (A.D. 69)		
Vitellius (A.D. 69)		
Vespasian (A.D. 69-79)	<p>Crushed the Jewish revolt against Rome (A.D. 66-70).</p> <p>His son, Titus, destroyed Jerusalem (A.D. 70).</p>	
Titus (A.D. 75-81)		
Domitian (A.D. 81-96)		<p>John (A.D. 85-95) Johannine Epistles (A.D. 90-95) Revelation (A.D. 95-96)</p>

Roman Emperors in New Testament Times⁴¹		
EMPEROR	IMPORTANT EVENTS	BIBLE BOOKS WRITTEN
Nerva (A.D. 96-98)		

1:10 The Holy Spirit appears to have caught John up and projected him in his spirit to a future time in a vision (cf. 4:2; 17:3; 21:10; Ezek. 3:12, 14; 8:3; 11:1, 24; 43:5).⁴²

The "Lord's day" probably refers to Sunday,⁴³ but it could refer to the future day of the Lord spoken of frequently elsewhere in Scripture.⁴⁴

"Referring *kyriake hemera* to Sunday agrees with the terminology of a number of Christian writings from the same general area of Asia Minor a short time after the writing of the Apocalypse there. 'The Lord's day' came to be the customary way of referring to Sunday by the end of the second century because it was the day of the week on which the Lord was raised from the dead . . ."⁴⁵

The New Testament writers never called Sunday the Lord's day elsewhere in Scripture.

A loud trumpet-like voice instructed John to write down what he saw and send it to seven churches in Asia Minor. The trumpet reference probably implies that submission to its command was necessary. The voice belonged to Jesus Christ (vv. 12, 17-18).

1:11 This is the first of twelve times that John wrote that he received instruction to write what he saw (cf. v. 19; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14; 14:13; 19:9; 21:5). The "book" in view was a roll of papyrus made from a plant that grew in Egypt. Normally papyrus scrolls were about 15 feet long.⁴⁶

⁴²See F. J. A. Hort, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 15.

⁴³Morris, p. 51; Newell, p. 24; Johnson, pp. 424-25; Mounce, p. 76; Beasley-Murray, p. 65; Aune, p. 84; Ladd, p. 31; Roger T. Beckwith and Wilfred Stott, *This is The Day: The Biblical Doctrine of the Christian Sabbath in its Jewish and Early Christian Setting*.

⁴⁴E. W. Bullinger, *The Apocalypse or "The Day of the Lord,"* p. 152; Walvoord, p. 42; Smith, p. 324.

⁴⁵Thomas, p. 91.

⁴⁶Frederic G. Kenyon, *Handbook to Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, p. 30.

The cities where these churches met formed a wedge on the map pointing northwest. A messenger carrying John's revelation would have traveled north from Ephesus to Smyrna and on to Pergamum. He would then have turned southeast to reach Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Note that all the Book of Revelation was to go to these churches, not just the special letter to each one contained in chapters 2 and 3.



Why did God select these churches in these particular towns? Obviously He did not do so because of their superior spirituality. Their popularity was not the criterion either since we read about only Ephesus and Laodicea elsewhere in Scripture. Probably they were representative congregations from which this book could circulate easily.⁴⁷

2. The source of the commission 1:12-16

John turned to see the person who had given him his commission. These verses describe what he saw.

1:12 When John turned to see the person who spoke to him he saw a majestic figure clothed in a long robe standing among seven lampstands (cf. Ezek. 25:31-40; Zech. 4:2; Matt. 18:20). This person would have been a priest in

⁴⁷Thomas, pp. 93-94.

Israel ministering in the tabernacle or temple. The seven lampstands represent seven churches (v. 20).⁴⁸

1:13 The man looked like "a son of man." This expression refers to the divine Messiah in Daniel 7:13-14 (cf. Acts 7:56). "Son of Man" was Jesus' favorite title for Himself according to the writers of the Gospels (cf. Mark 13:26). The person John saw looked like a human man. His clothing was that of a priest: a long robe with a golden sash around it.⁴⁹ Jesus Christ's present office is that of our high priest (Heb. 4:14). However this long robe (Gr. *poderes*) was also a sign of rank or dignity in those who wore them (cf. Ezek. 9:2; Dan. 10:5).⁵⁰

"In Rev. 1:13, Christ is seen dressed in the type robe worn by both a priest and a judge; but the position of the girdle about the breasts rather than the waist indicates that Christ, in this passage, is exercising a judicial rather than a priestly role. A priest would be girded about the waist, signifying *service*; but the girdle placed about the shoulders or breasts indicates a *magisterial* function (cf. John 13:2-5; Rev. 15:6)."⁵¹

"The titles of Jesus Christ found in the introductions to six of the seven messages in chapters 2 and 3 are drawn largely from this vision of 1:12-20 and its descriptive phrases. Only the message to Laodicea (3:14-22) is devoid of one of these. One of the titles is used in two messages (cf. 2:1 and 3:1) . . . It is apparent that the appearance of Christ in this vision is designed to emphasize the aspects of His nature that are most relevant to the needs and circumstances of the seven churches who are the primary recipients of this book."⁵²

1:14 His head, even His hair, was very white, as Daniel described the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:9 (i.e., God the Father).⁵³ White hair often represents wisdom and the dignity of age in Scripture.⁵⁴ John referred the images of

⁴⁸See the appendix, "Symbols Used in the Book of Revelation That the Book Itself Interprets," at the end of these notes.

⁴⁹Cf. Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 3:7:2.

⁵⁰Swete, pp. 15-16; R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 1:26-27.

⁵¹Arlen L. Chitwood, *Judgment Seat of Christ*, p. 15.

⁵²Thomas, p. 97.

⁵³John sometimes first stated a general term and then followed it up with a more specific one as here (head and hair). See Beckwith, pp. 241-42, 438.

⁵⁴Thomas E. McComiskey, "Alteration of OT Imagery in the Book of Revelation: Its Hermeneutical and Theological Significance," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36:3 (September 1993):310, pointed out that ". . . Revelation borrows components of complex OT figures, not the figures themselves." Thus we should not import everything that Old Testament figures teach in their contexts into Revelation.

God the Father in the Old Testament to Jesus Christ thus granting to Jesus the attributes and titles previously reserved for the Father (cf. v. 18; 2:8; 5:12; 22:13).⁵⁵ This is one way of stressing the equality of Jesus with the Father, here specifically His eternal pre-existence.

His eyes were similar to blazing fire, evidently an allusion to His piercing judgment and omniscient understanding (cf. 2:18, 19:12; Dan. 10:6; Mark 3:5, 34; 10:21, 23; 11:11; Luke 22:61).

1:15 His feet looked as though they were bronze glowing in the reflection of a fire. This is probably an allusion to His purity as He moves among the churches (cf. Luke 1:79; Acts 5:9; Rom. 3:15; 10:15; Heb. 12:13)⁵⁶ or perhaps as proved during His earthly walk that made Him a sympathetic high priest (Heb. 4:15; cf. 2:18).

His voice sounded like a rushing river such as the Niagara at its Falls, namely, authoritative, powerful, and irresistible (cf. 14:2; 19:6; Ps. 93:4; Isa. 17:13; Ezek. 43:2).

"Perhaps two ideas are suggested here: (1) Christ gathers together all the 'streams of revelation' and is the Father's 'last Word' to man (Heb. 1:1-3); (2) He speaks with power and authority and must be heard."⁵⁷

John would have hardly ever been away from the sound of waves beating on the shore while he lived on Patmos.

1:16 In His right hand, the symbol of official honor and sovereign control, He held seven stars protectively (cf. 9:1; 12:3; Job 38:7; John 10:28), the angels or messengers of the seven churches (v. 20; cf. 2:1; 3:1).

A sharp double-edged sword (Gr. *hromphaia*), the type the Romans used to kill with (2:12, 16; 6:8; 19:15, 21), proceeded from His mouth. His word will judge His enemies (Isa. 11:4; Eph. 6:17; 2 Thess. 2:8; Heb. 4:12; Rev. 19:13-15). This sword was tongue-shaped.⁵⁸

His face shone like the unclouded sun, a picture of pure holiness and righteousness (Judg. 5:31; Matt. 13:43). John saw Jesus at the Transfiguration with such a shining face (Matt. 17:2).

In Daniel 7:9, for example, the person with the white hair is God, but the white hair symbolizes wisdom. It may be improper to conclude that God meant John to understand that the person with the white hair in Revelation 1:14 is God. He definitely meant him to understand that the person with the white hair is wise.

⁵⁵Swete, p. 16.

⁵⁶Thomas, pp. 101-2.

⁵⁷Wiersbe, 2:569.

⁵⁸For a picture of one, see *Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. James Hastings, s.v. "Sword," by W. Emery Barnes, 4:634.

". . . Christ was presenting Himself to John in a character that would prepare the apostle for various aspects of the vision to follow."⁵⁹

"This first vision of John, then, included an indication of Jesus' Messianic office with its associated functions: judgment of the unrighteous and comfort of the suffering righteous, His high rank that fits Him as an agent of imposing divine wrath, His activity in imposing that wrath, His preexistence along with God the Father, His penetrating intelligence that enables Him to perform righteous judgment, His movement among the churches to enforce standards of moral purity, His identification with the Father in the power of His utterance, His authority over the seven messengers and the churches they represent, His power to overcome His enemies and pronounce judgment upon them, and His return to earth to implement judgment upon mankind."⁶⁰

It is primarily as Judge that Jesus Christ appears in Revelation (cf. Matt. 3:11). He judges the churches (chs. 2—3), the whole earth (chs. 4—16), Babylonianism (chs. 17—18), world rulers at Armageddon (19:19-21), and Satan (20:1-3, 10). He also judges the earth during the Millennium (20:4-6), the rebellious earth at the end of the Millennium (20:7-9), and all the unsaved dead (20:11-15). The first 20 chapters of the book deal with judgment and the last two with the new creation.

3. The amplification of the commission 1:17-20

John's response to this revelation was similar to Daniel's response to the vision God gave him (cf. Dan. 10:7-9). Jesus then proceeded to give John more information about what He wanted him to do.

1:17 This revelation of Jesus Christ in His unveiled glory took all the strength out of John. He could not stand in the presence of such an One. Paul had a similar experience on the Damascus road (Acts 9:4; cf. Job 42:5-6; Isa. 6:5; Ezek. 1:28; Dan. 8:17). However the glorified Christ laid His comforting, powerful hand on John and encouraged him to stop fearing (cf. Jesus' action following the Transfiguration, Matt. 17:7). He introduced Himself as the self-existent, eternal One. "I am" recalls Jesus' claims in the Gospels (cf. Matt. 14:27; Mark 6:50; John 6:20; 8:58) and connects Him with Yahweh (Exod. 3:14; Isa. 48:12). The title "the first and the last" is essentially the same as "the Alpha and the Omega" (v. 8) and "the beginning and the end" (22:13). All three titles stress the absolute

⁵⁹Robert L. Thomas, "The Glorified Christ on Patmos," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 122:487 (July-September 1965):246.

⁶⁰Idem, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 105.

sovereignty of God. The consoling words, "Do not be afraid," came from a sovereign being.⁶¹

1:18 Jesus also presented Himself as the resurrected One and the One with authority over the state of death and the place of the dead (cf. Ps. 9:13; 107:13; Isa. 38:10; Matt. 16:18; John 5:28). He may have personified Death and Hades here (cf. 6:8). John saw his beloved teacher of Galilee, on whose chest he had laid his head, in an entirely different light than he had seen Him before, except in His transfiguration (Matt. 17:2; Mark 9:2; cf. Rev. 4:10; 10:6).

1:19 Jesus Christ repeated His instruction to John to write down the things God was revealing to him (v. 11). The repetition of 'write' from verse 11 indicates that the 'therefore' is resuming the earlier command where it left off.⁶² Now Jesus gave John more specific instructions.

This verse provides an inspired outline of the Book of Revelation. Some of what John was to record he had already seen, namely, the Man standing among the seven golden lampstands with the seven stars in His hand (vv. 12-16). Some had to do with present conditions in the churches as exemplified by the seven churches (chs. 2—3). Some had to do with revelations about the times after conditions represented by the seven churches ended (chs. 4—22).⁶³

1:20 Jesus Christ then interpreted the meaning of some of the symbolic things John had seen. They were mysteries, revelations previously unclear until the Lord interpreted them for John. The seven stars represented the messengers of the seven churches, perhaps their angelic guardians.⁶⁴ Some interpreters have taken these angels as expressions of the prevailing spirit that characterized each church.⁶⁵ Others view them as the pastors of these churches, but the plurality of leadership that was common in the early churches militates against singling out one leader among many. Probably these churches' human representatives are in view.⁶⁶ These would have been men such as Epaphroditus and Epaphras, representatives of the churches in Philippi and Colosse, who went to Rome to visit Paul. These representatives may have come to Patmos to visit John and carried Revelation back with them to their respective congregations. The Greek word *angeloi* ("angels") frequently refers to human messengers (e.g., Matt. 11:10; Luke 7:24; 9:52; 2 Cor. 8:23; James 2:25).

⁶¹Mounce, pp. 80-81.

⁶²Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 113.

⁶³See idem, "John's Apocalyptic Outline," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123:492 (October-December 1966):334-41.

⁶⁴Swete, p. 22; Smith, pp. 57-58; Ladd, p. 35.

⁶⁵E.g. Morris, p. 57; Mounce, p. 82.

⁶⁶Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, pp. 116-19. See my comments on 2:1.

The lampstands figuratively supported the corporate witness of the Christians in each church as they lived in a dark world (cf. 1 Tim. 3:15).

God interpreted many of the symbols He used in Revelation elsewhere in Scripture. Correct interpretation of this book, therefore, depends on a knowledge of the rest of God's previously given revelation. This is also true of every other book of the Bible.

II THE LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES CHS. 2—3

Before analyzing each of the seven letters that follows we should note some of their features as a group. They are similar in that they are all brief, and each contains a unique description of the Lord Jesus drawn from 1:12-20 that is appropriate to that church. Moreover each contains a word of commendation (except the letter to Laodicea) and each carries some rebuke for the congregation (except those to Smyrna and Philadelphia). Furthermore each exhorts its readers to specific action, and each holds out a promise as an incentive for faithful obedience.

"These promises are often the most metaphorical and symbolic portions of the letters and thus in some cases present interpretative difficulties. Each is eschatological and is correlated with the last two chapters of the book (21—22). . . . Furthermore, the promises are echoes of Genesis 2—3: what was lost originally by Adam in Eden is more than regained in Christ."⁶⁷

"Churches 1 and 7 are in grave danger; churches 2 and 6 are in excellent shape, churches 3, 4, and 5 are middling, neither very good nor very bad."⁶⁸

These were letters to historical churches in the first century similar to so many of Paul's epistles, for example. A notable difference between Paul's letters and these, however, is that in his epistles normally doctrine precedes practical exhortation, but in Revelation practical exhortation precedes teaching about future events.

"The letters are not structured in strict epistolary form; they are special messages addressed to the seven churches. The book as a whole is in the form of a letter."⁶⁹

The messages of these seven letters are applicable to individual local churches and to the Christians in them today. Furthermore there is a remarkable parallel between conditions in these seven local churches and conditions in the universal church as history has unfolded from the first century to the twentieth. Their order has proven prophetic though there is no statement in the text that God intended them to be prophetic.⁷⁰ Nevertheless

⁶⁷Johnson, p. 432.

⁶⁸Morris, p. 58.

⁶⁹Ladd, p. 36.

⁷⁰Discussion of the three major views of the interpretation of chapters 2—3 will follow the exposition of these chapters.

the situations these churches faced represent characteristic situations the church has faced at any given time in various geographical locations. Each letter is applicable to the church today to the extent that local churches find themselves in similar circumstances.

"The pointed message of Christ to each of these churches is the capstone to New Testament Epistles dealing with the practical life of those committed to the Christian faith."⁷¹

". . . they are more like prophetic oracles than formal epistles. The likeness extends to form and content {cf. Amos 1—2}."⁷²

A. THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS 2:1-7

Jesus Christ told John to write the letter to the church in Ephesus to commend the Ephesian Christians for their labors and perseverance in God's truth. He also wanted to exhort them to rekindle their former love for the Savior.

1. Destination and description of Christ 2:1

Ephesus was a leading seaport and the capital of the Roman province of Asia Minor. Paul had evangelized it and used it as a base of operations for at least three years (Acts 18:19-21; 19; 1 Cor. 16:8). Timothy had labored there (1 Tim. 1:3) as had the Apostle John.⁷³ It was the largest city in Asia Minor and was "the Vanity Fair of the Ancient World."⁷⁴ Ephesus was definitely the first recipient of four New Testament books (Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Revelation) and possibly four more (John's Gospel and his three epistles). Paul also wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus. It was a very important city in the early history of the church.

The "angel" who was the primary recipient of this letter was probably the representative of the Ephesian church who carried this letter, along with the rest of Revelation, to the church at Ephesus.⁷⁵ He would have made the letter known to the congregation when he read it publicly. It seems unlikely that God would have sent the letter to a spirit being. The word translated "angel" usually refers to a heavenly being in the New Testament, but it describes human messengers as well (cf. Matt. 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:24, 27; 9:52). Another view is that the reference is to the prevailing spirit of the church personified.⁷⁶ However, "angel" is a very unusual term to describe such a spirit.

John described Jesus Christ figuratively as the One in authority over the churches' leaders and One who knew their situations. He was watching over them (cf. 1:13, 16).

⁷¹John F. Walvoord, "Revelation," *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 927.

⁷²Beasley-Murray, p. 72.

⁷³See my comments on 1:9.

⁷⁴William Barclay, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, p. 12. Barclay wrote much helpful background material on the seven cities mentioned in chapters 2 and 3 in this book.

⁷⁵Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 128. By the end of the first century there were probably many house-churches that composed the body of Christ in Ephesus (i.e., "the church in Ephesus").

⁷⁶Mounce, p. 85.

2. Commendation 2:2-3 (cf. v. 6)

This church had remained faithful to Jesus Christ for over 40 years. He approved of the good works of these believers—their toil in His service, patient endurance of circumstances (Gr. *hypomone*) under affliction, and discipline of evil men and false teachers. The false teachers undoubtedly claimed to be functional apostles (cf. 2 Cor. 11:13) rather than official apostles (Acts 1:15-26). Particularly commendable was the perseverance of this church (v. 3).⁷⁷

"As to whether the authoritative function of apostles continued after the first century, the apostolic fathers are instructive. In no case do the many references to apostles in the writings of Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Barnabas, and the Shepherd of Hermas relate to any recognized apostles other than those associated with the NT. The Fathers apparently understood the special apostolic function to have ceased with the end of the apostolic era."⁷⁸

3. Rebuke 2:4

The Ephesians, however, were serving Jesus Christ and maintaining orthodoxy as a tradition rather than out of fervent love for their Savior (cf. Eph. 1:15-16).⁷⁹ Obviously genuine believers are in view.⁸⁰ They did what was correct but for the wrong reason. Service and orthodoxy are important, but Jesus Christ wants our love too.

"It is only as we love Christ fervently that we can serve Him faithfully."⁸¹

4. Exhortation 2:5-6

The corrective for a cold heart that the Lord prescribed was a three-step process. They needed to remember how they used to feel about Him, to repent (change their attitude), and return to the love that formerly motivated them. The "deeds" they used to do probably refer to the activities that fanned the flame of their love (e.g., the Lord's Supper perhaps) as well as their service for Him (v. 2). To rekindle first love there needs to be a return to first works because there is an intimate relationship between love and good works (1 John 5:2).

⁷⁷The Greek word *oida*, translated "know" (v. 2), reflects full and exact knowledge from absolute clearness of vision and is always the word used to describe Christ's knowledge in Revelation (Swete, p. 24). The other Greek word for knowledge, *ginosko*, speaks of progress of knowledge.

⁷⁸Johnson, p. 434.

⁷⁹Many commentators, however, take the first love as a reference to the Ephesians' love for one another (cf. Acts 20:35; Eph. 1:15). Yet the emphasis in all these letters on the congregations' allegiance to Jesus Christ seems to favor the view that love for Him is in view here. See John R. W. Stott, *What Christ Thinks of the Church*, p. 27.

⁸⁰Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation*, pp. 86-87.

⁸¹Wiersbe, 2:572.

"Memory can be a powerful force in effecting a return to a more satisfying relationship (cf. the prodigal son in Lk 15:17-18)."⁸²

Eventually the Ephesian church passed out of existence, but that did not occur until the fifth century. The recipients of this letter seem to have responded positively to this exhortation. The site of the city has been virtually without inhabitants since the fourteenth century.

"Though they had left their first love, they had not left their former hatred for evil."⁸³

"The church that loses its love will soon lose its light, no matter how doctrinally sound it may be."⁸⁴

We know little of the Nicolaitans who were evidently followers of someone named Nicolas (cf. Acts 6:5). Irenaeus, who lived in the late second century, wrote that they were without restraint in their indulgence of the flesh and practiced fornication and the eating of foods sacrificed to idols.⁸⁵ The word "Nicolaitans" is a transliteration of two Greek words that mean "to conqueror" and "people." Consequently Nicolaitanism has come down through history as typifying any system that seeks to dominate rather than serve people.

"The teaching of the Nicolaitans was an exaggeration of the doctrine of Christian liberty which attempted an ethical compromise with heathenism."⁸⁶

5. Promise 2:7

An invitation preceded the promise, as in all the letters to follow (cf. 1:3). Jesus was the only person to issue this invitation in Scripture. The Gospels also record Him doing so seven times (Matt. 11:15; 13:9, 43; Mark 4:9, 23; Luke 8:8; 14:35). This invitation always occurs where Jesus appealed to His hearers to make a significant change.

In addition to the implied promise of the whole church's continuance if obedient (v. 5), Jesus Christ gave a promise to the individuals in the church. "Him who overcomes" probably refers to all Christians (cf. vv. 2-3, 10c, 13, 19, 25; 3:3, 8, 10; 1 John 5:4-5).⁸⁷

⁸²Mounce, p. 88.

⁸³Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 147.

⁸⁴Wiersbe, 2:572.

⁸⁵See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:352.

⁸⁶Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation*, p. 61.

⁸⁷L. S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 3:306; W. Robert Cook, *The Theology of John*, pp. 173-83; R. E. Manahan, "'Overcomes the World'—I John 5:4" (M.Div. Thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1970), pp. 38-39; William Newell, pp. 42, 52, 339; James E. Rosscup, "The Overcomer of the Apocalypse," *Grace Theological Journal* 3:2 (Fall 1982:261-86; Ryrie, *Revelation*, pp. 22-23; Smith, p. 65; Stott, pp. 97-98, 118-25; Lehman Strauss, *The Book of the Revelation*, pp. 108; Walvoord, *The Revelation . . .*, pp. 59, 98-99; Ladd, pp. 41, 69; and Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, pp. 151-53. Some students of Revelation have

The promises given to overcomers in all seven letters and in 21:7 bear this interpretation out.⁸⁸ The Lord held out a reminder of what would inevitably be theirs in the future to motivate the readers to follow Him faithfully in the present. Similarly other New Testament writers wrote of our blessings in Christ to motivate us to live in harmony with our calling.

". . . the promises to the conquerors are fundamentally assurances to the faithful of the benefits of Christ's redemption, expressed in the language of apocalyptic. In the nature of the case the promises afford inspiration for faith and fortitude in all who may be called to lay down their lives for Christ, and they are intended to do so."⁸⁹

John prefaced the promise with a special exhortation to give attention.

"These promises pertain to Christians alone, and their realization awaits the future Messianic Era. The time when Christians will enter into these promises *must* follow the time set forth in chapter one—Christ appearing as Judge in the midst of the seven Churches. The Church *must* first be brought into judgment, and *then* overcoming Christians will realize that which has been promised."⁹⁰

The promise itself seems to be that those who remember, repent, and repeat the first works (v. 5) will partake of the tree of life.

There is a connection between the tree of life and man's rule over the earth. Adam in his unfallen state had access to this tree, but when he fell God kept him from it (Gen. 1:26-28; 3:22). In the future believers will have access to it again (cf. 22:14).

"A number of other Jewish texts use the eating of the fruit of the tree of life as a metaphor for salvation (*1 Enoch* 25:5; *3 Enoch* 23:18; *T. Levi* 18:11; *Apoc. Mos.* 28:4; *Apoc. Elijah* 5:6), and this metaphor continues to

concluded that the overcomers are not all Christians but only faithful Christians, e.g., Donald G. Barnhouse, *Messages to the Seven Churches*, pp. 38, 43-44, 47, 56-57, 74-75, 84, 94-95; J. Sidlow Baxter, *Awake My Heart*, p. 323; R. R. Benedict, "The Use of *Nikao* in the Letters to the Seven Churches of Revelation" (Th.M. Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1966), p. 13; Harlan D. Betz, "The Nature of Rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ" (Th.M. Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1974), pp. 36-45; Zane C. Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse*, pp. 107-11; Ralph D. Richardson, "The Johannine Doctrine of Victory" (Th.M. Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1955), pp.20-29; William R. Ross Jr., "An Analysis of the Rewards and Judgments in Revelation 2 and 3" (Th.M. Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1971), p. 20; Mounce, pp. 90, 106, 256; Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, pp. 37, 470, 474; Chitwood, p. 48; J. William Fuller, "I Will Not Erase His Name from the Book of Life' (Revelation 3:5)," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 26 (1983):299.

⁸⁸Some interpreters who hold this view appeal to 1 John 2:13; 4:4; and 5:4-5 where John referred to his readers as overcomers. However, in 1 John 2:13 and 4:4 John said his readers had overcome the world, not that all Christians are overcomers. In 1 John 5:4-5 he wrote that only believers in Christ *can* overcome the world, not that every believer in Christ *does* overcome the world.

⁸⁹Beasley-Murray, p. 78.

⁹⁰Chitwood, p. 45. Cf. Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 153.

be used by Christian authors (*T. Jacob* 7:24). . . The tree of life is not simply a symbol for eternal life alone but also represents the *cosmic center of reality* where eternal life is present and available, and where God dwells. . .

"One tradition often used in apocalyptic literature originated in Gen 2:9; 3:23-24 and involved *eschatological access to the tree of life in the heavenly paradise*, clearly a metaphor for the enjoyment of eternal life."⁹¹

"The tree of life reserved for Christians is associated peculiarly with a provision for those who will rule and reign as co-heirs with Christ; and viewing Adam's position in the Genesis account—created to rule and reign, in possession of life, with the fruit of the tree at his disposal—the same would hold true. The fruit of this tree was in Genesis and will be in Revelation a provision for the rulers in the kingdom."⁹²

The tree of life appears four times in the Book of Proverbs and its use there helps us understand its presence in Genesis and Revelation. Solomon referred to wisdom (Prov. 3:18), righteousness (Prov. 11:30), satisfied hope (Prov. 13:12), and controlled speech (Prov. 15:4) as a tree of life. These are all the fruits that would have provided Adam and will provide the overcomers with what they will need to rule effectively in the millennial kingdom and beyond.

The tree of life in Eden and the tree of life in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:2, 14, 19) appear to be literal trees.⁹³

In church history, conditions described in this letter characterized the apostolic age especially.

B. THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA 2:8-11

John penned this letter to commend its recipients for their endurance of persecution and poverty for the sake of Jesus Christ. He also did so to exhort them to be fearless and faithful even to death. Whereas the Ephesian church needed to return to past conditions, this one needed to persevere in what was characteristic of it in the present.

1. Destination and description of Christ 2:8

Smyrna was also a seaport on the Aegean Sea. It stood about 40 miles north of Ephesus. Late in the first century it was a large wealthy city with a population of about 100,000. It still thrives today as Izmir with a population of about 200,000.

⁹¹Aune, p. 152. Paradise is a Persian loan word meaning a walling around, hence a walled park or garden (cf. Gen. 2:8-10 in LXX; Rev. 22:1-4, 14).

⁹²Chitwood, p. 48.

⁹³See Daniel K. K. Wong, "The Tree of Life in Revelation 2:7," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:618 (April-June 1998):211-26.

Jesus Christ described Himself here as the eternal One who died and experienced resurrection. "Smyrna" means "bitter." The Greek word translates the Hebrew *mor*, myrrh, a fragrant perfume used in embalming dead bodies (cf. Matt. 2:11; John 19:39). It becomes very fragrant when someone crushes it. These believers would have found encouragement that even though the prospect of death threatened them resurrection and eternal life with Christ were certain. Smyrna had died as a city on several occasions because of invasions and earthquakes, but it had risen again to new life because the residents had rebuilt it. In Smyrna many residents worshipped a goddess named Cybele whom they regarded as the personification of the yearly rejuvenation of nature. Her devotees claimed that she arose from the dead every spring.

2. Commendation 2:9

Jesus Christ knew the afflictions (lit. pressures) these Christians were experiencing as a result of their testimony for Him including abject poverty. Evidently their persecutors were cutting off some of their incomes. Notwithstanding their physical poverty the Christians in Smyrna were rich spiritually. Evidently some of the persecutors were Jews who slandered the Christians (cf. Acts 18:12-17) and cursed Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 26:11). They apparently claimed to be committed to God but were not. They came out of Satan's camp (cf. Acts 14:19; 17:5-8, 13).

"At the martyrdom of Polycarp at Smyrna in 168, these Jews eagerly assisted by gathering *on the Sabbath* wood and fagots for the fire in which he was burned."⁹⁴

Jesus Christ had no rebuke for these saints. Evidently in their trials they had remained pure in belief and behavior. In the first century the enemies of Christians leveled six slanderous accusations against them: cannibalism, lust and immorality, breaking up homes, atheism, political disloyalty, and incendiarism.⁹⁵

3. Exhortation 2:10a

These persecuted Christians did not need to fear their adversaries or death since they would live forever with Jesus Christ. "Behold" signals an oracular declaration (cf. 2:22; 3:8, 9, 20).⁹⁶ The devil would incite their foes to imprison some of them shortly having received permission from God to do so (cf. Job 1). This would be a trial (Gr. *peirasthete*) that Satan would use to try to entice them to depart from the Lord.

"Under the Roman legal system imprisonment was usually not a punishment in itself; rather it was used either as a means of coercion to compel obedience to an order issued by a magistrate or else as a place to temporarily restrain the prisoner before execution . . . Here it appears that

⁹⁴Ryrie, p. 23.

⁹⁵William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, 1:98.

⁹⁶Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 167.

imprisonment, viewed as a period of testing, is primarily for the purpose of coercion."⁹⁷

The "ten days" of trouble may refer to a period of relatively brief duration, specifically the "days" of persecution under 10 Roman emperors (cf. Gen. 24:55; Num. 11:19, 14:22; 1 Sam. 1:8; Neh. 5:18; Job 19:3; Jer. 42:7; Dan. 1:12; Acts 25:6).⁹⁸ Other interpreters view the days as symbolic of years,⁹⁹ or a longer period of time (e.g., complete tribulation),¹⁰⁰ or a short, limited time.¹⁰¹ However, John probably intended us to interpret this period as 10 literal 24-hour days that lay in the near future of the original recipients of this letter.¹⁰² There is nothing in the text that provides a clue that we should take this number in a figurative sense.

4. Promise 2:10b-11

The citizens of Smyrna had a reputation for being faithful to the emperor because of their previous acts of fidelity to him. The crown of life is probably the fullness of eternal life as a reward (cf. 1 Cor. 9:25; 1 Thess. 2:19; 2 Tim. 4:6-8; Heb. 2:9; James 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:4; Rev. 4:4). This appears to be a victor's crown (Gr. *stephanos*) given for enduring the trials and tests of life even to the point of death without denying Christ. It is not the gift of eternal life but the fullness of that life (cf. John 10:10, et al.). The person who endures these trials will receive the crown of life after Jesus Christ has approved him or her. This approval will take place when the Lord evaluates that believer's works at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:13). He will award the crown at this judgment (1 Cor. 3:14).¹⁰³

The Greeks called Smyrna "the crown of Asia Minor" because of its beauty as a city. Moreover every year a few city administrators, rulers, and priests received a crown of leaves for their faithfulness to their duties.

Christians will not (a double negative in Greek: "not in any way") suffer injury or harm (Gr. *adikethe*) by the "second death." The second death is eternal separation from God. It follows the first death, which is separation of the soul from the body.

"It is not annihilation, but conscious unending punishment."¹⁰⁴

"By litotes this [promise] intimates a superlative triumph over the second death. But since the second death is actual banishment from the presence

⁹⁷Aune, p. 166.

⁹⁸The emperors whom advocates of this view identify are usually Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Hadrian, Septimius Severus, Maximin, Decius, Valerian, Aurelian, and Diocletian. See Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 169; J. Vernon McGee, *Through the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, 5:906. Ladd, pp. 8-10, claimed that these were not empire-wide persecutions.

⁹⁹William Lee, "The Revelation of St. John," in *The Holy Bible*, 4:481, 520, 532.

¹⁰⁰Ray Summers, *Worthy Is the Lamb*, p. 113; Mounce, p. 94.

¹⁰¹Swete, p. 32; Charles, 1:58; Martin Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John*, p. 28; Aune, p. 166; Ladd, p. 44.

¹⁰²See Walter Scott, *Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 69.

¹⁰³Aune, p. 167. See Joe L. Wall, *Going for the Gold*, pp. 128-29, 140-51.

¹⁰⁴Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 174. Cf. A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6:303.

and life of God (Rev. 20:14-15), the litotes also intimates a splendid experience of the divine life and presence."¹⁰⁵

The point of the Lord's promise is that those who remain faithful will experience eternal life to the utmost in the life to come. The first death might hurt them briefly, but the second death would not hurt them at all.¹⁰⁶

Historically the church experienced intense persecution during the postapostolic era until Constantine elevated Christianity to the official religion of the Roman Empire. As mentioned before, some interpreters have correlated the 10 days of persecution (v. 10) with 10 periods of persecution instigated by 10 Roman emperors between A.D. 54 (Nero) and A.D. 284 (Diocletian).¹⁰⁷

C. THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN PERGAMUM 2:12-17

The purpose of this letter was to encourage the Christians in Pergamum for their faithfulness to Christ and to urge them to reject the false teaching in their midst.

1. Destination and description of Christ 2:12

Pergamum (modern Bergama) lay about 55 miles north of Smyrna inland a few miles from the Aegean coast. The meaning of the name "Pergamum" is "citadel." The town was noteworthy for three reasons. It was a center for many pagan religious cults, and emperor worship was more intense there than in any other surrounding city.¹⁰⁸ Second, it boasted a university with a large library. Third, it was the leader and center of the production of parchment.

Jesus Christ described Himself as the One who judges with His Word (cf. 1:16; 19:15, 21). God's Word separates believers from the world and sinners from God. This is perhaps its double-edged quality. Roman officials who had the right to carry this sword (Gr. *hromphaia*, cf. 1:16; 2:16) had the power of life and death in cases of capital offenses.

"It is interesting that Pergamum was a city to which Rome had given the rare power of capital punishment (*ius gladii*), which was symbolized by the sword. The Christians in Pergamum were thus reminded that though they lived under the rule of an almost unlimited *imperium*, they were

¹⁰⁵Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, p. 119. Litotes is a figure of speech in which the writer expresses an affirmative idea through the negation of its opposite. Examples include, "I am not amused" (meaning "I am very annoyed"), "I won't forget that" (meaning "I'll return the favor"), and "That test was no snap!" (meaning "That was a tough test!"). For some biblical examples, see Acts 12:18; 15:2; 17:4, 12; 19:24; 27:20.

¹⁰⁶See idem, "No Small Problem," *Grace Evangelical Society News* 6:3 (March 1991):4.

¹⁰⁷E.g., W. A. Spurgeon, *The Conquering Christ*, p. 28.

¹⁰⁸Barclay, *Letters to . . .*, p. 45.

citizens of another kingdom—that of him who needs no other sword than that of his mouth . . ."¹⁰⁹

2. Commendation 2:13

The Pergamum Christians had held firmly to their commitment to Jesus Christ and their witness for Him even though they lived in one of Satan's strongholds.

"Antipas is said to have been a dentist and a physician, but the Aesculapiades suspected that he was propagating Christianity secretly and they accused him of disloyalty to Caesar. He was condemned to death and was shut up in a brazen (or copper) bull, which was then heated until it was red-hot."¹¹⁰

Satan's throne may be an allusion to one or more of the pagan temples in the city, most likely the aesculapium. The aesculapium was a complex of buildings devoted to the god of healing. This made Pergamum "the Lourdes of the Province of Asia."¹¹¹ Some have thought that this throne was the altar of Zeus, which was very prominent in the town.¹¹² Another possibility is that Satan's throne refers to emperor worship that was stronger in Pergamum than elsewhere.

"The city was a leader in this form of worship, which was relatively new to the province of Asia . . ."¹¹³

". . . it appears that the 'throne of Satan' should be identified not with a specific architectural feature of Roman Pergamon (in part because so little is actually known about first-century Pergamon) but rather with the *Roman opposition* to early Christianity, which the author of Rev 2—3 perceived as particularly malevolent in that city."¹¹⁴

3. Rebuke 2:14-15

Balaam told Balak that he could overcome the Israelites if he would involve them in Moabite religious feasts that included sacred prostitution (Num. 25). This would render them unfaithful to God and consequently subject to His discipline. The pagans in Pergamum were evidently encouraging the Christians to join in their pagan feasts and the sexual immorality that accompanied them too. By participating some in the church had given tacit approval to Balaam's teaching. The Nicolaitans evidently regarded these sins as acceptable under the pretense of Christian liberty (cf. v. 6).¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹Johnson, p. 440. Cf. G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, p. 38.

¹¹⁰Frederick A. Tatford, *The Patmos Letters*, p. 75.

¹¹¹Charles, 1:60.

¹¹²E.g., Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, p. 281, n. 3.

¹¹³Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 184. Cf. Mounce, p. 96; Ladd, p. 46.

¹¹⁴Aune, pp. 183-84.

¹¹⁵Interestingly "Balaam" in Hebrew can mean "swallow the people," so the ideological connection between the Nicolaitans ("conquer the people") and Balaam is clear (cf. Johnson, p. 441).

"The best conclusion is that there were two different but similar groups in this church, both of which had disobeyed the decision of the Jerusalem council in regard to idolatrous practices and fornication (cf. Acts 15:20, 29)."¹¹⁶

"The main facet of the doctrine of Balaam which is being promulgated in Churches today is the teaching that [equal] future blessings and rewards have been set aside for every Christian solely on the basis of Christ's finished work on Calvary and the Christian's positional standing 'in Christ.' Thus, all Christians—regardless of their conduct during the present time—will receive crowns and positions of power and authority with Christ in the [millennial] kingdom. However, the teaching throughout the Word of God is to the contrary. The Israelites did not sin with immunity, and neither can Christians. Sin in the camp of Israel resulted in the Israelites being overthrown in the wilderness, short of the goal of their calling. And it will be no different for Christians."¹¹⁷

4. Exhortation 2:16

If the erring believers would not judge themselves and repent they could anticipate God's judgment (cf. 1 Cor. 11:31).

"Unwillingness to repent shows that a person is not a faithful believer."¹¹⁸

They would die by the sword proceeding from Christ's mouth. Balaam had died, ironically, by the Israelites' sword (Num. 31:8). This judgment would be by the unyielding standard of God's revealed Word that clearly condemns such behavior. Having taken sides with the enemy they could expect God to oppose them in His war against evil.

"The fault of Pergamum is the opposite of Ephesus where the heretics were rooted out but love was missing (2:2, 4)."¹¹⁹

5. Promise 2:17

The "hidden manna" seems to be a reference to the manna that sustained the lives of the Israelites in the wilderness that lay "hidden" in the holy of holies. The Christians in Pergamum did not need the food of pagan festivals since they already had much better

¹¹⁶Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 193. Cf. Robertson, 6:306.

¹¹⁷Chitwood, p. 70.

¹¹⁸Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 196.

¹¹⁹Mounce, p. 99.

food. Christians feed spiritually on Jesus Christ, the bread of life (John 6:48-51), who is the real manna hidden from sight now.¹²⁰

The "white stone" seems to allude to the *tesseron*.¹²¹

A *tesseron* was, ". . . given to those who were invited to partake, within the precincts of the temple [at Pergamum], of the sacred feast, which naturally consisted only of meats offered to the idol. That stone bore the secret name of the deity represented by the idol and the name was known only to the recipient."¹²²

Victors in contests or battles also received a white stone.¹²³ Perhaps God will elevate the overcomer to the position of ruler over the earth and will give him or her a new name, as He did Joseph (cf. Gen. 41:39-45). The name on that stone is new (Gr. *kainon*) in the sense of being different, not new in contrast to what is old. However the name is probably that of Christ (cf. Phil. 2:9).¹²⁴ It is unknown to others in the sense that others who are not overcomers do not possess it.

The historical parallel to the church in Pergamum is the period following Constantine's legalization of Christianity in A.D. 313 that lasted for about 300 years. When Christianity became the official religion of the empire, paganism overwhelmed it. It became hard to distinguish true Christians because people claiming to be Christians were everywhere. Many of them were practicing pagans who indulged in immoral festivals and all kinds of behavior inconsistent with the teachings of Christianity. Many writers have noted that "Pergamum" comes from the Greek word *gamos* that means marriage. This letter pictures a church married to the world rather than to Christ.

D. THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA 2:18-29

Jesus Christ sent this letter to commend some in this church for their service, orthodoxy, and fidelity and to warn others in it to turn from false teaching and sinful practices.

1. Destination and description of Christ 2:18

Thyatira, the smallest of the seven cities but the one that received the longest letter, lay about 45 miles to the southeast of Pergamum. It was famous for its textiles, especially the production of purple dye (cf. Acts 16:14), and its trade guilds.

Flame-like eyes suggest discerning and severe judgment (cf. 1:14). Burnished (highly reflective) bronze feet in this context picture a warrior with protected feet (cf. 1:15; Dan.

¹²⁰See Daniel K. K. Wong, "The Hidden Manna and the White Stone in Revelation 2:17," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:619 (July-September 1998):348-49.

¹²¹Mounce, p. 99.

¹²²Tatford, p. 82.

¹²³Chitwood, p. 73.

¹²⁴Aune, pp. 190-91. See my comments on "name" as "reputation" at 3:5.

10:6). "Son of God" emphasizes Jesus Christ's deity and right to judge.¹²⁵ The main local god in Thyatira was Tyrimnas who, his worshippers said, was a son of the gods. They pictured him on the city coins as a warrior riding a horse and wielding a double-edged battle ax in judgment.

2. Commendation 2:19

In many particulars some in this church were praiseworthy. They were strong in good deeds, love for others, trust in God, service of their Savior, and patient endurance in trials. Moreover they had become even more zealous recently. Love shows itself in service, and faith demonstrates itself in perseverance through persecution.¹²⁶

3. Rebuke 2:20-23

Evidently a woman claiming to be a prophetess (cf. Luke 2:36; Acts 21:9; 1 Cor. 11:5) had been influencing some in this church to join the local trade guilds without which a tradesman could not work in Thyatira. This meant participation in the guild feasts that included immoral acts and the worship of idols.¹²⁷ Her name may or may not have been Jezebel. I think it was not.¹²⁸ However her behavior reflected that of wicked Queen Jezebel (1 Kings 16—2 Kings 9) who led Israel into immorality and idolatry by advocating Baal worship (cf. v. 14; Acts 15:28-29).

"With her Nicolaitan orientation the prophetess could suggest that since 'an idol has no real existence' (I Cor 8:4), believers need not undergo the privation which would follow from unwillingness to go along with the simple requirements of the trade guild."¹²⁹

God had not brought judgment on her previously so she might repent (2 Pet. 3:9). Since she refused to change her ways, God would judge her and her followers unless they repented. She might experience a fatal illness (cf. 2 Kings 1:4; 1 Cor. 11:29-30), and her followers might experience great tribulation. This could be a reference to the Great Tribulation,¹³⁰ but it seems more likely to refer to severe divine discipline similar to what is coming during the Great Tribulation. Death would also be the punishment of her spiritual children (v. 23), another way of describing her followers (v. 22). The other churches would recognize her punishment as coming from God who knows all people intimately (cf. Ps. 7:9; Prov. 24:12; Jer. 11:20; 17:10; 20:12).

¹²⁵This is the only use of this title in Revelation, though it is practically equivalent to "Messiah" (cf. Ps. 2:12; Luke 4:41; John 1:34, 49; 3:18; 5:25; 10:36; 11:4, 27; 20:31).

¹²⁶J. P. Lange, "The Revelation of John," in *Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, p. 121.

¹²⁷See Beasley-Murray, pp. 89-90.

¹²⁸Newell, p. 54; Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 214; Aune, p. 213. Jezebel, Balaam, and the Nicolaitans all sought to lead God's people into idolatry and sexual immorality.

¹²⁹Mounce, p. 103.

¹³⁰Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 219-21.

4. Exhortation 2:24-25

Apparently this woman claimed that her teaching (that Christians can indulge the flesh with impunity) was deeper than the apostles' teaching, but it was, of course, the depths of Satanic doctrine. Gnosticism, which taught that only its members could understand deep spiritual truth, was growing in popularity in this region at this time. It may have been part of her teaching. Jesus Christ exhorted the faithful in the church to continue with their present good conduct (v. 19). He would soon purge the wicked ones from their midst.

"He cast (*ballo*) Jezebel and her children into conditions of unparalleled suffering (vv. 22-23), but He does not cast (*ou ballo*) upon the faithful anything worse than to keep doing what they already are doing."¹³¹

5. Promise 2:26-29

The prize for faithfulness was the privilege of reigning with Christ in His earthly kingdom (cf. 1:6; 12:5; 19:15; Ps. 2:8-9; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 20:4-6). As with the promises in the other letters, this one is probably for all believers and would encourage them to overcome the temptations this Jezebel held out. The Lord intended the prospect of this blessing to motivate the unfaithful in the church to return to God's will for them and to encourage the faithful to persevere. Believers who are faithful will receive authority in heaven from Jesus Christ and will "rule" (lit. shepherd) others during the Millennium (Luke 19:11-27; 1 Cor. 6:2-3; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 3:21). Some believers evidently will receive greater authority for being faithful than others who have not been as faithful (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10). This is the first mention in Revelation of the Lord's coming for the church, the Rapture (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13-18).

"This is the nearest we have in the seven letters to a definition of the conqueror. He *holds fast* the traditions of faith and life delivered to the Church till the coming of Christ (v. 25), and he *keeps* Christ's works till the end (v. 26)—whether that 'end' be the Lord's parousia or his own death."¹³²

John identified the "morning star" (v. 28) elsewhere as Jesus Christ Himself (22:16). The morning star (the planet Venus) appears in the night sky just before the dawning of a new day. From Babylonian to Roman times the ancients regarded the morning star as a symbol of sovereignty and, in Roman times, victory.¹³³ Jesus Christ will guide faithful believers in the future as the new day of His rule dawns (cf. Titus 2:13). A special close relationship with Jesus Christ seems to be the focus of this blessing.

"The gift of the morning star must refer to the fact that the exalted Christ shares his messianic status with the believer who conquers."¹³⁴

¹³¹Ibid., p. 230.

¹³²Beasley-Murray, p. 93.

¹³³See *ibid.*, pp. 93-94.

¹³⁴Aune, p. 212.

Commentators have pointed out that spiritual conditions during the Middle Ages in the West (A.D. 606-1520) were similar to those that existed in this church. There were faithful believers, but there was also a strong encouragement coming from those who claimed higher authority to do things contrary to the teachings of Scripture. This came primarily from the Roman Catholic Church. Some have also compared the leadership of the Virgin Mary, as promoted by the Roman Church, to Jezebel's leadership in Thyatira.¹³⁵

E. THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN SARDIS 3:1-6

Jesus Christ sent this letter to commend the few faithful Christians in Sardis for their good deeds and to challenge the negligent majority to remember what they knew and to obey Him.

1. Destination and description of Christ 3:1a-b

Sardis (modern Sart) stood about 33 miles southeast of Thyatira on a major highway that led all the way to Susa in Mesopotamia.¹³⁶ It had been the capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia. It was famous for its military history, jewelry, dye, and textiles. Due to its situation on a steep hill many people thought the city was impregnable. However Cyrus the Persian had captured it about 549 B.C. by following a secret path up a cliff. Antiochus invaded the city in the same way about 218 B.C.

"The dominant religion of the city . . . appears to be that of the general Anatolian religious forms: a worship of the forces of nature, which were viewed as subject to death but also as having the power of self-reproduction."¹³⁷

The Lord presented Himself to this congregation as the all-wise God. The "seven Spirits" probably refer to the seven principle angels of God (cf. 1:4). The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches (1:20). Christ also reminded the readers of His lordship over the churches (the "seven stars," 1:20; 2:1).

2. Commendation and rebuke 3:1c, 2b

The Lord gave less praise to this church than to any of the churches except Laodicea, which received none. The only good thing He said to these Christians was that they had a good reputation, evidently among the other churches. However, they were really a dead church and their good works were not as impressive as they should have been. Only a few of their number were faithful to the Lord (v. 4).

¹³⁵E.g., Walvoord, *The Revelation . . .*, p. 75.

¹³⁶See Caird, p. 47.

¹³⁷Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 243.

"The temple to Artemis (possibly Cybele) equaled in size the famous temple of Artemis in Ephesus. However, the temple at Sardis was never finished."¹³⁸

This tendency to fail to finish what they had begun characterized the Christians too.

"No city of Asia at that time showed such a melancholy contrast between past splendor and present decay as Sardis."¹³⁹

"Death was a special preoccupation of the Sardians, as witnessed by the impressive necropolis seven miles from the city."¹⁴⁰

"Dr. Vance Havner has frequently reminded us that spiritual ministries often go through four stages: a man, a movement, a machine, and then a monument. Sardis was at the 'monument' stage, but there was still hope!"¹⁴¹

3. Exhortation 3:2a, 3

These believers needed to awake from their spiritual slumber, to examine their condition, and to realize their needs (cf. Matt. 24:42; 25:13; 26:41). Their city had fallen into enemy hands more than once due to the carelessness of sentries who had relied too much on the town's natural fortifications. They also needed to strengthen the areas of weakness in their church, which was almost dead.

As the Ephesians, they needed to remember the rich spiritual heritage of their church and to return to the attitudes and activities their teachers had taught them. Failure to heed these warnings would result in Jesus Christ sending discipline on the believers that would surprise them. It would be similar to the surprise that earth-dwellers will experience at the Second Coming (cf. Matt. 24:43; Luke 12:39; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 16:15). These Christians were not watching expectantly for the Lord to return.¹⁴²

4. Promise 3:4-6

Jesus Christ held out blessings for the faithful few in the congregation to stimulate the rest to repent. White garments symbolic of one's works (19:8) are pure and free of defilement (cf. 7:9, 13; 19:14; Matt. 22:11-12). Sardis boasted of her trade in woolen goods and dyed stuffs.¹⁴³ Only the Christians who were faithful to Jesus Christ could enjoy His intimate fellowship ("walk with Me;" cf. 7:14; 22:14).

¹³⁸Johnson, p. 447.

¹³⁹William M. Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*, p. 375.

¹⁴⁰Johnson, p. 448.

¹⁴¹Wiersbe, 2:577.

¹⁴²Note the many allusions to Jesus' teachings in the Gospels in this Sardis letter.

¹⁴³Cf. Charles, 1:78.

"The reference was to the day of a Roman triumph. All work ceased and the true Roman citizen donned the pure white toga. The specially privileged few—usually the civic authorities and sometimes relations or friends of the victorious general who was being honoured—had a part in the triumphal procession. Clad in white, these Sardian believers were also to walk in triumph with their Captain in the day of His triumph. They had remained loyal to Him and would share His honour in the day of His glory."¹⁴⁴

God will eventually clothe all overcomers with special garments that declare their inward purity (cf. 7:9, 13; 19:8).

Second, He will not (double negative for emphasis in Greek) erase their names from the "book of life" (cf. Luke 10:20), another metaphor for eternal life (cf. 2:7). There appear to be several books that God keeps in heaven (cf. 20:12). There is the book of the living, namely, those who are presently alive on the earth including the unsaved (Exod. 32:32-33; Deut. 29:20; Ps. 69:28; Isa. 4:3). There is also a book containing the names of the lost and their deeds (Rev. 20:12). There is a book with the names of the elect in it (Dan. 12:1; Rev. 13:8; 17:8; 20:15; 21:27). A fourth book evidently contains the names of faithful followers of the Lord (Mal. 3:16; Phil. 4:3; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 3:5).¹⁴⁵

"The Book of Deeds and the Book of Life are distinguished in Rev 20:12 . . . The motif of having one's name *erased* from, or *blotted out* of, the Book of Life is a metaphor for judgment (Exod 32:32-33; Ps 69:27-28; . . .), based on the notion of expulsion or disenfranchisement from the record of citizenship. Originally, however, to be *blotted out* of the Book of Life meant 'to die' (Exod 32:32-33; Ps 69:27-28; Isa 4:3)."¹⁴⁶

The term "name" (Gr. *onoma*) also has more than one meaning. Biblical writers used it of the name of a person, his reputation (as in "he has a good name"; cf. Job 30:8; Prov. 22:1; Isa. 56:4-5), a synonym for the person himself, and in prepositional combinations.¹⁴⁷ In view of the previous use of the word "name" (v. 1), where it means reputation, that is probably what it means here too (cf. 2:17; 3:12). The Christian has a good reputation in heaven that results in his receiving an honorable eternal identity. Yet his good name associates closely with his rewards.¹⁴⁸

"Practically every city of that day maintained a roll or civic register of its citizens, and in that record was entered the name of every child born in the

¹⁴⁴Tatford, p. 115. Cf. Ramsay, pp. 386-88; Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, p. 147; J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, p. 413.

¹⁴⁵See Charles R. Smith, "The Book of Life," *Grace Theological Journal* 6:2 (Fall 1985):219-30.

¹⁴⁶Aune, p. 224. Wiersbe, 2:577-78, believed that the book of life contains the names of everyone living, but as unbelievers die God removes their names from the book. Thus at the end the book contains only the names of believers.

¹⁴⁷*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "Onoma," by H. Bietenhard.

¹⁴⁸Fuller, p. 304; cf. Dillow, pp. 482-86; Robert N. Wilkin, "I Will Not Blot Out His Name," *Grace Evangelical Society News* 10:2 (March-April 1995):1-4.

city. If one of the citizens proved guilty of treachery or disloyalty or of anything bringing shame on the city, he was subjected to public dishonour by the expunging of his name from the register. (The name was, in any case normally obliterated at death.) He was deemed no longer worthy to be regarded as a citizen of the city. If, on the other hand, a citizen had performed some outstanding exploit deserving of special distinction, honour was bestowed upon him, either by the recording of the deed in the city roll or by his name being encircled in gold (or overlaid in gold) in the roll."¹⁴⁹

We should not interpret this statement in verse 5 to imply that some believers will lose their salvation (John 5:24; 6:35-37, 39; 10:28-29). The litotes here (cf. 2:11) means the overcomer's name will be specially glorious forever.¹⁵⁰

"The purpose of the promise is to provide certainty and assurance to those who are 'worthy' (cf. v. 4), not to indicate anything about the fate of those who do not overcome."¹⁵¹

Third, Jesus Christ will acknowledge all overcomers as His own (cf. Matt. 10:32; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; 12:8).

"The faithful, in the white toga of the freeborn, would walk in the triumphal procession with the Victor; they would be brought into the banquet and clad in the shining festal robe; their names would be honoured in the civic register of heaven; and finally they would be confessed before the Sovereign of the universe. Just as, in the presence of the emperor and his court, the victorious general related the deeds of the warriors who had done exploits in the battle and presented these men before the august court in acknowledgement of their worth, so the Lord Jesus Christ would recount the deeds of His followers and present them to His father."¹⁵²

"Faithfulness in trial now is to be rewarded beyond measure in the life to come."¹⁵³

In view of these coming realities the Christians in Sardis would have felt encouraged to live in keeping with their calling (cf. Eph. 4:1).

During the period of the Protestant Reformation the Protestant church had a reputation for being sound, but really it was quite dead. The reformers affected a return to the

¹⁴⁹Tatford, pp. 116-17. Cf. Aune, p. 225.

¹⁵⁰See Zane C. Hodges, "Revelation 3:15 Revisited," *The Kerugma Message* 4:1 (September 1995):2.

¹⁵¹Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 261. This writer, Walvoord, *The Revelation . . .*, p. 82, and McGee, 5:915, like Wiersbe, 2:577-78, believed that the names of all people were originally in the book of life, but failure to trust in Christ results in the removal of one's name.

¹⁵²Tatford, p. 117. Cf. Matt. 10:32; Mark 8:38; Luke 12:8-9; 2 Tim. 2:12.

¹⁵³Mounce, p. 114.

doctrines of salvation by grace and the priesthood of all believers, but they and their disciples could not agree on many other doctrines. This resulted in denominationalism that has fragmented the church ever since destroying its unity and marring its testimony. The faithful few of this period were those who held to the truths of Scripture that the Reformation discovered anew but did not agree with the errors of its leaders.¹⁵⁴

Even in the present day there are many local churches that have a reputation for being good perhaps because of an imposing building, much activity, or a rich history. However they are really almost dead spiritually.

F. THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA 3:7-13

The Lord sent the letter to the church in Philadelphia to praise the Christians for their faithfulness in spite of persecution and to encourage them to persevere.

1. Destination and description of Christ 3:7

Philadelphia (lit. brotherly love; cf. Rom. 12:10; 1 Thess. 4:9; Heb. 13:1; et al.) lay about 30 miles southeast of Sardis. A Pergamene king, Attalus II (159-138 B.C.), founded it. The town received its name from his nickname, "Philadelphus" or "brother lover." This king had a special devotion to his brother, Eumenes II. The city stood in a wine-producing area and was the so-called gateway to central Asia Minor. The modern name of this town is Alasehir.

"It was a missionary city, founded to promote a unity of spirit, customs and loyalty within the realm, the apostle of Hellenism in an Oriental land."¹⁵⁵

Because it experienced earthquakes from time to time more of the population than normal chose to live outside the city walls.

Jesus Christ presented Himself to these saints as holy (cf. 4:8; 6:10; Ps. 16:10; Hab. 3:3; Isa. 40:34; Mark 1:24; Luke 1:35; 4:34; John 6:69; Acts 4:27, 30; 1 Pet. 1:15; 1 John 2:20), true (genuine), and authoritative (cf. 1:5; 6:10). The "key of David" seems to refer to Isaiah 22:20-23 where Hezekiah's servant, Eliakim, received authority over David's house including access to all the king's treasures. Jesus claimed to have God's full administrative authority to distribute or not distribute all God's resources according to His will.

2. Commendation 3:8

The Philadelphia Christians had received an "open door" to opportunity for spiritual blessing, perhaps opportunity for evangelism (cf. 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3). This opportunity would continue because they had a little "power" (spiritual power) though

¹⁵⁴See E. H. Broadbent, *The Pilgrim Church*, for an account of the continuance through the centuries of churches practising the principles taught and exemplified in the New Testament.

¹⁵⁵Tatford, p. 119.

they were evidently few.¹⁵⁶ They had faithfully obeyed God's Word, and they had maintained a faithful testimony for the Lord in the past, presumably by word and by deed. They also enjoyed the prospect of an open door into the messianic kingdom because they had been faithful. This may be the primary reference in view.¹⁵⁷

3. Promise 3:9-11a, 12

Jesus Christ gave no rebuke to this church, as was true of the church in Smyrna. He gave the Christians five promises instead.

1. Their Jewish antagonists would eventually have to acknowledge that the Christians were the true followers of God (cf. 2:9). These foes claimed to be the true followers of God, but they were not having rejected Jesus Christ (cf. John 8:31-59). Eventually they would have to admit their error, at the judgment of unbelievers (the great white throne judgment) if not earlier (Isa. 45:23; 60:14; Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10-11). However the future repentance of Israel at Messiah's second coming that will result in the Jews' respectful treatment of Gentile believers seems to be in view here (cf. Isa. 45:14; 49:23; Ezek. 36:23; 37:28; Zech. 8:20-23).
2. God gave a second promise for faithful, patient endurance. He promised the Christians in this church that they would not go through the Tribulation period (Rev. 6—19). He promised to keep them from the hour of testing. The combination of the verb and the preposition in Greek in this verse clearly means that He would keep them out of it (the pretribulation position). It does not mean He would preserve them through it (the posttribulation position) or remove them during it (the midtribulation position).¹⁵⁸

What if some in the church did not keep the word of Christ's perseverance?¹⁵⁹ Would God not keep them from the hour of testing? In other words, will only faithful or watchful Christians experience the Rapture (the partial rapture position)? No, all Christians will experience transformation at the Rapture (1 Cor. 15:51-52). God has promised all Christians deliverance from that outpouring of His wrath (1 Thess. 1:10).¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶Since there is no article before "little" in the Greek text, it is possible to understand their "little strength" (NIV) as a reference to their small influence, evidently because of their small number.

¹⁵⁷See Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, pp. 277-78; Beasley-Murray, p. 100.

¹⁵⁸See Newell, pp. 71-72; Thomas R. Edgar, "An Exegesis of Rapture Passages," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, pp. 211-17; Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, pp. 283-91; Daniel K. K. Wong, "The Pillar and the Throne in Revelation 3:12, 21," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156:623 (July-September 1999):303. For the posttribulation interpretation, see Mounce, p. 119; or Ladd, p. 62.

¹⁵⁹This is probably a subjective genitive, meaning the endurance that Jesus Himself displayed rather than the endurance that He requires.

¹⁶⁰See Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, pp. 478-507, for further explanation of these four major premillennial views of the Rapture; and see Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept from the Hour*, for refutation of the partial rapture, the midtribulation rapture, and the posttribulation rapture views.

Furthermore, it is not just the testing God promised to deliver them from but the "hour" of testing, the time in history during which these trials will come (cf. John 12:27).¹⁶¹ The Greek word translated "testing" (*peirasai*) means to test to demonstrate the quality of a thing, not to purify its quality. This hour of testing will involve the "whole world" (Gr. *oikoymenes*, the inhabited earth), not just a local area. Its purpose is to demonstrate the quality of those who "dwell upon the earth." This term refers to earth-dwellers as contrasted with heaven-dwellers, the unsaved as contrasted with Christians. As with the promises given to the other churches in chapters 2 and 3, this one is applicable to all Christians, not just the original recipients of the letter.¹⁶²

Verse 10 appears at first reading to be another inducement to remain faithful to the Lord (cf. 2:10c, 25; 3:4). The implication may appear to be that if a Christian denies Christ (v. 8) he or she will not participate in the Rapture. However other Scriptures make it clear that God will catch up all Christians, faithful and unfaithful, at the same time (1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Thess. 1:10; 4:16-17; 5:9). We must therefore look for another explanation.

Since the whole Philadelphia church was faithful (v. 8) verse 10 is probably not an inducement to remain faithful. It seems instead to refer to a blessing the whole church could anticipate. The verse seems intended to comfort the whole church rather than to challenge unfaithful or potentially unfaithful Christians.

"The words in this verse must be looked upon as a *statement after the fact* rather than a *conditional statement*, somewhat similar to the words, 'Because thou hast obeyed my voice,' in Gen. 22:18."¹⁶³

"Probably the most debated verse in the whole discussion about the time of the Church's rapture is Revelation 3:10."¹⁶⁴

Gundry believed that God will fulfill the promise of this verse at the Rapture, but he believed the Rapture will occur at the end of the Tribulation (posttribulation). He believed the Lord will come for His saints, meet them in the air, and descend with them to the earth immediately.¹⁶⁵ Townsend's article, just cited, refuted Gundry's posttribulation interpretation of this verse.¹⁶⁶

"It is exemption from the period of time that is promised. By implication, this deliverance will coincide with Christ's return

¹⁶¹Beasley-Murray, p. 101, regarded the hour of testing as a designation of the trial itself rather than as a period of testing (cf. Mark 14:35).

¹⁶²See Stanton, pp. 46-50, 108-37; and Jeffrey Townsend, "The Rapture in Revelation 3:10," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137:547 (July-September 1980):252-66.

¹⁶³Chitwood, p. 98.

¹⁶⁴Gundry, p. 54.

¹⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 159.

¹⁶⁶See also Renald E. Showers, *Maranatha: Our Lord, Come! A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church*, pp. 176-91, for evidence that the Rapture and the Second Coming cannot occur back to back.

mentioned in the very next verse: 'I will come soon' (3:11). Believers on earth will meet the Lord in the air and thus escape the hour of trial . . . One cannot make good sense out of Rev. 3:10 otherwise. The statement does not refer directly to the rapture. What it guarantees is protection away from the scene of the 'hour of trial' while that hour is in progress. This effect of placing the faithful in Philadelphia (and hence, the faithful in all the churches; cf. 3:13) in a position of safety presupposes that they will have been removed to another location (i.e., heaven) at the period's beginning. . . .

"Because this period of tribulation will immediately precede the coming of the Lord to earth in power and great glory (cf. Matt. 24:29, 30), and because the generation to whom John wrote these words has long since passed away, Philadelphia's representation of not just the other six churches of Asia but also of the church universal throughout the present age is evident . . ." ¹⁶⁷

Other New Testament passages also teach a pretribulation Rapture (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Thess. 1:10; 4:16-17; 5:9).

3. The Lord also promised to come quickly (Gr. *tachy*, soon; cf. 1:1, 7; 2:16; 22:7, 12, 20; 2 Pet. 3:8).

"This can hardly be His return to earth described in Rev. 19:11-21, because this phase of His coming will be preceded by all the events described in chapters 6-18. A return to earth could not be characterized as 'soon' by any stretch of the imagination. It is rather an imminent event that will come suddenly and unexpectedly (Walvoord). Only this nearness of the Lord's coming to reward the faithful provides an effective motive to be tenacious (Alford; Moffatt)." ¹⁶⁸

"In light of the concept of the imminent coming of Christ and the fact that the New Testament does teach His imminent coming, we can conclude that the Pretribulation Rapture view is the only view of the Rapture of the church that comfortably fits the New Testament teaching of the imminent coming of Christ. It is the only view that can honestly say that Christ could return at any moment, because it alone teaches that Christ will come to rapture the church before the 70th week of Daniel 9 or the Tribulation period begins and that nothing else must happen before His return." ¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, pp. 288, 289. Showers, pp. 208-18, exegeted this verse fully and concluded that it implies a pretribulation rapture.

¹⁶⁸Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 290.

¹⁶⁹Showers, p. 149.

4. God will not just honor overcomers by erecting a pillar in their name in heaven, as was the custom in Philadelphia. He will make them pillars in the spiritual temple of God, the New Jerusalem (21:22; cf. Gal. 2:9; 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:4-10).¹⁷⁰

"When Solomon built the temple following his ascension to the throne, he had a worker of brass from Tyre construct two massive pillars for the porch. Solomon named one of these pillars 'Jachin,' meaning *establish*, and he named the other pillar 'Boaz,' meaning *strength* (I Kings 7:13-21). The overcomers in Philadelphia were promised future positions with Christ which appear to be described by the meanings of the names given to these two pillars. The promise to the overcomers that they would 'go no more out' refers to their fixed position as pillars in the temple; and with the two massive pillars in Solomon's temple in view, saying that overcoming Christians will be placed in the position of pillars in the temple is the same as saying that these Christians will occupy *sure, secure, firmly established* positions of *strength* and *power*, positions which will be realized when they rule and reign as co-heirs with Christ in the [millennial] kingdom."¹⁷¹

"In contrast to the fate of Eliakim [see comment on v. 7], who was like a peg that gave way, and the buildings that perished in Philadelphia's earthquakes, the victor is assured that his place in the city which comes down out of heaven is eternally secured."¹⁷²

5. Jesus Christ will identify with His faithful people. Since they have honored Him on earth He will acknowledge them in heaven (cf. 2:17; 14:1; 19:12). Writing one's name on something indicated ownership in John's day, as it does now. In the ancient world columns often bore the names of conquerors. In the pagan world devotees of certain gods often wrote the name of their god on their forehead (cf. Exod. 28:36). Scripture does not reveal Jesus Christ's new name elsewhere. Perhaps this name is a symbol of His character, which overcomers can appreciate only when we see Him (cf. 2:17; 3:5).

"The threefold occurrence of *onoma* ('name') is impressive and amounts to a threefold assurance of his identity with God."¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰For a study of the references to the temple in Revelation from a Reformed perspective, see Simon J. Kistemaker, "The Temple in the Apocalypse," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:3 (September 2000):433-41.

¹⁷¹Chitwood, p. 101.

¹⁷²Beasley-Murray, p. 102.

¹⁷³Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 293.

4. Exhortation 3:11b, 13

Since Jesus Christ's return is imminent the believers should remain faithful to Him so their detractors would not rob them of the reward that would be theirs for steadfast perseverance (cf. 2 John 8). The familiar closing charge (v. 13) reminds us again that the message of each of these seven letters is applicable to all churches.

Students of church history have seen the era during which the modern foreign missionary movement flourished, especially the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as similar to the Philadelphia church. During those years there were several revivals of return to God's Word. These took place under the leadership of the Puritans, the Wesleys, the Plymouth Brethren, and others. As the church at Philadelphia, these groups of believers were not flashy, but they were faithful.

G. THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA 3:14-22

Jesus Christ sent this letter to shake the Laodicean Christians out of their self-sufficient complacency and to exhort them to self-sacrifice for higher spiritual goals (cf. Col. 2:1-2, 4:16).

1. Destination and description of Christ 3:14

The last of the seven cities (modern Eski-hisar, "the old fortress") lay about 40 miles southeast of Philadelphia and 90 miles east of Ephesus. It was a wealthy town that specialized in banking, producing black woolen cloth, and health care. It had suffered a severe earthquake that had destroyed it, but its prosperous citizens had rebuilt it.

Jesus Christ called Himself the "Amen" (lit. So be it). We should probably understand this title as a testimony to His ability to produce what He predicts (cf. Isa. 65:16). As a "Witness," His testimony to the situation in Laodicea was trustworthy. The Laodiceans had a reputation for saying and doing whatever was necessary to preserve their own well-being.¹⁷⁴ In contrast Jesus spoke the truth. The "Beginning [Origin] of God's creation" sets forth His authority to pass judgment. The Laodiceans were creative, but Jesus alone was the Creator (cf. John 1:3; Col. 1:16).

2. Rebuke 3:15-17

This church received no commendation, a fact that makes this letter unique compared to the other six.

The deeds of the Laodicean Christians manifested their heart attitude. They were neither cold nor hot in their love for God, just lukewarm. Beverages are better either cold or hot. Similarly the Lord would rather that His people be cold or hot in their love for Him, not apathetic. The Laodiceans knew how the Lord felt because their city drinking water came

¹⁷⁴Tatford, pp. 143-44.

from a spring six miles to the south over an aqueduct, and it arrived disgustingly lukewarm.¹⁷⁵

"Neighboring Hierapolis had hot, spring water, valuable for its medicinal effects. In its journey to Laodicea it lost some of this heat and consequently medicinal value by the time it arrived either overland or by aqueduct in Laodicea. Nearby Colosse had cool, life-giving water that was refreshing as a beverage (Hemer)."¹⁷⁶

The Lord's spitting (lit. vomiting) His people out of His mouth (v. 16) does not mean they would lose their salvation. The Scriptures teach this possibility nowhere (cf. v. 19). This anthropomorphism simply indicates His intense disgust. He did not mean that He would rather we be spiritually cold than that we be spiritually lukewarm either. He did mean that He would rather we be spiritually refreshing or healthful, as cold or hot water, rather than that we be spiritually bland, as lukewarm water. This explanation seems more likely than the one that identifies the Laodiceans as unbelievers.

The Laodiceans enjoyed material prosperity (v. 17) that led them to a false sense of security and independence.¹⁷⁷ Spiritually they had great needs (cf. Rom. 7:24). This self-sufficient attitude is a constant danger when Christians live lives of ease and enjoy plenty.

3. Exhortation 3:18-19

Since they considered themselves to be rich but were spiritually poor Jesus urged them to "buy," implying self-sacrifice, the things they really needed (cf. Isa. 55:1). Instead of real gold they should buy "gold refined by fire," namely, pure spiritual riches (cf. Ps. 66:10; Prov. 17:3; Zech. 13:9; Luke 12:21; 1 Tim. 6:18; James 1:3; 2:5; 1 Pet. 1:7; 4:12). Instead of the black garments that were popular in Laodicea they should buy "white garments" that symbolize righteous conduct (19:8).¹⁷⁸ Instead of the eye salve that the Laodiceans produced and sold they should purchase spiritual "eye salve," probably a reference to the Word of God that enables us to see life realistically (cf. John 9:6; 1 John 2:20, 27).

The Lord reminded His readers that He said what He did because He loved them (cf. Prov. 3:11-12). They should, therefore, be zealous (Gr. *zeleue*, cf. *zestos*, "hot," vv. 15, 16) and repent (i.e., repent with zeal). The only way cold people can become hot in their love for the Lord is to repent (i.e., change their minds).

¹⁷⁵Beasley-Murray, p. 105.

¹⁷⁶Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 307. Cf. M. J. S. Rudwick and E. M. B. Green, "The Laodicean Lukewarmness," *Expository Times* 69 (1957-8):176-78; Hemer, pp. 432-40.

¹⁷⁷The expression "I am rich, and have become wealthy" is a literary device that inverts the natural sequence for emphasis (cf. v. 19; 5:2, 5; 10:4, 9; 12:10; 19:13). Here it stresses that the wealth attained came though self-exertion.

¹⁷⁸Mounce, p. 127.

4. Promise 3:20-22

In the context we note that God addressed well-known verse 20 to Christians.

"The first thing which a person *must* get fixed in his mind when studying the message to the Church in Laodicea is the fact that the Spirit of God is addressing Christians. . . .

"Too many people deal with certain acute problems which arise in the Christian life in a rather loose manner. When, for example, sin manifests itself in the life of an individual claiming to be a Christian, one of the most common ways to deal with the matter is to begin questioning the person's salvation. The thought usually centers around the premise that if a person is saved he will follow a certain course of action; and if he doesn't follow this course of action, his conduct reveals that he was never really saved in the first place. Such a thought, however, is completely contrary to any Scriptural teaching on salvation by grace through faith. It is a corruption of the pure gospel of the grace of God, for works have been introduced into a realm where works cannot exist (Cf. Eph. 2:8, 9; Rom. 11:6)."¹⁷⁹

It is the indifferent Christian that the Lord urged to open his heart's door and to invite Jesus Christ in for intimate fellowship.¹⁸⁰ When He enters, He takes whatever the individual may offer to Him, and He gives to that person out of His vast riches. The fellowship in view may anticipate participation in the marriage supper of the Lamb that will take place at the beginning of the Millennium (cf. Matt. 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:30).

This verse expresses a truth taught elsewhere in Scripture, namely, that Jesus Christ desires intimate fellowship with all people (cf. Mark 10:45; Luke 19:10; John 10:10; 1 Tim. 4:10). Consequently I believe it is appropriate to use it in evangelism.¹⁸¹ It expresses God's universal desire very graphically.

The privilege of reigning with Christ will be the portion of the overcomer (cf. Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:29-30; 1 Cor. 6:2-3; 2 Tim. 2:12).

Scholars have explained the relationship between Christ's throne and the Father's throne in two ways. Many interpreters believe they are the same throne (cf. 22:1).¹⁸² However this verse clearly distinguishes two thrones.¹⁸³ The Scriptures consistently present the

¹⁷⁹Chitwood, p. 105.

¹⁸⁰Mounce, p. 129. Another view (Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, pp. 321-23) is that Jesus was knocking on the eschatological door through which He will enter at His second coming. However this results in the unlikely figure of people opening this door for Jesus to enter His kingdom.

¹⁸¹See Tim Wiarda, "Revelation 3:20: Imagery and Literary Context," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38:2 (June 1995):203-12.

¹⁸²This is the view of covenant theologians (e.g., Mounce, p. 130) and progressive dispensationalists.

¹⁸³This is the view of normative dispensationalists (e.g., Walvoord, *The Revelation . . .*, p. 99; Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, pp. 325-26; et al).

Father's throne as in heaven and Christ's Davidic throne as on earth and His eternal throne as in heaven. Here Christ's Davidic (messianic, millennial) throne on earth and the Father's eternal throne in heaven seem to be in view.

This promise is the climax of all those held out to overcomers in chapters 2 and 3. We can choose not to live like kings now because we can live like kings one day. Again God invited all to listen and respond (v. 22).

Many students of Revelation have compared the Laodicean church to the church as it exists in the world today. Christendom (all professing Christians) appears wealthy and powerful, but it lacks life and love for Jesus Christ. Sadly this is also true to a lesser degree in the body of Christ.

"There is an interesting, often overlooked parallel between the *five warnings* in the Book of Hebrews and the *seven overcomers' promises* in the Book of Revelation. The warnings and the overcomers' promises both have the same end in view. The last warning has to do with the *birthright* (Heb. 12:14-17), and the last overcomers' promise has to do with the *throne* (Rev. 3:21). The successive thought in the warnings in the Book of Hebrews is that of Christians ultimately realizing their birthright—*sons* exercising the rights of primogeniture. The great burden of Hebrews is 'bringing many *sons* into glory' (Heb. 2:10). And the successive thought in the overcomers' promises in the Book of Revelation is that of Christians ultimately ascending the throne—co-heirs, companions, exercising power with Christ. The great burden of Revelation, chapters two and three is that of placing equipped Christians upon the throne with Christ."¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴Chitwood, pp. 138-39.

SYNOPSIS OF REVELATION 2 AND 3					
<i>Church and Passage</i>	<i>Description of Jesus Christ</i>	<i>Commen-dation</i>	<i>Criticism</i>	<i>Exhortation</i>	<i>Promise to the Overcomers</i>
Ephesus (2:1-7)	One who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands	Their deeds, toil, perseverance (twice), intolerance of wicked men, testing of professing apostles, endurance, and hatred of the deeds of the Nicolaitans	Left their first love	Remember your former position, repent, and repeat your first deeds.	Will receive permission to eat of the tree of life in God's paradise
Smyrna (2:8-11)	The first and the last, who was dead and has come to life	Endured tribulation, poverty, and blasphemy by professing Jews		Do not fear temporary suffering and tribulation, but remain faithful.	Will enjoy freedom from hurt by the second death
Pergamum (2:12-17)	One who has the sharp two-edged sword	Held fast Christ's name, and did not deny His faith	Some held the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans.	Repent or expect an attack from the sword of His mouth.	Would receive hidden manna, a white stone, and a new secret name on the stone
Thyatira (2:18-29)	The Son of God who has flaming eyes and burnished bronze feet	Their deeds, love, faith, service, perseverance and recent improvement in deeds	Their toleration of seductive, immoral, idolatrous, and impenitent Jezebel	The faithful should hold fast.	Gets authority to rule over the nations with Christ, and the morning star

SYNOPSIS OF REVELATION 2 AND 3					
<i>Church and Passage</i>	<i>Description of Jesus Christ</i>	<i>Commen- dation</i>	<i>Criticism</i>	<i>Exhortation</i>	<i>Promise to the Overcomers</i>
Sardis (3:1-6)	He who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars	Some had not soiled their garments.	They were dead, had incomplete deeds, and were asleep.	Wake up, strengthen what remains, remember what you heard and obey it, and repent.	Clothed in white garments, name retained in the book of life, and name confessed before the Father and His angels
Philadelphia (3:7-13)	He who is holy, true, has David's key, and permanently opens and shuts	Their deeds, a little power, had kept His word, had not denied His name, and had persevered		Hold fast what you have.	Made a pillar in God's temple that he will not leave; have the names of God, His city (the New Jerusalem), and Christ's name written on him
Laodicea (3:14-22)	The Amen, the faithful and true witness, and the source of God's creation		Lukewarm, self-sufficient, wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked	Buy from Christ refined gold, white garments, and eye salve. Repent. Open the door to Him.	Will sit down on Christ's throne with Him

Each of the seven letters in chapters 2 and 3 is applicable, as are all the other New Testament epistles. They apply to the local congregation that originally received each one and to all local congregations and all individual Christians since then.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵As you have opportunity to preach and teach the letters to the seven churches, I recommend Tatford's book as one I have found most helpful and concise. It opens up the meaning of the text by explaining the historical backgrounds of these churches and cities. This background information is helpful for correct

"Collectively, the seven messages form an indispensable part of the Apocalypse. In them are the practical lessons to be applied in the light of coming events in God's prophetic program. . . .

"These seven messages cannot be read apart from the rest of the Apocalypse, nor does the rest of the book mean anything without these seven. Chapters 2-3 explain why the rest of the book was written. The overall purpose is distinctly practical (cf. 1:3)."¹⁸⁶

However these letters have also proved prophetic of the history of Christianity following their writing. Most Christians in the first century may not have seen this, but one can hardly deny it now. It has become increasingly obvious as church history has unfolded. Chapters 2 and 3 are therefore prophetic as are the rest of the chapters of Revelation.¹⁸⁷ In saying this I am expressing the "historico-prophetic" interpretation of chapters 2 and 3.¹⁸⁸ Different views are that these chapters are only prophetic of conditions in the future day of the Lord or they are only historical and deal with first century situations exclusively. Further explanation of these views follows.

interpretation and appreciation of the allusions that the Lord made in almost every verse of chapters 2 and 3. Other good books on chapters 2 and 3 are by Hemer; William Landels, *The Victor's Sevenfold Reward: Being Discourses on the Promises of Our Lord to the Seven Churches*; Marcus Leone, *They Overcame: An Exposition of Revelation 1—3*; G. Campbell Morgan, *The Letters of Our Lord or First Century Messages to Twentieth Century Believers*; Ramsay; Richard C. Trench, *Commentary on the Epistles to the Seven Churches*; and Edwin M. Yamauchi, *The Archaeology of the New Testament Cities in Western Asia Minor*.

¹⁸⁶Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 327.

¹⁸⁷See M. J. Brunk, "The Seven Churches of Revelation Two and Three," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 126:503 (July-September 1969):240-46.

¹⁸⁸Smith, *A Revelation . . .*, pp. 61-62; Lange, p. 139; and many others held this view.

THREE VIEWS OF THE INTERPRETATION OF REVELATION 2—3¹⁸⁹

The Prophetical View

Statement: The seven churches addressed were not in existence in the first century but will come into being in the day of the Lord.¹⁹⁰

Arguments pro

Revelation 1:19 stresses the unity of the book. The whole book is a revelation of things yet future.

The connection of angels with these churches indicates that what is in view is Israel in the day of the Lord rather than the church. Elsewhere in Scripture, God associated angels with Israel (e.g., Dan. 10:21).

God did not call church leaders angels in the New Testament.

Tertullian (A.D. 145-220) and Epiphanius (ca. A.D. 367) wrote that churches did not exist in all the seven towns addressed when John wrote Revelation.

Responses

This verse may indicate a two or three-fold division of the contents only some of which may be prophetical. Or chapters 2 and 3 are prophetic of the church age.

God also associated angels with churches in the New Testament (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:10). Or these angels may be human messengers.

John used this title in Revelation to emphasize the divine origin of these seven letters.

These writers were combating unorthodox views of the Apocalypse in their writings. They were not denying the existence of churches in these towns then.

¹⁸⁹Based on Robert L. Thomas, "The Chronological Interpretation of Revelation 2—3," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124:496 (October-December 1967):321-31, with additions by Thomas L. Constable.

¹⁹⁰Advocates of this view include Bullinger, pp. 66-70; and Charles H. Welch, *This Prophecy*, pp. 59-61.

The Historical View

Statement: The seven churches addressed existed in the first century, and what characterized each of them has marked other local churches in various locations throughout church history.¹⁹¹

Arguments pro

This is the way we interpret the other New Testament epistles.

The Book of Revelation does not specifically identify the messages to the seven churches as prophetic.

Responses

God did not identify the other New Testament epistles as prophetic as He did these (1:19).

That they are prophetic is clear from 1:19 and the contents of chapters 2 and 3. Moreover history has shown they were prophetic.

¹⁹¹Advocates include F. Godet, *Studies in the New Testament*, pp. 303-4; Trench, pp. 307-8; Robert L. Thomas, "The Chronological . . .," pp. 327-31; idem, *Revelation 1—7*, pp. 505-15; and Leon Morris, p. 57.

The Historico-Prophetical View

Statement: The seven churches addressed were in existence in the first century, and what characterized each of them has marked other local churches in various locations throughout church history. However they also reveal the history of the church from the time John wrote to the Rapture in seven successive periods.¹⁹²

Arguments pro

Responses

There is a correspondence between seven successive periods of church history and these seven letters.

The correspondence is arbitrary and contrived as is clear from the differences in the limits of each period as expounded by various advocates of this view.

God said the whole of Revelation is prophetic (1:19), and to exclude chapters 2 and 3 seems unwarranted.

Revelation 1:19 means that the things "hereafter" are prophetic, and those things begin in 4:1.

The Rapture could not be imminent if chapters 2 and 3 reveal the history of the church from the first century to the twentieth or beyond.

Chapters 2 and 3 do not predict that the church would pass through these stages before the Rapture. It is only by looking back that we can see they were prophetic.

This pattern of church history rests on a selective reading of history.

The correspondence is legitimate because there is adequate historical evidence to support this view.

These prophetic parallels hold true only for western Christianity.

Western Christianity has been the major leading branch of the church throughout history.

A general scheme of the periods of western civilization that correspond to the conditions described in each of the letters to the seven churches is as follows.

¹⁹² Advocates include Lange, p. 139; Arno C. Gaebelien, *The Revelation*, p. 33; Smith, *A Revelation . . .*, pp. 61-62; William Kelly, *Lectures on the Revelation*, p. 24; J. N. Darby, *Notes on the Apocalypse*, p. 11; Tatford, p. 106; F. W. Grant, *The Prophetic History of the Church*; Joseph A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, p. 64; C. I. Scofield, ed., *Scofield Reference Bible* (1917 ed.), pp.1331-32; H. A. Ironside, *Lectures on the Revelation*, pp. 35-36; Walvoord, *The Revelation . . .*, p. 52; and McGee, 5:900-26.

THE PROPHETIC HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN REVELATION 2 AND 3			
2:1-7	Ephesus	Apostolic Era	ca. A.D. 33-64
2:8-11	Smyrna	Period of Persecution	ca. A.D. 64-313
2:12-17	Pergamum	Era of Official Patronage	ca. A.D. 313-606
2:18-29	Thyatira	Middle Ages	ca. A.D. 606-1520
3:1-6	Sardis	Protestant Reformation	ca. A.D. 1520-1750
3:7-13	Philadelphia	Missionary Era	ca. A.D. 1750-1900
3:14-22	Laodicea	Modern Period	ca. A.D. 1900-????

"It is said that the seven churches of Revelation 1—3 picture the course of the age, and therefore early Christians could not have held to the doctrine under consideration [i.e., the doctrine of Christ's imminent return]. While it is true that these churches bear a marked resemblance to the various periods of church history, and while granting that this is a legitimate application, it must not be forgotten that John was writing to seven existing, although representative, congregations. All these varying shades of Christian testimony, or of departure from, were present in John's day throughout the early church. John saw no need for projecting the second coming into the far distant future, for he saw himself one of the chief witnesses to the soon coming of Christ, the closing words penned in the book of Revelation being 'Surely I come quickly [*tachy*, soon]. Even so, come, Lord Jesus' (Rev. 22:20)."¹⁹³

III. THE REVELATION OF THE FUTURE 4:1—22:5

John recorded the rest of this book to reveal those aspects of the future that God wanted His people to know (cf. 1:19). He revealed the events in chapters 4—18 to enable the readers to understand events leading up to Jesus Christ's second coming.

¹⁹³Stanton, p. 116.

"The closest modern parallel to this mode of communication is the political cartoon, which has gained an established place in the popular press all over the world."¹⁹⁴

Scholars have proposed many interpretations of the remaining chapters (4—22), but the only ones that make much sense of the text are those that see them as predicting events yet future. This is the futuristic approach. Other approaches are the following. The *idealist* (or allegorical) approach sees these chapters as containing the story of the conflict between God and Satan in the present age with a symbolic presentation of God's ultimate victory. The *preterist* approach sees these chapters as a picture of conflicts that took place in the early history of the church. Some preterist interpreters see these chapters as a symbolic revelation of God's principles of dealing with humankind throughout history. The *historical* approach interprets these chapters as a history of the church from Jesus Christ's first advent to His second advent. A major problem with the approaches just named is that their advocates do not agree with one another on the interpretation of individual passages. Only the *futuristic* approach has resulted in consistency in the interpretation of the major interpretive problems. This approach also has the support of 1:19 that promises a revelation of things yet future.

Whereas chapters 4—18 present events culminating in Jesus Christ's second coming, there are clues in the text that not everything in these chapters is in chronological order. I will point out these clues in the exposition to follow. There is also evidence in the text that as the time of Christ's return approaches predicted events will occur more closely together. The revelation of these events becomes correspondingly fuller. Jesus' second coming is the true climax of this section of the book and is the true climax of history on planet earth.

A. INTRODUCTION TO THE JUDGMENTS OF THE TRIBULATION CHS. 4—5

Chapters 4 and 5 prepared John, and they prepare the reader, for the outpouring of judgments on the earth that follow. They present the place from which these judgments originate and the Person from whom they come. Before revealing the judgments God will send on the earth (chs. 6—18), He gave John a second vision (cf. 1:10—3:22). This vision revealed what will take place in heaven (chs. 4—5) following the Rapture and the judgment seat of Christ (1 Pet. 4:17-18). He did this to enable the readers to view coming earthly events from a heavenly perspective.

One writer proposed that God revealed the whole heavenly court scene in chapters 4—5 as a cosmic temple similar to Israel's Old Testament temple. The court scene describes a divine council in session. In it God decides the worthiness of the Lamb to receive the covenant inheritance, symbolized by the seven-sealed scroll, by a process of investigative judgment.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴Beasley-Murray, p. 16.

¹⁹⁵R. Dean Davis, "The Heavenly Court Scene of Revelation 4—5" (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1986).

"Chapters 4—5 may be viewed as the fulcrum of the Revelation. In relation to what has gone before they provide a fuller understanding of him who dominates the letters to the churches. In relation to the rest of the book they serve the double purpose of initiating the series of judgments which lead to the final advent and descent of the city of God to earth, and of supplying the form for the series of messianic judgments (the seven seals) which immediately follow. In this respect these chapters constitute the pivot of the structure which holds the book together, for the rest of the visions dovetail into this main structure. Yet the vision of chapters 4—5 is also a self-contained whole, serving a highly important function regarding the message of the book. It reveals the ground of assurance that God's gracious purpose for the universe will come to pass, and so it is dominated by praise and adoration."¹⁹⁶

"No part of the Scripture is more calculated to evoke worship than these two chapters of John's prophecy."¹⁹⁷

1. The throne in heaven ch. 4

This chapter focuses on God the Father, the Creator who hands over the seven-sealed scroll. Chapter 5 emphasizes God the Son, the Redeemer who receives and opens the scroll.

Christ's invitation 4:1

"These things" refer to the revelation of the messages to the seven churches (chs. 2—3; cf. 1:19). After John had received these messages, he received a vision of heaven in which Jesus Christ invited him (cf. 1:10, 12-16) to enter heaven to receive a revelation of future events. John had been viewing Christ in authority over the churches and their messengers (1:10—3:22), but now he would see a throneroom in heaven. "After these things I looked" is a clause that, with variations, introduces a new vision each time it occurs in Revelation (cf. 7:1, 9; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1). What John evidently saw in this vision was a door standing ajar (Gr. *eneogmene*) in the sky (cf. Ezek. 1:1). A voice, probably the glorified Christ's (cf. 1:10; Exod. 19:20, 24-25), bid him enter through the door into heaven. This is not an invitation for the church to enter heaven at the Rapture but an invitation for John to enter heaven in his vision. From that new vantage point he would receive new revelations (cf. Rom. 10:6; 2 Cor. 12:1-2). "Must" (*dei*) indicates that the events God was about to reveal will indeed happen. The word indicates divine necessity here as it does frequently in the Gospels, especially Luke's Gospel (Luke 2:49; 4:43; 13:33; 17:25; 19:5, 22; 22:37; 24:25-27, 44-46; cf. Acts 2:23-24).

¹⁹⁶Beasley-Murray, p. 108.

¹⁹⁷Ibid., p. 109.

The glory of God 4:2-8

4:2 As soon as John heard this invitation, he entered another ecstatic state (cf. 1:10). His body remained on the earth, but he saw a throne and someone sitting on it in heaven (cf. Ezek. 11:1, 5). "Throne" occurs 45 times in Revelation and only 15 times in the rest of the New Testament. The tense of the Greek verb translated "sitting" (present participle here and in v. 3) suggests continuous sitting. The person on the throne was undoubtedly God the Father (cf. v. 5; 5:5, 7; 6:16; 7:10; 19:4). John apparently saw a very large room with a throne in the center of it and someone sitting on the throne (cf. 1 Kings 22:19; Ps. 11:4; 47:8; Isa. 6:1; Ezek. 1:26; Dan. 7:9).

"Daniel, the prophet, saw the same glorious sight (Daniel 7): the Ancient of Days enthroned, and 'One like unto a son of man brought near before him' and given 'dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, and languages should serve him.'"¹⁹⁸

This was probably a room in the heavenly temple since later John also saw the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant there (8:3; 11:19).

"The major focus of chapter 4 upon the throne is its symbolism of God's sovereignty exercised in judgment. From this point of origination proceeds the outworking of God's wrath described in the body of the Apocalypse (cf. 6:10, 16-17; 14:7; 15:1; 16:5, 19; 18:20; 19:2, 11). Though evil reigns for a time on earth, God will ultimately prevail."¹⁹⁹

Some pretribulational commentators have seen a representation of the rapture of the church in this verse. They view John entering heaven in his vision as symbolic of Christians entering heaven at the Rapture.²⁰⁰ This is probably reading too much into the text since it was John himself who entered heaven, and he entered heaven in a vision, not in reality.

The absence of specific reference to the Rapture in Revelation has led some interpreters to conclude that it will occur at the Second Coming, following the Tribulation judgments. Yet the differences between the Rapture and the Second Coming, as various Scriptures refer to these events, make this extremely improbable (cf. John 14:1-3, 1 Cor. 15:50-58, and 1 Thess. 4:13-18 with Rev. 19). The unusual absence of reference to the Rapture may be due to God's purpose in chapters 4—19, namely, to focus on the judgments coming on unbelievers culminating in the Second

¹⁹⁸Newell, p. 84. Dan. 7:13-14; cf. Dan. 7:9.

¹⁹⁹Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, pp. 339-40.

²⁰⁰E.g., Ironside, p. 80.

Coming. There are 20 references to the church in chapters 1—3 but none until 22:17. This strongly implies that the church is not on earth during the Tribulation. Evidently the Rapture takes place between chapters 3 and 4.

- 4:3 In what sense is God like jasper and sardius (carnelian, NIV) stones? The jasper gem that John saw was evidently a diamond (cf. 21:11), not what we identify as a jasper today.²⁰¹ The sardius, named for the town of Sardis where it was discovered, is fiery red. These colored gems probably symbolize the holiness and justice of God (cf. 1:14; 10:1; Ezek. 1:4, 26-28; 8:2; Dan. 7:9).

"Perhaps it is better to think of this resemblance as denoting His anger as a reaction of His holy nature in view of the prevailing sinfulness of man and in consequence of which He is about to send judgment upon the earth, that 'the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.'"²⁰²

The "rainbow" around the throne was apparently the shape of a rainbow rather than the color of one since this one was green. This bow completely encircled the throne, perhaps resembling a halo. It evidently symbolizes God's mercy that surrounds His rule (cf. Gen. 9:8-17). This rainbow may have been various shades of green suggesting the variegated mercy and grace of God.²⁰³ Another possibility is that the emerald (Gr. *smaragd*) was a crystal that served as a prism and so yielded a rainbow of colors.²⁰⁴

"Usually, a rainbow appears *after* the storm; but here, we see it *before* the storm."²⁰⁵

- 4:4 John saw 24 thrones surrounding the main throne in what is obviously a subordinate relationship. The throne is a place of rule. Evidently these elders will have positions of authority under God.

The identity of the 24 elders (Gr. *presbyteros*) is difficult to determine. There have been two basic views: men and angels. If they are human beings, they may be representatives of Israel, the church, or both groups.²⁰⁶ If angels, they could be angelic representatives of either of the Old Testament priestly orders (cf. 1 Chron. 24:4-5; 25:9-13), or angelic

²⁰¹Charles, 1:114; Beasley-Murray, p. 113; Mounce, p. 134.

²⁰²Smith, *A Revelation . . .*, p. 103.

²⁰³Swete, p. 68; Alford, 4:596; Bullinger, p. 217; Homer Hailey, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 168.

²⁰⁴Beasley-Murray, p. 113.

²⁰⁵Wiersbe, 2:582.

²⁰⁶Smith, *A Revelation . . .*, p. 104; Walvoord, *The Revelation . . .*, pp. 106-7; Alford, 4:596; J. D. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, pp. 207-9; John F. McGahey, "The Identity of the Twenty-Four Elders," (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1954); Ironside, p. 82; Barclay, *The Revelation . . .*, 1:19-25; Tenney, pp. 189-90; Swete, pp. 68-69; Stanton, pp. 200-4.

representatives of the faithful of all ages, or a special group or class of angels.²⁰⁷

I think the 24 elders are either 12 human leaders of Israel and 12 human leaders of the church or a special group of 24 angelic leaders who represent the 12 patriarchs of Israel and the 12 apostles of the church. All that John wrote about them fits angels, and some of what he wrote could fit some men. Their song of praise seems to set them apart from those purchased by Christ's blood (5:9-10). However, "elder" is a term used nowhere else in the Bible to describe angels. Their number may relate to the 24 priestly orders in Israel that worshipped and served the Lord (1 Chron. 23:6; 24:7-18). They evidently serve God by executing His will in the universe, but they do so in rank under the four living beings of verse 6.

White apparel is the characteristic dress of angels (cf. Matt. 28:3; Mark 16:5; John 20:12; Acts 1:10). These elders wore crowns (Gr. *stephanous*). This Greek word often refers to a victor's crown (2:10; 3:11), but John also used it to describe a crown that represents authority (6:2; 9:7; 12:1; 14:14).

4:5 The lightning and thunder are evidently portents of judgment to come and symbolize God judging (8:5; 11:19; 16:18; cf. Exod. 19:16).

"In Revelation the symbols of thunder and lightning are always connected with a temple scene and mark an event of unusual import."²⁰⁸

The wrath of God proceeds from this throne. The seven burning lamps (or torches, Gr. *lampades*, cf. *lychniai*, "lampstands," 1:12, 20) probably picture divine preparedness for battle against wickedness (cf. Judg. 7:16, 20; Nah. 2:3-4; Isa. 4:4; Mal. 4:1).²⁰⁹ The seven spirits of God (i.e., the seven principle angels of God, cf. 1:4; 3:1) will carry out this judgment. The picture is of these torches ready to go from God's presence to the earth where they will consume wickedness during the Tribulation.

4:6 The clear glass-like sea before the throne may represent the need for cleansing before approaching God. The laver (called a "sea" in the Old Testament, e.g., 1 Kings 7:23, et al.) served the need for cleansing in the Israelite tabernacle and temple. Perhaps the fact that this sea is solid indicates that those who can approach God's throne have attained a fixed

²⁰⁷Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 348; Bullinger, p. 219; Lange, p. 152; James Moffatt, "The Revelation of St. John the Divine," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 5:378; Beckwith, pp. 498-99; John Phillips, *Exploring Revelation*, p. 103; Alexander Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, p. 92; Ladd, p. 75; Beasley-Murray, p. 114. See Aune, pp. 287-92, for a helpful summary of the views.

²⁰⁸Mounce, p. 136.

²⁰⁹Seiss, p. 103.

state of holiness by God's grace.²¹⁰ Perhaps the sea represents the forces opposed to God's will and His people. This is what the sea symbolized in the ancient Near East. John now saw these forces under God's sovereign control (cf. Exod. 24:10; Ezek. 1:22, 26).²¹¹ The best explanation seems to be that this sea pictures some type of firmament that separates God in his holiness and purity from all of His sinful creation (cf. Gen. 1:7; Exod. 24:10-11; 1 Kings 7:23; Ps. 104:3; Ezek. 1:22, 26).²¹²

The four living "creatures" seem to be angelic beings that reflect the attributes of God. They form an inner circle and surround the throne and God (cf. Ezek. 1:12), so they must constitute an exalted order of angelic beings. They appear similar to the seraphim (Isa. 6:2) and even more like the cherubim (Ezek. 1:4-14; 9:3; 10), though because of their differences they appear to be in a class by themselves. They appear to have a judicial function (cf. 6:1, 3, 5, 7) and to have some connection with animate creation (cf. vv. 9-11; 15:7). Their many eyes evidently symbolize their penetrating intelligence that makes them immediately aware of whatever is happening that affects their judicial responsibility (cf. Ezek. 1:18; 10:12).²¹³

4:7 The four creatures represent four classes of created beings: wild beasts, domesticated animals, human beings, and flying creatures. Together they may picture all creation praising God, or God's sovereign control over all aspects of His creation, or both.

Each creature also seems to possess different qualities that are appropriate in their service of God. John described these as the outstanding qualities of animals that everyone can identify. Lions are strong (cf. Ps. 103:20), oxen are servants (cf. Heb. 1:14), men have intelligence (cf. Luke 15:10), and eagles are swift (cf. Dan. 9:21).

"The four forms suggest whatever is noblest, strongest, wisest, and swiftest in animate nature."²¹⁴

Some of the early church fathers equated these creatures with the four Gospels, but they had different opinions about which beings represented which Gospels. Some commentators have taken this further and have suggested that each creature represents a different aspect of Christ in each Gospel. Others take the beings as symbolizing attributes of God. Still others connect them with the four chief signs of the zodiac. Some believe they represent Israel because there is some connection with the pictures on

²¹⁰Strauss, p. 134.

²¹¹Johnson, p. 463

²¹²Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 353.

²¹³*Ibid.*, pp. 358-59.

²¹⁴Swete, p. 71.

the standards of Israel's tribes (cf. Num. 2:2, 10, 18, 25). Others see them as representing four outstanding apostles or other glorified men. Yet none of these interpretations seems valid.

- 4:8 These creatures seem similar to the seraphim (lit. burning ones) of Isaiah 6:2-3 in that they each have six wings. Their many eyes suggest alertness, comprehensive knowledge, and constant vigilance (cf. Ezek. 10:12). "Around and within" probably means that they had eyes even on the undersides of their wings so they could move their wings without interrupting their vision. Their movements did not detract from their constant vigilance. They ascribe holiness to God day and night, namely, constantly, though not necessarily without stopping (cf. 1 Thess. 2:9; 5:17; 2 Thess. 3:8).

"In Hebrew, the double repetition of a word adds emphasis, while the rare threefold repetition designates the superlative and calls attention to the infinite holiness of God—the quality of God felt by creatures in his presence as awesomeness or fearfulness (Ps. 111:9: 'Holy and awesome is his name.')"²¹⁵

The focus of their worship is on God's holiness, His omnipotence, and His eternity.

"This continual song from the four living beings underscores the central role of the one sitting upon the throne in the present setting. As the absolutely holy one, He is thoroughly entitled and has ample might to initiate stringent measures against His own creation in order to return it to its original holy state."²¹⁶

The worship of God 4:9-11

- 4:9 Whenever it is appropriate and possible the four living creatures give praise to eternal God. They glorify and honor Him for His perfections, and they thank Him for His great works, especially His creation (v. 11).
- 4:10 The 24 elders likewise fall down before Him out of reverence. When the crowned elders prostrate themselves before God and cast their crowns at His feet, these rulers humbly acknowledge His sovereignty and His right to receive worship. Casting their crowns at His feet symbolizes the willing subjection of their power to His superior authority.

²¹⁵Johnson, p. 463.

²¹⁶Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 363.

When a victorious athlete returned home from the games and participated in a final celebration, he would ceremoniously offer the wreath or crown that he had earned to his deity.²¹⁷ The Apostle Paul said he wanted to make sure he did nothing that would result in his losing his reward (1 Cor. 9:27). He also used rewards as a motivation to urge Christians to serve Jesus Christ faithfully (1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:10; et al.). These factors have created problems for some believers. Is it not selfish to want to gain a reward? Is this not an unworthy motive for living the Christian life? I believe the answer lies in this verse. Here the 24 elders cast their crowns at the feet of the Father in worship. Since a crown is something we will give back to the Lord in worship, the desire for a crown need not be a selfish motivation. Indeed the desire to present one's life work of faithful service as a gift to the Savior is a very unselfish and God-honoring motive.

A victor's crown is symbolic of the fact that the judge has declared the athlete victorious. Anyone can go out and buy a trophy in a store, but a trophy received as a reward for victory in competition has much greater value because of what it represents. Christians will receive crowns for finishing the race set before us faithfully, not first (i.e., before others). We do not compete against fellow believers, but we compete to overcome our spiritual enemies, namely, the world, the flesh, and the devil.

4:11 The elders' song is similar to that of the four living beings, but it focuses more on the wonders of God's creation as the evidence of his glory and power.²¹⁸ It is also directed to God directly.²¹⁹ "Worthy art thou" and "our Lord and God" were phrases that pagans used to worship the emperor in John's day.²²⁰ "Because of Thy will" directs praise to God for the ultimate cause of creation.²²¹ Probably "they existed, and were created" simply credits God for the existence of all things and then stresses the fact that He brought them into existence.²²²

The total impression that this highly symbolic vision presents seems clear even though the interpretation of some of the symbols may not be as obvious. The angelic creatures closest to God will bow before God and give Him the honor He so rightly deserves.²²³ We need to see all that follows in this revelation (chs. 5—22) in the light of the character of God manifested in this vision. God is perfectly holy, just, gracious, righteous, pure, omnipotent, eternal, and sovereign. This should help us to accept the coming revelation that He will wipe out huge segments of humanity in the future.

²¹⁷Ibid., p. 349.

²¹⁸William Milligan, *The Book of Revelation*, vol. 25 of *The Expositor's Bible*, pp. 74-75.

²¹⁹Mounce, p. 140.

²²⁰Hanns Lilje, *The Last Book of the Bible*, p. 108.

²²¹Stott, p. 167.

²²²Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 368.

²²³See Mazie Nakhro, "The Manner of Worship according to the Book of Revelation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:630 (April-June 2001):165-80. This article identifies the reasons for worship and the manner of worship in Revelation.

2. The Lamb on the throne ch. 5

John next recorded the revelation of the sealed scroll and its recipient. He did so to continue the revelation of what will be going on in heaven before God pours out the judgments to follow on the earth (chs. 6—18). This chapter continues the vision of God in chapter 4.

The description of the scroll 5:1

John also saw a book (scroll) on God's "right hand"—suggesting its source, His authority, and power adequate to translate its contents into action—as He sat on the throne. This scroll was the focus of John's attention in this chapter, and it is what Jesus Christ opens in chapter 6 resulting in the judgments that will come upon the earth. Its contents comprise almost all the revelation that will follow. It was so full of words that John could see writing on the outside as well as on the inside of the scroll (cf. Ezek. 2:10). Someone, probably God, had sealed it with seven seals, suggesting the profound nature of the revelation it contained.²²⁴ The perfect number of seals may also hint at the absolute inviolability of the scroll.²²⁵ In John's day people used a seal to keep the contents of a document secret until some authoritative person broke the seal. In this case after Jesus broke the first seal the scroll unrolled until the second seal made it impossible to open it further. Then He had to break the second seal that revealed more of the contents and so on. Probably the seals were on the edge of the scroll. The book contained the prophecies that follow. It may represent the book of prophecies God instructed Daniel to seal until the end times (Dan. 12:4, 9).

The opener of the scroll 5:2-5

- 5:2 The identity of the strong angel is probably unknowable. His loud voice indicated his authority and the importance of what he said. One with sufficient authority was necessary to open (Gr. *anoixai*) the scroll and by breaking its seals to unleash the judgments on the world that it contained. Any prophet could have revealed this information, but it took someone with adequate power to execute the events foretold as well as to reveal them. The "and" (Gr. *kai*) is probably epexegetical, meaning "even."
- 5:3 No created being (cf. Phil. 2:10) had authority to break the seals or even to learn of God's plans contained in the scroll—no one in heaven, on earth, or in the place of departed spirits.

"What simpler and more sublime way of picturing God's ultimate sovereignty over all history could be found than this picture of the scroll resting in the hand of God?"

²²⁴Charles, 1:138. Roman law required that people seal wills seven times because they were very important documents (Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars*, pp. 182-83).

²²⁵Mounce, p. 142.

However strong evil becomes, however fierce be the satanic evils that assail God's people on earth, history still rests in God's hand."²²⁶

- 5:4 John's continual weeping reflected his sorrow that the revelation of God's plans and their execution would remain hidden and postponed because no one had sufficient authority to open the scroll.

"He did not want to see God's vindication of His people as a part of the OT Messianic hope deferred for an undetermined period . . ."²²⁷

- 5:5 One of the 24 elders comforted John with the news that Jesus Christ would open the scroll (cf. Luke 7:13; 8:52). He had achieved victory over all God's enemies and therefore had the authority to open the scroll and to release its contents. The "Lion . . . of Judah" (Gen. 49:9) and the "Root [offspring] of David" (Isa. 11:1, 10; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Matt. 22:42-43; Rom. 15:12) are both titles of the divine Messiah who would fulfill the Old Testament promises of salvation and rule.²²⁸ As God's ultimate Anointed One, Jesus alone possessed the authority necessary for this task. He overcame Satan, sin, and death so He could implement God's purposes for the future that this scroll revealed.

The worship of the Lamb 5:6-14

- 5:6 As with our dreams, John's vision contained some unusual features. John saw the Messiah as a Lamb.²²⁹ The Lamb is a symbol of Jesus Christ at His first advent, meek and submissive to a sacrificial death as our substitute (Isa. 53:7; John 1:36; 21:15).²³⁰ The Lion is a symbol of Him at His second advent, powerful and aggressively judging the world in righteousness (Ps. 2).

John saw the Lamb now in the center of all the angelic creatures gathered around the throne as the central character and most important personage in the entire heavenly scene (cf. 3:21; 4:6; 7:17). The Lamb was standing, ready to complete His work bearing the marks of His death. His self-sacrifice led to His supreme power.

²²⁶Ladd, pp. 82-83.

²²⁷Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 386.

²²⁸This is the only place in the New Testament where they occur together, however.

²²⁹The diminutive form of *amnos* ("lamb," namely, *arnion*) enhances the contrast with the lion. The lion is a picture of strength and majesty, but this lamb was meek and gentle. Christ combines both sets of characteristics.

²³⁰John is the only New Testament writer who described Jesus as the Lamb, though Peter came close in 1 Peter 1:19.

"In one brilliant stroke John portrays the central theme of NT revelation—victory through sacrifice."²³¹

He had seven horns representing the fullness of His power. The horn is a common Old Testament symbol for power or strength, and it came to represent kingly authority (Num. 23:22; Deut. 33:17; 1 Sam. 2:1; 2 Sam. 22:3; 1 Kings 22:11; Ps. 75:4; 132:17; Dan. 7:20-21; 8:5). Thus the Lamb is the all powerful warrior and king. The Lamb also had seven eyes representing the fullness of His divine wisdom and discernment (Zech. 4:10). His eyes are the seven Spirits of God (i.e., the seven principle angels of God). That is, they communicate to Christ all that transpires. The Lamb is, nonetheless, omniscient as well as omnipotent.

An alternative interpretation, which I favor, is that the clause "which are the seven Spirits" refers to both the seven horns and the seven eyes. In this case John may have meant that the Lamb had the seven spirits, who are powerful and perceptive, at His disposal.

- 5:7 Next John saw God the Father on the throne and the Lamb (evidently now in human form) coming and taking the scroll out of His right hand.²³² Clearly this symbolizes a transfer of authority from the Father to the Son to reveal the future and to execute judgment (cf. 1:1).

"It has been frequently recognized that the vision of chapter 5 gives us a Christian prophet's version of the enthronement ceremony known to the ancient world, when its potentates ascended their thrones. Here the king is the Christ, his domain the universe, and his throne the throne of God [cf. Phil. 2:6-11]. . . . The steps of the ancient enthronement are commonly described as exaltation, presentation, enthronement. If we apply these to chapter 5, the exaltation must be seen in the conquest of the Lamb referred to in 5:5, the presentation in verse 6, and the bestowal of authority in verse 7."²³³

- 5:8 This transfer precipitated an outpouring of praise for the Lamb because it signaled that Christ would begin judging. While the four living creatures and 24 elders prostrated themselves in worship, only the elders had harps (lyres) and bowls.²³⁴ They used the harps to praise God in song (Ps. 33:2; 98:5).²³⁵

²³¹Mounce, p. 144.

²³²This is evidently a dramatic use of the perfect tense of the verb *eilephen* ("took;" Robertson, 6:335).

²³³Beasley-Murray, p. 110.

²³⁴This is clear in the Greek text from the gender of *kekastos*, translated "having."

²³⁵This is the only place in Scripture where angels praise God with harps.

John explained that the bowls contained the prayers of God's people that are as the fragrant aroma of burning incense to Him (cf. Ps. 141:2; Luke 1:10). In the Old Testament the offering of incense was a priestly prerogative (Num. 16:6-7), so these angels were functioning in a priestly capacity. The Jews believed that angels carried human prayers to God (cf. 8:3).²³⁶ The prayers offered are probably all those as yet unanswered petitions that people have prayed asking God to judge unrighteousness including, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven" (cf. 5:10; 6:10; 8:3-5; Matt. 6:10; Luke 18:7-8).²³⁷

- 5:9 The Lamb's receiving authority from God to advance God's plan of the ages led these 28 angels to sing a new (Gr. *kainen*, lit. fresh, distinctive in quality, rather than recent) song of praise. It may be new in the sense that it celebrates His death that inaugurated a new covenant.²³⁸ However, I think it was probably new in the sense that it represented new praise for deliverance about to take place.

"This [i.e., "a new song"] is a well-known expression in the psalms, relating to songs sung on festal occasions and celebrating new mercies from God, especially his deliverances from distress (e.g., Ps. 40:1, 98:1). It receives a deeper meaning in Isaiah 42:10, where the new song relates to the new and greater deliverance which the Lord is about to make in the earth."²³⁹

In this song the Lamb receives honor as being worthy in view of four things. The first is His death. The second is the purchase (redemption) of a people for God by His death including those yet to be saved (cf. 14:2-3; 15:2-4). People from every branch of the human family will make up this company (cf. Gen. 10:5, 20, 31). This does not mean that all will be saved because Jesus died for all, of course. Only those who appropriate the benefits of Christ's death by faith will be. Tribes, tongues, peoples, and nations represent divisions of humanity based on lineage, language, race, and political orientation. Together these terms describe the universal nature of the redeemed people of God.

- 5:10 The third reason for praise is the creation of a kingdom and priests (a priestly kingdom) for God by the Lamb's death (cf. 1 Pet. 2:5, 9). Priesthood involves immediate access into God's presence for praise and worship as well as the privilege of priestly service. The fourth is the blessing of His people by allowing them to rule on the earth (during the Millennium).

²³⁶Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, p. 825.

²³⁷Ladd, p. 89.

²³⁸Mounce, p. 147.

²³⁹Beasley-Murray, pp. 126-27.

Some translations render this song in the first person ("You have redeemed *us* . . .," 2:8, AV). Others put it in the third person ("You have redeemed *men* . . .," e.g., NASB, NIV).²⁴⁰ The second reading is better, and it harmonizes with the identification of all these creatures as angels. These creatures offer worship to God for man's salvation.

5:11 An innumerable host of angels now joined the four creatures and 24 elders in ascribing worth to the Lamb (cf. Dan. 7:10; Ps. 68:17-18; Matt. 2:13). The word order "myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands" may seem anticlimactic.

"The word order is deliberate and the resultant anticlimax brings even more emphasis to the expression. When ten thousand is multiplied by itself, even this does not match the number of angels involved. The leftover still comes to a figure amounting to a thousand multiplied by itself. This is an apocalyptic symbol for countless thousands of angels who lift their voices in this great doxology."²⁴¹

5:12 The Lamb deserves all power, riches, wisdom, might, honor, glory, and blessing. All seven qualities belong intrinsically to Christ.

"The angels use seven expressions (the perfect number is probably significant) to indicate the wonder of the Lamb."²⁴²

The repetition of "and" (Gr. *kai*) between each quality brings special emphasis to each one individually.²⁴³

5:13 In his vision John saw every creature giving praise to God and to the Lamb. The creatures in view must be intelligent beings who can appreciate God and the Lamb, not the stars, planets, and animals. This probably involved a forward (proleptic) look to the end of the history of planet earth when every creature will bow the knee to Jesus Christ (cf. 5:10; Phil. 2:8-11).²⁴⁴

²⁴⁰This variation reflects a difference in the Greek texts that underlie these translations. I prefer the text family used as a basis for the NASB and NIV translations.

²⁴¹Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, pp. 403-4. Cf. Lenski, p. 210; Rienecker, p. 825.

²⁴²Morris, p. 101.

²⁴³This is a literary device called polysyndeton. It "produces the impression of extensiveness and abundance by means of an exhaustive summary" (F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, par. 460 [3]).

²⁴⁴There is much proleptic revelation in this book, as will become clear. God often gave John previews of things further ahead in the future than the future events that he was then considering.

"In these two chapters [4 and 5], the sequence of hymns shows that the first two are addressed to God, the next two to the Lamb, and the last one to both. There is also a gradual enlargement in the size of the choirs. The internal movement also builds as the last hymn is sung by 'every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth' to 'him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb' (5:13)."²⁴⁵

". . . that blessing and that thanksgiving are the one gift that we who have nothing can give to Him who possesses all."²⁴⁶

"In all three doxologies the repeated use of *kai* ["and"] heaps up the ascriptions like a great tower of praise."²⁴⁷

5:14 The worship culminated in John's vision with the four creatures saying "Amen" repeatedly after the vast crowd fell silent. The elders worshipped by prostrating themselves before God's throne (cf. 4:10).

These chapters (4—5) present heaven, God's dwelling place, as a real place. John saw God receiving great honor there surrounded by innumerable angelic worshippers. Even though John saw a vision, it was a vision of something that truly exists. We may be able to see it and the individuals said to be there someday.

In chapters 4—20, John described what he saw in heaven and on earth. The following chart identifies which place was in view in each of the sections that compose these chapters.

THE FOCUS OF JOHN'S VISIONS IN CHAPTERS 4—20	
In Heaven	On Earth
The heavenly throne (ch. 4)	
The Lamb on the throne (ch. 5)	
	The first four seal judgments (6:1-8)
The fifth seal judgment (6:9-11)	
	The sixth seal judgment (6:12-17)
	The sealing of the 144,000 witnesses (7:1-8)
The great multitude (7:9-17)	

²⁴⁵Johnson, p. 464.

²⁴⁶Barclay, *The Revelation . . .*, 1:227.

²⁴⁷Lenski, p. 212.

THE FOCUS OF JOHN'S VISIONS IN CHAPTERS 4—20

In Heaven

On Earth

Preparations for the trumpet judgments
(8:1-5)

The first six trumpet judgments (8:6—9:21)
The little book (ch. 10)
The ministry of the two witnesses (11:1-14)

The announcement of the seventh trumpet
judgment (11:15-19)
The expulsion of Satan (12:1-12)

The activity of Satan (12:13-17)
The activity of the two beasts (ch. 13)
Judgment at the end of the Great
Tribulation (ch. 14)

The announcement of the seven last
judgments (ch. 15)

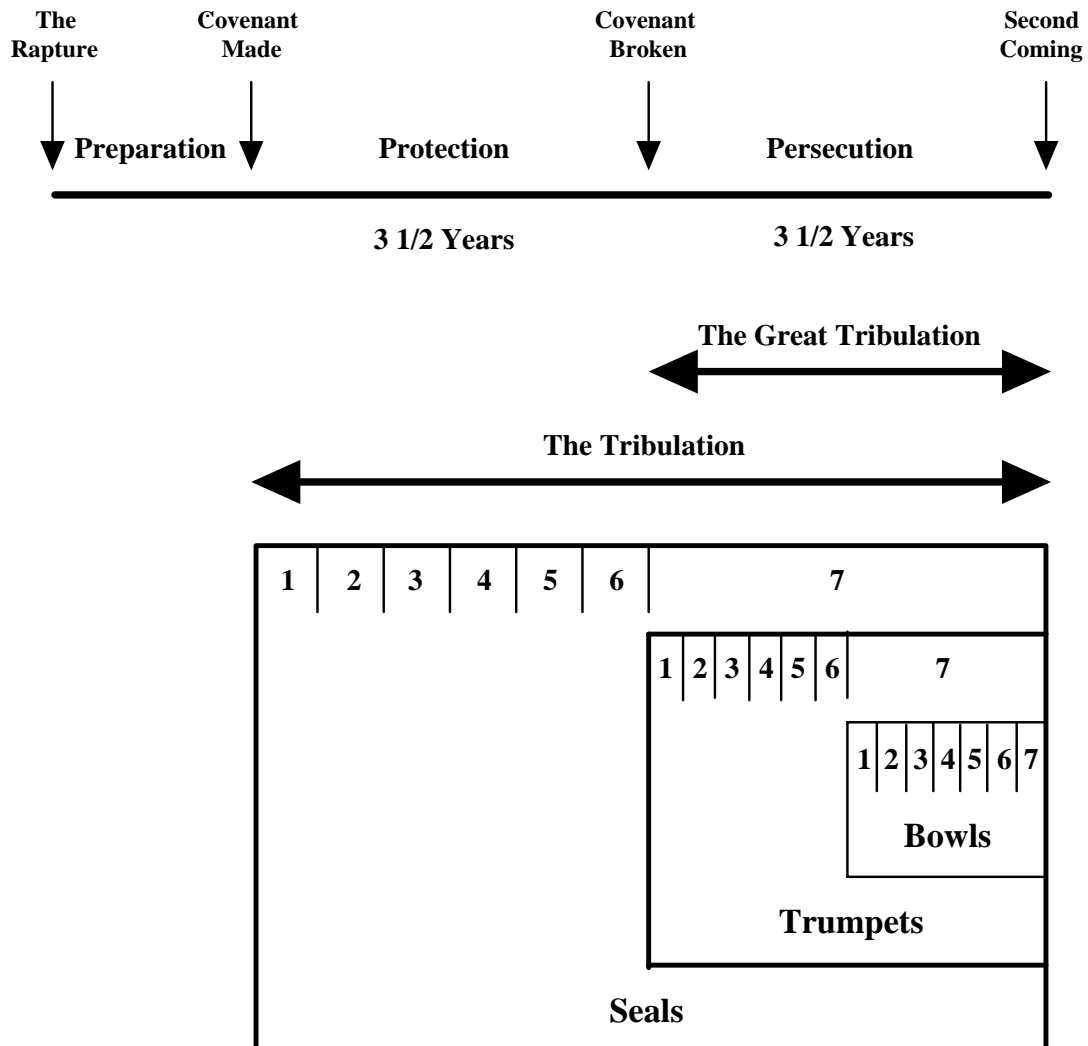
The seven bowl judgments (ch. 16)
Religion in the Tribulation (ch. 17)
Commerce in the Tribulation (ch. 18)

Praise for judging (19:1-10)

The second coming of Christ (19:11-21)
The millennial reign of Christ (ch. 20)

B. THE FIRST SIX SEAL JUDGMENTS CH. 6

The Tribulation Judgments



John received revelation concerning the judgments that would take place on earth after the Lamb opened the seals on the scroll (5:1). God gave him this information to help us understand what will take place in the future. The diagram above places the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgements that begin to unfold here in the context of the earlier revelation concerning Daniel's seventieth week (Dan. 9:24-27).

The failure of scholars to agree on the correlation of events that have happened in church history with these judgments confirms that the events predicted here are still future (cf. 1:19; 4:1). Some interpreters view the seals as describing conditions preparatory to the

Tribulation.²⁴⁸ Other scholars believe that they picture events that are part of the Tribulation.²⁴⁹ I favor the second view. The seals, trumpets, and bowl judgments seem to fit best this last seven-year period of which Daniel prophesied (i.e., the Tribulation, Dan. 9:27).

The order of events predicted in Revelation 6 is very similar to the order Jesus predicted in the Olivet Discourse. That passage is key to understanding the further revelation that God gave John about this future time. These events are the appearance of antichrists, war, famine, death, martyrdom, and earthly and heavenly phenomena. Later in the Olivet Discourse Jesus mentioned an event that occurs at the middle of Daniel's seventieth week, namely, the abomination of desolation (Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14). Consequently the events that He described before the midpoint, namely, those of the first six seals, will probably occur in the first half of the Tribulation. Jesus referred to this three and one-half year period as the "beginning of birth-pangs" (Matt. 24:8; Mark 13:8).

The "beginning of birth-pangs" (Matt. 24:8; Mark 13:8) The first half of the Tribulation					
Matt. 24:4-5	Mark 13:6	Luke 21:8	Antichrists	Rev. 6:1-2	First seal
Matt. 24:6-7	Mark 13:7-8	Luke 21:9-10	War	Rev. 6:3-4	Second seal
Matt. 24:7	Mark 13:8	Luke 21:11	Famine	Rev. 6:5-6	Third seal
Matt. 24:9	Mark 13:12	Luke 21:16	Death	Rev. 6:7-8	Fourth seal
Matt. 24:9-13	Mark 13:9-13	Luke 21:12-19	Martyrdom	Rev. 6:9-11	Fifth seal
		Luke 21:11	Earthly & heavenly phenomena	Rev. 6:12-17	Sixth seal
The "abomination of desolation" (Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14) The middle of the Tribulation					

1. The first seal 6:1-2

6:1 "I saw" marks the continuation of what John had seen that chapters 4 and 5 record, but also the commencement of revelation concerning future

²⁴⁸E.g., Ladd, pp. 95-96; Johnson, p. 472. Posttribulationists, such as Ladd and Johnson, understand the Tribulation to be the culminating period of the church's persecution on earth before Christ's second coming. They believe the church will go through the Tribulation.

²⁴⁹E.g., Walvoord, *The Revelation . . .*, pp. 122-23; Pentecost, pp. 278-79; Harris, p. 238.

events on earth. Chapters 1—5 have introduced this revelation. John was an eyewitness of this revelation that came to him as action scenes in a film rather than as words from the pages of a book.

When the Lamb broke the first of the seven seals on the scroll that He had taken from God, one of the four creatures invited someone to "Come." This was probably an invitation to the first horseman rather than to John or to Christ. The angel gave this command (Gr. imperative) four times (vv. 1, 3, 5, 7), and each time a horseman on a horse came forth.

6:2 John saw a horse, which was a war machine in his day (cf. Job 39:19-25; Ps. 76:5-6; Prov. 21:31), and its rider (cf. Zech. 1:7-11; 6:2-3; Jer. 14:12; 24:10; 42:17). The horse was white symbolizing righteousness and holiness. It gave an appearance of purity, but that does not necessarily mean the rider was righteous.

"When men wage war they always pretend to be fighting for righteousness."²⁵⁰

The first four seal judgments involve riders riding horses of various colors. This imagery recalls Zechariah 1:8 and 6:1-8. However the horses and horsemen in Revelation evidently represent something different from those in Zechariah as comparison of these texts suggests.

The rider carried a bow (cf. Zech. 9:13-14) symbolizing victory, but no arrows. The absence of arrows probably indicates a bloodless victory. The rider threatens war (cf. Num. 24:8; Ps. 45:5; Zech. 9:14), but it never occurs, probably because he accomplishes victory through peaceful means. Someone, evidently God, gave him an imperial crown (Gr. *stephanos*) anticipating an authoritative career (cf. 9:1, 3, 5; 13:5, 7, 14, 15). The sovereign God is the only one who can give human rulers authority to rule (cf. Rom. 13:1).

"All events in the apocalyptic section of the book are initiated from the throne described in chapter 4 . . . , and must be understood in that light. Though indirect, all that transpires under the seals is in implementation of the 'book of doom' through the agency of the Lamb introduced in chapter 5."²⁵¹

This rider rode out conquering his enemies and bent on future conquests.

There have been many suggestions concerning who or what this rider represents. These include a Roman emperor, the Parthian invasion of the

²⁵⁰D. T. Niles, *As Seeing the Invisible*, p. 58.

²⁵¹Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 423.

Roman Empire, Messiah, and the Antichrist. Others have taken him to represent the Word of God, a personification of judgment, the victorious course of the gospel, warfare in general, triumphant militarism, or the personification of ungodly movements. In the Olivet Discourse Jesus predicted that a number of individuals will mislead many people (cf. Matt. 24:5, 24; Mark 13:6; Luke 21:8). This has led some interpreters to conclude that a personification of ungodly activity is what the rider represents in this verse.²⁵² The most probable view is that this is a prophecy of Antichrist who will make a covenant with Israel but only as a pretense for destroying the Jews (cf. Dan. 9:27; 1 Thess. 5:3).²⁵³

2. The second seal 6:3-4

6:3 When the Lamb broke the second seal on the scroll, John heard the second living creature order the second horseman forward.

6:4 The red horse probably symbolizes bloodshed and war. The rider of this horse removes peace from the earth and begins war. There do not seem to me to be sufficient similarities between this red horse rider and the one in Zechariah 1:7 to identify them as the same individual. The one in Zechariah is probably the Angel of the Lord.²⁵⁴

If we observe the Olivet Discourse parallelism, the time when peace ends is probably before the middle of the Tribulation (cf. Matt. 24:6-7a; Mark 13:7-8a; Luke 21:9-10). This is, therefore, not a reference to the termination of peace with Israel that Antichrist will affect, which will signal the middle of the Tribulation and the beginning of the Great Tribulation (cf. Matt. 24:15).

The large sword (Gr. *machaira megale*) represents authority to slay people. War on the earth will follow the manifestation of Antichrist. The warfare in view here seems to be what Ezekiel described in Ezekiel 38 and 39 as the battle of Gog and Magog.²⁵⁵

²⁵²Ibid., p. 422.

²⁵³See J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, p. 250. Daniel K. K. Wong, "The First Horseman of Revelation 6," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:610 (April-June 1996):212-26, concluded that the horseman is either Antichrist or a trend or movement of which he is the chief example. For defense of the view that he is Christ, see Zane C. Hodges, "The First Horseman of the Apocalypse," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 119:476 (October 1962):324-34; or Jack MacArthur, *Expositional Commentary on Revelation*, p. 137. Newell believed the rider on the four horses in the first through the fourth seal judgments is Jesus Christ. He viewed these judgments as an overview of the Lord Jesus' judgment on the world that he believed the following chapters reveal in more detail.

²⁵⁴See Merrill F. Unger, *Zechariah*, p. 27.

²⁵⁵See Pentecost, *Things to . . .*, p. 352; and John F. Walvoord, *The Nations in Prophecy*, p. 103.

3. The third seal 6:5-6

6:5 A black horse followed symbolizing the ravage of war, namely, famine. Antichrist, the cause of this famine, seems to be the rider (cf. Matt. 24:7b). He carries a pair of balance scales, a symbol of commerce, indicating his control of commodity prices.

6:6 The voice in the middle of the four living creatures must belong to God or the Lamb, probably God the Father since He is the source of all these judgments (cf. v. 11). The price of wheat (good food) and barley (cheap cattle food) will be very high. A quart of wheat would provide one meal, but it would cost a whole day's wages. In John's day a denarius would purchase 12 to 15 times as much food. The poor would have little money left over for oil, for fuel and health needs, and for wine to drink (cf. Ezek. 4:16-17). "Do not harm" means, "Do not tamper with" reflecting the strict control over prices that ungodly rulers under Antichrist's leadership will have at this time.

The causes of the famine were not extremely severe since they killed the wheat and barley but not the vines and olive trees (v. 6) whose roots go deeper.²⁵⁶ As the Tribulation grows worse, the rich as well as the poor will suffer, but at this early stage the poor will suffer more than the rich. Probably the wars that the ungodly rulers under Antichrist's leadership begin will reduce the food supply greatly. These rulers will control it strictly with consequent suffering for many people (cf. Luke 21:11).

4. The fourth seal 6:7-8

6:7 The Lamb broke the fourth seal, and the fourth living creature called the fourth horseman out.

6:8 John next saw an ashen (lit. pale green) horse the color of a human corpse. Presumably Antichrist, the cause of this death, is the rider since his name is "Death."²⁵⁷ "Hades," which claims unbelieving people's immaterial part at death, followed on his heels.²⁵⁸ Perhaps John saw Hades following Death as a man on foot follows a mounted warrior grimly gathering in his victims, or as a hearse follows a horse.

God gave these enemies authority to take one-fourth of the world's population. This evidently is the total number that will die as a result of all the catastrophes predicted so far. These catastrophes are war, the resulting famine, and disease. Attacks by wild animals will also contribute to the death rate (cf. Jer. 15:2-3; 24:10; 29:17-18; Ezek. 5:12, 17; 14:21).

²⁵⁶Beckwith, p. 521.

²⁵⁷Swete, p. 88; Lange, p. 165; Lenski, p. 224; et al.

²⁵⁸Death claims the material part of the person and Hades the immaterial part.

Presently the world's population is about five billion people. These initial calamities would reduce that number by one and one-half billion. It seems that nuclear war could play some role in this devastation since so many people will die in these judgments.

5. The fifth seal 6:9-11

What happened next evidently took place in heaven.

6:9 The altar John saw was evidently in heaven (cf. 8:3, 5; 14:18). Earlier John had seen a throneroom in heaven (chs. 4—5), but now he saw a temple. Probably the concepts of palace and temple communicate aspects of God's magnificent dwelling-place in heaven (cf. Ps. 11:4; 18:6; 29:9-10; Isa. 6:1; Hab. 2:20). This altar was evidently an altar of sacrifice rather than an incense altar (cf. 5:8; 8:3-5; 14:17-18). Under this altar were the souls (Gr. *psyche*, lives) of people who had died for their faith in God and their faithfulness to Him during the period just described (vv. 3-8; i.e., in the Tribulation so far). Perhaps the idea is that the lives of these martyrs were sacrifices to God (cf. Phil. 2:17; 2 Tim. 4:6). The "and" (Gr. *kai*) is again probably ascensive (cf. 1:2, 9) meaning the word of God "even" the testimony they maintained.

These people must be those who died after the Rapture since all Christians living at the time of the Rapture will experience bodily resurrection and go directly into Jesus Christ's presence then (1 Thess. 4:16-17). Consequently the people John described in this verse are evidently those who come to faith in Christ after the Rapture (cf. Matt. 24:9; Luke 21:11). They became believers during the first half of the Tribulation and then suffered martyrdom for their faith. John did not see their resurrected bodies because God had not resurrected them yet. The resurrection of Tribulation saints will not occur until the end of that seven-year period (cf. 20:4).

6:10 John saw these martyrs calling out to their heavenly Master (Gr. *despotes*) to punish their murderers.²⁵⁹ "Master" implies divine might, majesty, power, and authority, and it stresses the absolute power of God.²⁶⁰ How much longer did they have to wait for God to avenge them (cf. Ps. 79:10; 94:3; Hab. 1:2)? "Holy and true" were attributes of Christ earlier (3:7), but here the Father is probably in view since He is the source of the judgments. "Those who dwell on the earth" is almost a technical expression in Revelation describing unbelievers who are hostile to God (cf. 3:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 12; 17:2, 8).

²⁵⁹Contrast the prayers of Jesus (Luke 23:24) and Stephen (Acts 7:60) in which they asked God to be merciful to their murderers. The difference is that the time of God's longsuffering has now ended and He has begun to pour out His wrath on sinners.

²⁶⁰Moffatt, 5:391; Lange, 176; Robertson, 6:344; Alford, 4:619.

"Their prayers for revenge upon their enemies are viewed as the fifth judgment against the earth-dwellers."²⁶¹

6:11 Each martyr received a long white robe (Gr. *stole*). They had been faithful and had suffered martyrdom for their fidelity to Christ (cf. 3:5; 7:9, 14). God told these martyrs to be patient. More people would experience martyrdom before it would be God's time for Jesus Christ to return to the earth and judge their living adversaries.

6. The sixth seal 6:12-17

The scene now shifts back to earth.

"The entire passage in every clause utilizes well known prophetic anticipations of the day of the Lord, and by his use of these images John identifies the day for his readers. One may check this by consulting the chief scriptures John employs, notably Joel 2:10, 30f., Isaiah 13:9ff., 2:10ff., 34:4, Ezekiel 32:7f., Hosea 10:8. These passages depict the concomitants of the day of the Lord and supply John with all his pictures."²⁶²

6:12-13 Next God will send a tremendous earthquake that will rock the whole world (cf. Luke 21:11). The darkening of the sun (cf. Isa. 13:10; Ezek. 32:7-8; Joel 2:10, 31; Amos 8:9; Matt. 24:29; Mark 13:24-25; Luke 21:25), the reddening of the moon (cf. Joel 2:31; Acts 2:20), and the falling of the stars to earth (a meteor-like shower?) appear from the context to be consequences of this judgment.²⁶³ A less likely possibility is that they will be unrelated phenomena.

Many commentators have taken this description as picturing a metaphorical convulsion among the nations, not a literal shaking of the earth and the heavens. We should probably take them literally for at least two reasons. First, Jesus used the same language in the Olivet Discourse and gave no indication that it was symbolic (cf. Matt. 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11). Second, a shaking of the nations follows in verses 15-17.

6:14 Evidently the sky will appear to split and roll back in two opposite directions (cf. Isa. 34:4).²⁶⁴ The universe will seem to be coming apart. Apparently the opening of the sky will give earth-dwellers a glimpse into

²⁶¹Robert Thomas, "The Imprecatory Prayers of the Apocalypse," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125:502 (April-June 1969):127; idem, *Revelation 1—7*, pp. 517-24.

²⁶²Beasley-Murray, p. 138.

²⁶³That the stars do not literally fall but appear to do so seems clear from the fact that they are still in place in 8:12. This fact suggests that we should also understand the other phenomena described here as appearing to happen.

²⁶⁴Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 454.

the throneroom of heaven (v. 16). Probably the earthquake (v. 12) will cause mountains and islands to rise and fall (cf. Nah. 1:6).

6:15-16 The reaction of every category of humanity all over the world is amazing. It indicates that people's perception of God and the Lamb in heaven will be far more terrifying to them than the physical consequences of this judgment. Whereas the martyrs cry, "Avenge us" (v. 10), these unbelievers cry, "Hide us."

"What sinners dread most is not death, but having to stand before a holy and righteous God."²⁶⁵

Literal interpretation does not rule out the use of hyperbole, which appears at this point. If all the mountains moved out of their places, there would be no places for people to seek to hide.

6:17 This "great day of their wrath" is the Tribulation, Daniel's seventieth week (cf. Jer. 30:7; Dan. 12:1; Joel 2:2; Matt. 24:21). These people will not turn to God in repentance but from Him in terror (cf. Isa. 2:19, 21; Hos. 10:8; Luke 23:30). By the end of the sixth seal judgment, they will know that what they are experiencing is the outpouring of His wrath. This is the first part of the judgment phase of the day of the Lord (cf. Joel 2:11, 30-31; Isa. 2:10-11, 19-21; 13:8-13; 26:17-19; 34:4, 8; 66:7-9; Jer. 30:6-8; Ezek. 32:7-8; Hos. 10:8; Mic. 4:9-10; Matt. 24:8; 1 Thess. 5:3).²⁶⁶

Note that the Tribulation will be a distinct judgment of God unique from other times of distress that the earth has ever experienced (Jer. 30:7). It will be worldwide and severe. Furthermore everyone will not only know that it is a divine judgment, but they will act like it by seeking death to hide from God, not just from these calamities. The judgments of the sixth seal appear to be a foreshadowing of the similar but even greater judgments that will come at the end of the Tribulation, just before Jesus Christ returns to the earth (cf. 16:17-21; Matt. 24:21).

"The cosmic disturbances immediately before the beginning of the Joel 3 Day of the Lord and the Second Coming of Christ immediately after the Great Tribulation are not the same as those of the sixth seal. The cosmic disturbances immediately before the beginning of the Joel 3 Day of the Lord and the Second Coming of Christ will occur at the end of the 70th week, but those of the sixth seal will occur and end considerably before then."²⁶⁷

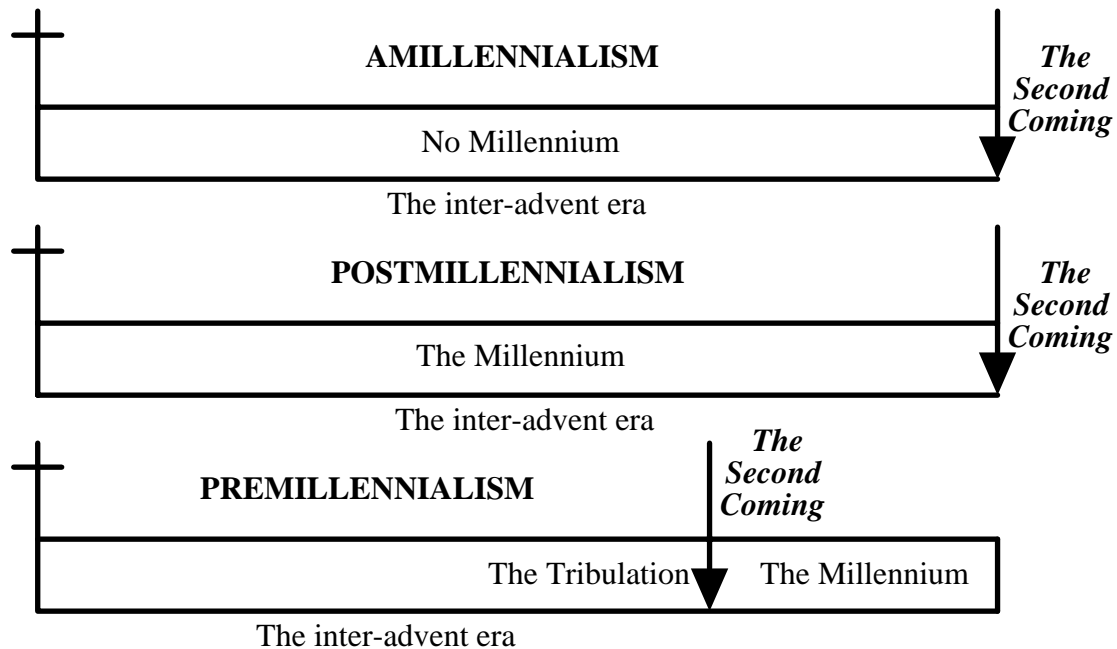
²⁶⁵Ibid., p. 456.

²⁶⁶The day of the Lord includes Daniel's seventieth week (seven years) of judgment, Christ's return to the earth, and His 1,000 year reign on the earth. Gundry, pp. 91-92, sought to limit the day of the Lord to Armageddon only, but he did not take all the data in Scripture into account.

²⁶⁷Showers, p. 70. Other cosmic disturbances appear in the Great Tribulation before the one described in Joel 3 occurs, namely, those associated with the fourth and fifth trumpets and the sixth bowl (8:12; 9:1-11; 16:12-16). Joel 3 does not refer to a cosmic disturbance before the Tribulation begins.

Postmillennialists²⁶⁸ and amillennialists²⁶⁹ interpret the revelation of tribulation in chapters 6—18 as a symbolic description of various troubles that have come and will come on believers before Jesus Christ's second coming. They do not believe the Tribulation will be a specific seven-year period of the unique outpouring of God's wrath yet future.

Three Views of Jesus' Second Coming



Posttribulationists believe the church will be on earth during the Tribulation. Gundry, a posttribulationist, held that sufferings Christians experience during the Tribulation will not come as a result of God's penal judgments but will be persecutions that arise "from other quarters."²⁷⁰ He viewed the martyrs of this period as Christians rather than as tribulation saints.

Marvin Rosenthal argued, correctly I believe, that the first four seals describe what Jesus called "the beginning of sorrows" (Matt. 24:8).²⁷¹ He equated this period with the first half of Daniel's seventieth week (i.e., three and one-half years, or 42 months). However,

²⁶⁸One of the best modern representatives of postmillennialism is David Chilton, *Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion*, and *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation*. David S. Clark's *The Message from Patmos: A Postmillennial Commentary on the Book of Revelation* is more concise.

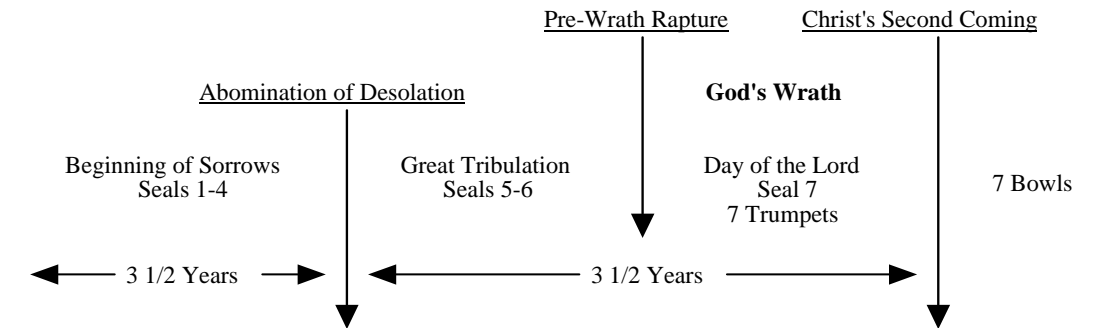
²⁶⁹William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, is one of the most carefully argued amillennial commentaries. Hailey is also clear, while Herman Hoeksema's *Behold, He Cometh!* is comprehensive.

²⁷⁰Gundry, p. 51.

²⁷¹Marvin Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*. Robert Van Kampen, *The Sign*, presented a similar view.

he wrote, incorrectly I believe, that the fifth and sixth seals picture "the Great Tribulation" (Matt. 24:21), which he limited to the following 21 months, not the whole second half of Daniel's seventieth week. He further argued, also incorrectly, that the seventh seal begins "the day of the Lord" (Joel 2:1-2), which will only be the final quarter of Daniel's seventieth week, namely, the remaining 21 months. He placed the Rapture at the beginning of the day of the Lord, which he believed would be the only period of wrath poured out. Thus since the Rapture will occur before it, according to his scheme, we can expect a "Pre-wrath Rapture."²⁷²

Rosenthal's Pre-Wrath Rapture Position



C. SUPPLEMENTARY REVELATION OF SALVATION IN THE GREAT TRIBULATION

CH. 7

God led John to record what he saw between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals to explain how God would be merciful during this period of judgment.²⁷³ John received two new visions that corrected the possible impression that no one would survive the "beginning of birth-pangs" (6:17). God will deliver two groups of people during the first half of the Tribulation (cf. Matt. 24:14). He will preserve 144,000 Israelites alive on the earth, and He will take to heaven a multitude of people from all nations who will die then. John saw both groups in this chapter. It contrasts the security of believers in Jesus with the panic of unbelievers during the period just described (ch. 6).²⁷⁴ It also answers the question posed in 6:17: "Who is able to stand?" Furthermore it serves as a dramatic interlude delaying briefly the disclosure of what will follow in the seventh seal to heighten expectation.

1. The sealing of 144,000 Israelites 7:1-8

The scene continues to be on earth.

²⁷²Paul S. Karleen, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church—Is it Biblical?* refuted Rosenthal's view. Some good articles that also rebut him are Gerald B. Stanton's "A Review of *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:589 (January-March 1991):90-111; and John A. McLean's "Another Look at Rosenthal's 'Pre-Wrath Rapture'," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:592 (October-December 1991):387-98.

²⁷³Wiersbe, 2:587, divided chapters 6—7 into three parts: retribution (6:1-8), response (6:8-17), and redemption (ch. 7).

²⁷⁴Swete, p. 95.

7:1 The phrase "after this" (Gr. *meta touto*) indicates that what follows is a new vision (cf. 4:1). The general chronological progression of the visions suggests that the events John saw now will happen at the end of the first half of the Tribulation. What John saw in this vision supports that conclusion.²⁷⁵

The angels described here were God's agents (cf. Heb. 1:14). They appear to be different from the four living beasts and the 24 elder-angels. Four of them received the task of keeping the wind from blowing. God stationed them at the four "corners" (i.e., compass points) of the earth for this purpose (cf. 20:8; Isa. 11:12; Jer. 49:36; Matt. 24:31). The winds represent God's judgments coming on the world (v. 3; cf. Jer. 49:36-38; Dan. 7:2; Hos. 13:15), specifically those about to follow during the remainder of the Tribulation (cf. Ezek. 9:4-8). The threefold repetition of "four" probably stresses the universal control of these angels.²⁷⁶ We should probably understand the "sea" and any "tree" literally in view of what follows (cf. v. 3).

7:2-3 Another (Gr. *allon*, another of the same kind) angelic messenger appeared in the East. In Scripture divine salvation often comes from the East (cf. Gen. 2:8; Ezek. 43:2; Matt. 2:1). He possessed a seal from "the living God," the title adding solemnity and vitality to the seal.²⁷⁷ A seal was a symbol of ownership (2 Cor. 1:22), authentication (John 6:27), and protection leading to final salvation (Eph. 1:14; 4:30). A signet ring typically made the distinctive impression on the seal in John's day.²⁷⁸ This seal is probably the name of the Lamb and His Father (cf. 14:1; Isa. 44:5). The angel instructed the four angels to withhold their judgment on the earth until he had finished sealing God's servants on their foreheads (cf. Ezek. 9:4). The servants in view are believers in Jesus Christ (cf. Phil. 1:1, et al.) who are Jews (vv. 4-8).

". . . they, like Saul, will be set apart to be God's messengers to the Gentiles."²⁷⁹

The seal could be visible (Ezek. 9:4) or invisible (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:14; 4:30), but the mention of their foreheads suggests a visible seal (cf. 14:1).

"It was not uncommon for a soldier or a guild member to receive such a mark as a religious devotee. The mark was a sign of consecration to deity . . . The forehead was chosen

²⁷⁵Moffatt, 5:394.

²⁷⁶Scott, p. 163; Smith, *A Revelation . . .*, p. 128.

²⁷⁷Alford, 4:623.

²⁷⁸Mounce, p. 167.

²⁷⁹Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom . . .*, p. 252.

because it was the most conspicuous, the most noble, and the part by which a person is usually identified . . ." ²⁸⁰

Their sealing marks these believers off as God's redeemed people and guarantees their protection from divine judgment while they carry out their service for God on the earth during the Great Tribulation (14:1, 3-4; cf. 13:16-18; 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30). Their seals may not protect them from harm that other people inflict on them (cf. 13:7, 15; 20:4) but from the divine judgments sent on unbelievers in the last half of the Tribulation (cf. 16:2). Evidently God will give these 144,000 believers special protection in the last half of the Tribulation because its calamities will be much more severe than those in the first half. Antichrist will also mark his followers in a similar way (13:16-18; 14:9, 11; 16:2; 19:20).

7:4 The specific references to Israel and the names of the 12 Israelite tribes strongly suggest that the nation of Israel is in view rather than the church.²⁸¹ Most posttribulationists and amillennialists believe the 144,000 are members of "spiritual Israel," a title of theirs for the church.²⁸² Gundry called them "'orthodox' [though unconverted] Jews who will resist the seduction of the Antichrist."²⁸³ He believed God will supernaturally keep them from dying during the Tribulation. He also believed they will accept Jesus Christ when He returns at the Second Coming, and they will populate the millennial kingdom. The problem with this view is that these witnesses appear to be believers in Jesus Christ. Many interpreters take the number 144,000 as symbolic of all God's servants in the Tribulation.²⁸⁴

"Though admittedly ingenious, the case for symbolism is exegetically weak. The principal reason for the view is a predisposition to make the 144,000 into a group representative of the church with which no possible numerical connection exists. No justification can be found for understanding the simple statement of fact in v. 4 as a figure of speech. It is a definite number in contrast with the indefinite number of 7:9. If it is taken symbolically, no number in the book can be taken literally."²⁸⁵

²⁸⁰Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 473. Cf. Lange, p. 189.

²⁸¹For a discussion of the accuracy of the number 144,000, see Christopher R. Smith, "The Tribes of Revelation 7 and the Literary Competence of John the Seer," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38:2 (June 1995):213-18.

²⁸²E.g., Mounce, p. 168; Morris, p. 175; Beasley-Murray, p. 140; Ladd, p. 114-16.

²⁸³Gundry, p. 82.

²⁸⁴Johnson, for example, pp. 463 and 481, took the number 12 and its multiples as symbolic of God's government. Ladd, p. 117, believed it represents the full number of God's people that will survive the time of tribulation.

²⁸⁵Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 474.

7:5-8

God will deal with Israel as a nation in the future (cf. Rom. 11). Though an Israelite may not know from which tribe he or she comes, or even that he or she is an Israelite, God does. God, or His angelic agent, will select each person for sealing.

There are at least 19 lists of Jacob's sons in the Old Testament (Gen. 35:22-26; 46:8-25; 49:3-27; Exod. 1:2-5; Num. 1:5-15; 2:3-31; 13:4-15; 26:4-51; 34:19-28; Deut. 27:12-13; 33:6-25; Josh. 13:7-22; Judg. 5:12-18; 1 Chron. 2:1—8:40; 12:24-37; 27:16-22; Ezek. 48:1-7, 23-28, 31-34). Not one of them is the same as the list here.

The tribe of Judah was usually first in such lists, as it is here, due to the prophecies that it would lead the other tribes and that Messiah would come from Judah (Gen. 49:10; 1 Chron. 2:3—4:43). "The lion that is from the tribe of Judah" is the Lamb (5:5; cf. 6:16-17; Heb. 7:13-14).

The tribe of Dan is absent in this list perhaps because that tribe was the first to establish idolatry in Israel (Judg. 18:30; cf. 1 Kings 12:29-30). However the Danites will receive a portion of land in the Millennium (Ezek. 48:1-2).

"Joseph" represents Ephraim (v. 8; cf. v. 6). Ephraim was also "notorious for . . . fickleness and proclivity to idol worship."²⁸⁶ Ephraim was the head of the Northern Kingdom of Israel that apostatized under King Jeroboam I's leadership. Ephraim will also be in the millennial kingdom (Ezek. 48:5). Perhaps Ephraim's name does not appear in this list, though he is included in the reference to Joseph, to avoid the unpleasant connotations of his name.²⁸⁷

The listing of Manasseh's name (v. 6) is unusual since his father Joseph's name also appears. Perhaps this honors Manasseh's faithfulness in contrast to Ephraim's unfaithfulness.

References such as the one in this passage argue strongly for the continuance of Israel as a nation in the future and for God's dealing with ethnic Jews again as His chosen people (cf. Rom. 11). This is a major assertion of dispensational theology. Jehovah's Witnesses or any other Gentiles who claim to be part of this group today fail to recognize that these witnesses will be the physical descendants of Jacob. When God seals them they will know their tribal roots. The sealing will take place after the Rapture.

The sealing of the 144,000 Jewish servants of God in the Tribulation raises the question of the Holy Spirit's relationship to these believers. Will the Spirit baptize them? Evidently He will not since the baptizing work of the Spirit joins believers to the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). The body of Christ (i.e., the church) will be in heaven during the Tribulation,

²⁸⁶Smith, *A Revelation . . .*, p. 130. Cf. Deut. 29:18-21; Hos. 4:17.

²⁸⁷Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 481.

not on earth.²⁸⁸ Will the Spirit indwell Tribulation saints? Probably He will not. In the church age Spirit indwelling takes place at the same instant as Spirit baptism, namely, at the moment of salvation. The Spirit's indwelling is probably unique to the church age as is His baptizing ministry. Probably the Holy Spirit will come upon and influence Tribulation saints as He did in Old Testament times.²⁸⁹ The sealing of these witnesses therefore probably indicates God's special selection and protection of them during this time of unprecedented global catastrophes.

2. The salvation of the great multitude 7:9-17

There are a number of contrasts between the 144,000 and this great multitude. The number of the first group is not only smaller but definite whereas the number of the second group is larger and indefinite. People from the 12 tribes of Israel make up the first group, but people from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue compose the second. God prepares the first group for imminent peril on the earth, but the second group is victorious, secure, and at rest in heaven.

"This group, like the 144,000, is unhurt by the effects of God's wrath, but for a different reason. They have at this point been removed from the earthly scene of the wrath and have no need of protective sealing. Someone might ask, 'Are the 144,000 the only ones who have maintained their composure under the first six seals?' This vision responds to such a question negatively. A vast throng has turned to God during this period and have now passed into His immediate presence through death [cf. 6:8]."²⁹⁰

This pericope describes events transpiring in heaven.

"Without doubt it is one of the most exalted portrayals of the heavenly state to be found anywhere in Scripture."²⁹¹

7:9 John next saw another vision (cf. v. 1; 4:1). Conditions in this vision and the former one (vv. 1-8) seem to be simultaneous rather than consecutive, however. This vision seems to reveal things happening in heaven at the same time as what John saw happening on earth in verses 1-8.

John saw an innumerable multitude of people in heaven before God's throne. They came from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue on earth—Gentiles and Jews (cf. 5:9; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15). They stood clothed in white robes (flowing stoles, cf. 6:11) symbolic of their righteousness and

²⁸⁸Showers, pp. 245-51, presented evidence that none of the references to the church in Revelation refer to its being on the earth during the Tribulation and that the saints who are on the earth during the Tribulation and the great multitude of Revelation 7 are not the church. This evidence implies that the church will not be on the earth during any part of the Tribulation.

²⁸⁹See John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, pp. 151, 230.

²⁹⁰Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 482.

²⁹¹Mounce, p. 171.

purity (v. 14). This group appears to be the same as the one referred to earlier in 6:9-11 (cf. v. 14). These believers died either natural or violent deaths during the first half of the Tribulation. They have joined the angels in the heavenly throneroom that John saw previously (chs. 4—5; cf. v. 11). Now they hold palm branches symbolizing their victory and joy (cf. John 12:13). They are worshipping and serving God in heaven before the Millennium.²⁹²

- 7:10 Together they praise God and the Lamb for their salvation, namely, their physical deliverance from the Tribulation scene and their consequent victory (cf. 12:10; 19:1).²⁹³ Probably the feast of Tabernacles is in the background of what John saw here (cf. v. 15). This multitude has entered into its rest, something that the feast of Tabernacles anticipated (cf. Deut. 16:13-15; Neh. 8:15). The Jews also used palm branches in the celebration of this feast, which was a time of great joy.
- 7:11 Other angels, beside the four living beasts and the 24 elders, gathered around the throne. The angelic host assembled joined these Tribulation saints in prostrating themselves before God in worship (cf. Luke 15:8-10).
- 7:12 This is one of many doxologies in Revelation. "Blessing" or "praise" (Gr. *eulogia*) is what God deserves because of what he has done for these people (cf. 5:12, 13). It is "that spontaneous act of thanks which men utter when they realize more vividly than ever before their happiness."²⁹⁴ "Glory" (*doxa*) is the honor due Him because of His good reputation, specifically for delivering them (cf. 1:6; 4:11; 5:12, 13; 19:1).²⁹⁵ "Wisdom" (*sophia*) is God's infinite knowledge displayed in His plan of deliverance (cf. 5:12). "Thanksgiving" (*eucharistia*) literally means "well" and "to give freely," but it denotes an expression of gratitude for a favor rendered (4:9).²⁹⁶ "Honor" or "esteem" (*time*) is what God deserves because He has planned and provided this salvation (4:11; 5:12, 13).²⁹⁷ "Power" (*dynamis*) reflects God's omnipotence that enables Him to overcome all opposition (4:11; 5:12; 19:1). "Might" or "strength" (*ischys*) refers to God's inherent power that enabled Him to deliver this multitude from their enemies (5:12).²⁹⁸ God is worthy of this worship throughout eternity. "Amen" underlines the truthfulness of this sevenfold ascription (cf. 5:13).

²⁹²Amillennialists Charles, 1:202; and Beasley-Murray, p. 145; viewed this group as including the whole church, including the last generation of Christians, in heaven at this time.

²⁹³John never used "I save" (Gr. *sozo*) to denote salvation from sin, and it is questionable whether he ever used "salvation" (*soteria*) in this sense either (Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, pp. 489-90).

²⁹⁴R. H. Preston and A. T. Hanson, *The Revelation of Saint John the Divine*, p. 47.

²⁹⁵W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, p. 158.

²⁹⁶G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 190.

²⁹⁷F. C. Jennings, *Studies in Revelation*, p. 230.

²⁹⁸Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, pp. 491-92.

7:13 Occasionally in prophetic visions a dialogue takes place involving one of the characters in the vision and the person receiving it (cf. Jer. 1:11, 13; Amos 7:8; 8:2; Zech. 4:2, 5). Here one of the elders asked John a question anticipating the question that was in John's mind. This led to a clarification of the identity of the multitude in this vision (cf. 5:5; Josh. 9:8; Jon. 1:8).

7:14 John did not know the identity of these individuals, so the elder told him who they were. They are "those who are coming out from the great tribulation." Jesus coined the term "the Great Tribulation" (Matt. 24:15, 21) and limited it to the second half of Daniel's seventieth week (Matt. 24:15-22; Mark 13:14-20; cf. Dan. 9:27). Positioned as this vision is just before the midpoint of the Tribulation, before the Great Tribulation begins, the elder must have meant that this multitude came out of the Great Tribulation before it began. The Greek preposition *ek* ("out of") permits such an interpretation.²⁹⁹ God promised to keep Christians completely out of the Tribulation (3:10; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; et al.), but these Tribulation saints come out of the first part of it while it is in progress.³⁰⁰

Washing their robes in the Lamb's blood is a figure of speech for salvation (22:14; cf. Zech. 3:4-5). Another interpretation is that "washed their robes" is a figurative expression picturing that they had purified their deeds (22:14; cf. 19:8). This would make the entire passage (vv. 14-17) a description of faithful Tribulation saints instead of all Tribulation saints. The issue hinges on whether "robe" represents the believer's garment of salvation or his good works here. Scripture uses "robe" both ways elsewhere. Since all the redeemed will eventually go into God's presence, it seems unwarranted to limit this innumerable multitude to faithful saints. The fact that they died during the first half of the Tribulation does not necessarily mean that they were all martyrs who died for their testimony as believers.

"In modern thought, making anything white by washing it in blood is paradoxical and even shocking, but it was not so with John and those with an OT background. To them such washing denoted spiritual purity. Not just any blood would accomplish the cleansing. The blood of martyrs shed for the Lamb's sake would not even do it. It had to be the blood of the Lamb's great sacrifice to produce the whiteness (Rev.

²⁹⁹Another possibility is that the elder meant that these saints came out during the Great Tribulation, which the Greek preposition allows but the placement of this vision between the sixth and seventh seals does not. A third view is that they departed after the Great Tribulation was complete (Rosenthal, p. 185). This is unacceptable for two reasons. First, the Greek verb *erchomenoi* ("are coming") is a present participle indicating an ongoing departure. Second, this view makes an unwarranted distinction between the Great Tribulation and the outpouring of God's wrath.

³⁰⁰Smith, *A Revelation . . .*, p. 135.

1:5; 5:9; cf. Rom. 3:25; 5:9; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:20; Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 1:2, 19; 1 John 1:7) . . ."³⁰¹

7:15 These saints are in God's presence because they have believed in Jesus Christ and have died in the first half of the Tribulation.³⁰² They will serve God continually in His present heavenly sanctuary.³⁰³ God will protect them and share fellowship with them there. The elder's description of God spreading His tabernacle over them recalls Old Testament instances of God dwelling among and protecting His people (cf. Exod. 13:21-22; 40:34-38; 2 Chron. 7:1-3) and His promises to do so (cf. Lev. 26:11-12; Isa. 4:5-6; Ezek. 37:27; Zech. 2:10, 11; 8:3, 8; cf. Rev. 13:6; 21:3).

7:16-17 They will no longer experience the privations and discomforts of their earthly existence (cf. Isa. 49:10, LXX; John 4:14; 6:35; 7:37). The Lamb, now seen standing before the middle of the throne, will provide for them as a good shepherd takes care of his sheep (cf. Ps. 23:1-4; Isa. 40:11; Ezek. 34:23; John 10:11, 14; Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 2:25; 5:2-4). He will refresh them as well as protect them (cf. Exod. 15:13; Deut. 1:33; Ps. 5:9; 85:11; John 16:13). The Lamb will lead these sheep to God who is the fountain of life (21:6; 22:1, 17; cf. Ps. 35:10; John 4:12, 14; 7:38-39). As a loving parent, he will wipe away the tears they shed because of their sufferings (cf. 21:3).

"The ultimate fulfillment of these seven promises (7:15b-17) will come in the eternal state described more fully in Revelation 21-22, but John's 'snapshot' of the innumerable multitude catches them in heaven at a point just before the beginning of the last half of the seven years of Daniel's seventieth week."³⁰⁴

The location of this revelation in the context of John's visions is significant. It strongly argues for these two groups, the 144,000 living Jewish believers and the multitude of dead believers, existing during the Tribulation after Christians have gone to heaven at the Rapture. Note that God will save multitudes of people during this time. It will be harder for all people to believe the gospel after the Rapture than it is now. However it may not be impossible for people who have rejected it before the Rapture to believe it from then on (cf. 2 Thess. 2:11-12).

³⁰¹Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 498. The *en* ("in") has instrumental force here; Christ's blood is what made their robes white. Contrast 12:11 where *dia* ("because of") expresses the means of victory, namely, His blood and their faithfulness.

³⁰²Evidently they will have intermediate bodies until their resurrections (cf. Matt. 17:1-3; Luke 16:19-25; Rev. 6:9-11). This appears to be the condition of Christians who die before the Rapture too (cf. 2 Cor. 5:2-3).

³⁰³There will be no temple in the new Jerusalem (21:22), so what John saw here was not a vision of the new Jerusalem.

³⁰⁴Thomas, *Revelation 1—7*, p. 504.

THE LITERARY STRUCTURE OF CHAPTERS 6—18			
The Seals			
FIRST SIX (ch. 6)	Supplementary Revelation (ch. 7)	SEVENTH (chs. 8—16)	
The Trumpets			
FIRST SIX (chs. 8—9)	Supplementary Revelation (10:1—11:14)	SEVENTH (11:15—16:21)	Supplementary Revelation (chs. 12—15)
The Bowls			
FIRST SIX (16:1-16)		SEVENTH (16:17-21)	Supplementary Revelation (chs. 17—18)

D. THE FIRST SIX TRUMPET JUDGMENTS CHS. 8—9

John received a revelation of more judgments to take place next on earth to prepare his readers for these events.³⁰⁵

1. The first four trumpet judgments ch. 8

Chapter 7 introduced additional information between the breaking of the sixth and seventh seals. Now the chronological progression of judgments resumes. The scene John saw continues to be in heaven.

The seventh seal 8:1

When the Lamb broke the seventh seal of the scroll, silence fell on the heavenly scene. For "half an hour" awesome silence continued as all of those assembled around the throne

³⁰⁵Wiersbe, 2:587, believed chapters 6—9 describe what happens in the first half of the Tribulation, chapters 10—14 what happens in the middle, and chapters 15—19 what happens in the last half.

waited expectantly to see what God would do next. This is probably a literal 30 minutes since there are no clues in Revelation that we should interpret time references non-literally. The purpose of the silence is to prepare for what is about to happen by heightening expectation of God's awesome judgments to follow (cf. Hab. 2:20; 3:3; Zeph. 1:7-8, 15, 17-18; Zech. 2:13).³⁰⁶ Perhaps the silence represents God listening to the prayers of the saints.³⁰⁷ It is the lull before the storm, as a few moments of calm precede the most devastating destruction of a tornado or hurricane.

Introduction to the seven trumpet judgments 8:2-6

8:2 John saw someone, perhaps God, give seven trumpets to a group of seven angels standing before the heavenly throne (cf. 1:4; 3:1; 8:6; 15:1). Exactly who these angels were is not clear. Some interpreters have identified them with seven archangels in Jewish tradition (cf. Book of Jubilees 1:27, 29; 2:1-2, 18; 15:27; 31:14; Tobit 12:15; 1 Enoch 20:2-8), but there is no basis for this in Revelation. They are apparently simply seven other angels who have great authority. These trumpets appear to be different from the trumpet of God (1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16) and other trumpets mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament (Heb. 12:19; Rev. 1:10; 4:1), though they too announce God's working (cf. Ezek. 33:3).

Trumpets play a major role in God's dealings with His people (cf. Exod. 19:16; 20:18; Isa. 27:13; Jer. 4:5; Joel 2:1; Zeph. 1:16; Matt. 24:31; 1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Thess. 4:16). They were part of Israel's ceremonial processions (e.g., Josh. 6:1, 13-16; 1 Kings 1:34, 39; 1 Chron. 15:24), and they assembled the Israelites for war, journeys, and special feasts (e.g., Num. 10:9-10). They also warned of the coming day of the Lord (e.g., Joel 2:1), and they announced the new year in Israel (e.g., Num. 29:1). Here they announce divine judgment in the day of the Lord (cf. Zech. 1:14-16).

8:3 The vision at this point is very reminiscent of priestly service as it took place in Israel's tabernacle and temples. Another angel acting as a priest came into view and stood before the golden incense altar in heaven (cf. 6:9). His censer of gold, appropriate in view of God's presence, contained coals of fire. The angel received more incense to add to the prayers of the saints already there. This may indicate that the prayers of the Tribulation saints (6:10) joined those of the rest of God's people requesting God's justice (cf. 5:8; 9:13; 14:18; Ps. 141:2).

"No saint's prayer is forgotten, but has its effect in due season, in bringing in the Kingdom, that is, our Lord's return!"

³⁰⁶For further proof that the trumpet judgments telescope out from the seventh seal rather than recapitulating the seals judgments, see Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8—22: An Exegetical Commentary*, pp. 3-5, 525-43.

³⁰⁷Beasley-Murray, p. 152.

"It is the answer at last to 'Thy Kingdom come' which the saints of all ages have prayed. No other answer could be given, inasmuch as earth has rejected the rightful King!"³⁰⁸

- 8:4 The angel offered this incense on the coals on the golden incense altar, the only altar referred to in the heavenly sanctuary. The smoke of the incense went up before God symbolizing His receiving the prayers of His people.³⁰⁹ Clearly the incense, while symbolizing prayer (5:8), is distinct from prayer here. However the total impression is of prayers commingling as the angel pours more incense on the altar. He facilitates these prayers, though Jesus Christ, of course, is the only mediator between God and man (cf. 1 Tim. 2:5).
- 8:5 Then the angel took coals from the altar, placed them in his censer, and threw them out onto the earth. These coals of fire, symbolic of judgment, produced symbols of catastrophe: thunder, lightning, and earthquake (cf. Ezek. 10:2-7). The censer thus became a symbolic instrument of judgment in response to prayer.
- 8:6 The whole scene quite clearly symbolizes God sending judgment on the earth in response to His people's accumulated prayers (cf. Exod. 3:7-10; 19:16-19; Rev. 4:5; 11:19; 16:18). The trumpet judgments to follow are what He will send. The storm theophany, therefore, apparently implies the awful calamities that will come in the trumpet and bowl judgments that are ahead.³¹⁰

All the trumpet judgments seem to proceed out of the seventh seal judgment. In other words when the Lamb broke the seventh seal John saw not just one judgment but a whole new series of judgments. There is every reason to conclude that these will follow chronologically.³¹¹ We shall see that seven bowl judgments apparently proceed out of the seventh trumpet judgment in the same way.³¹²

These are the judgments that the angel ascending from the rising of the sun held back until the bond-servants of God were sealed on their foreheads (7:3). Therefore, they are more severe than the first six seal judgments. Their object is to lead hostile unbelievers to repentance, but few will repent (9:20-21).

³⁰⁸Newell, p. 121.

³⁰⁹Swete, p. 108.

³¹⁰Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 12.

³¹¹See Tenney, p. 71; Ladd, p. 122. For defense of the view that all three series of judgments are parallel in their last events, see Dale Ralph Davis, "The Relationship Between the Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls in the Book of Revelation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 16 (Summer 1973):149-58.

³¹²See the chart "The Tribulation Judgments" at the beginning of my discussion of chapter 6 for a visual representation of this relationship.

The first trumpet 8:7

The scene shifts again, this time from heaven to earth. This first trumpet blast signaled the beginning of a judgment that involved hail, fire (lightning?), and blood (bloodshed? cf. Exod. 9:23-26; Ezek. 38:22). This judgment resulted in the fiery destruction of one-third of the earth (cf. Ezek. 5:2; Zech. 13:8-9). This holocaust included a third of its trees and all of its grass. There are two explanations of how all the grass perishes here but in 9:4 we read that grass exists later. First, the grass may grow again since some time elapses between these two references. Second, it may only be the grass that is green that perishes now and what is now dormant and brown will be green when the events of 9:4 transpire. These judgments seem to be as literal as the plagues on Egypt were. Note the parallels with the Egyptian plagues.

"The OT prophets understood that the miracles of Egypt were to be repeated in the future (e.g., Isa. 10:22-25; 11:12-16; 30:30; Jer. 16:14-15; 23:7-8; Ezek. 38:22; Mic. 7:15) . . . At several points the prophet Amos uses God's miraculous work of deliverance from Egypt as a reference point for the way He will deal with His people in the future (cf. Amos 2:10; 4:10; 8:8-9; 9:5-7)."³¹³

The second trumpet 8:8-9

Following the blowing of the second trumpet something "like [cf. 6:13] a great mountain" that was on fire came crashing down from heaven into the waters of one or more of the earth's seas. This resulted in a third of the oceans, perhaps a third of the ocean waters, becoming blood. Whether the water became blood, or became a substance like blood, or simply looked like blood is difficult to determine from the text (cf. Exod. 7:20-21; Ps. 78:43-44; Joel 2:31; Zeph. 1:3). Literally it could become blood.³¹⁴ A third of the creatures living in the sea died, and a third of the ships on the sea perished.

"As of January 1, 1981 there were 24,867 ocean-going merchant ships registered. Imagine the shock waves that would hit the shipping industry if 8,289 valuable ships were suddenly destroyed! And what about their cargoes!"³¹⁵

John was clearly describing supernatural interventions, not natural happenings.

³¹³Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, p. 16.

³¹⁴I understand that the only chemical difference between sea water and blood is that blood contains an iron molecule that is absent in sea water. Perhaps this mountain-like mass (a meteor?) will provide that molecule resulting in a change in the chemical composition of these seas.

³¹⁵Wiersbe, 2:593.

The third trumpet 8:10-11

Next a great star (meteor or comet?) fell from heaven on the fresh water sources on earth.³¹⁶ It too was on fire (vv. 7, 8). The ancients sometimes used "torch" (this Greek word, *lampas*) to describe a meteor shooting through the sky.³¹⁷ It poisoned a third of the rivers and streams, and many people died from drinking the poisoned water. The National Geographic Society has listed 100 major rivers in the world ranging in length from 4,000 miles (the Amazon) to 150 miles (the Rio de la Plata).³¹⁸ "Wormwood" means "bitter" (cf. Deut. 29:18, et al.). It was the name of a bitter herb that was fatally poisonous to some people and was a symbol of divine punishment (Jer. 3:15; 9:15; 23:15; Lam. 3:15, 19; Amos 5:7). This judgment recalls the bitter water that God gave the rebellious Israelites to drink in the wilderness, which the tree cast in turned sweet (Exod. 15:23-25), as well as the first Egyptian plague (Exod. 7:21).

The fourth trumpet 8:12

This time the trumpet blast announced judgment on a third of the heavenly bodies. Darkness is a common symbol of judgment in the Old Testament, and the day of the Lord was to be a time of darkness (Amos 5:18; cf. Isa. 13:10; Joel 2:2; Mark 13:24). The darkening of the heavenly bodies predicted in this verse also serves to warn of more judgment to come. Evidently God will cut off light from the sun, moon, and stars from the earth by one-third (cf. Exod. 10:21-23). The text seems to imply that God will reduce the intensity of light from these sources by one-third (cf. Matt. 27:45). Perhaps a partial eclipse or pollution in the atmosphere is in view. Such a reduction in light, and consequently temperature, would have a devastating effect on the earth.

The warning concerning the final three trumpets 8:13

"And I looked" (Gr. *kai eidon*) signals a new scene in John's vision. John next saw, on earth, an eagle interrupt the angels by flying through the sky and warning those living on the earth to beware of the last three trumpet judgments. This could be a literal eagle (Gr. *aetou*, also translated "vulture," Luke 17:37). God has given animals the ability to communicate with people in the past (cf. Gen. 3:1-5; Num. 22:28-30). Eagles (or vultures) are birds of prey that approach rapidly and are a sign of disaster (Matt. 24:28). Thus this eagle is a fitting herald of God's judgments to come. Another possibility is that this eagle is an angel (cf. 12:14). Mid-heaven is the position of the sun at noon, where everyone can see this bird.³¹⁹ Its loud voice further guarantees that everyone on the earth will hear its message. The eagle announces the last three trumpet judgments, which are also "woes" (9:12; 10:14). They are specially bad because they have people rather than the objects of nature as their targets. There are several examples of double woes in Scripture (18:10, 16, 19; Ezek. 16:23), but a triple woe announces an even worse

³¹⁶Sometimes stars represent angels (e.g., 9:1), but here something mineral seems to be in view.

³¹⁷Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 21.

³¹⁸Wiersbe, 2:593.

³¹⁹Morris, p. 125.

calamity. The objects of these judgments are earth-dwellers, and their judgment is partially in response to the prayers of the Tribulation martyrs (cf. 6:10).

2. The fifth and sixth trumpet judgments ch. 9

John continued to relay the revelation of the trumpet judgments that he had received to clarify God's future plans for his readers. John was still viewing things happening on the earth.

"In this chapter there are more occurrences of the words 'as' and 'like' than in any other chapter in the Bible, which shows how difficult it was for John to describe the scene which he saw in the vision."³²⁰

The fifth trumpet (first woe) 9:1-11

"Already introduced by the eagle's proclamation in 8:13, the fifth trumpet sets the tone for the last three trumpets through its specificity and independence of the two to follow. This feature marks the last three seals too. The seventh trumpet also resembles the seventh seal in the way it solemnly concludes the whole and contains the next series within in its scope. As with the seals also, two episodes intervene between the sixth and seventh members. In so doing, the episodes set the stage for the seventh trumpet."³²¹

The impact of the locusts 9:1-6

9:1 Again John saw a "star" (cf. 6:13; 8:10), but this time the "star" was an intelligent being. If "fallen" (Gr. *peptokota*) has theological connotations, the "star" may refer to Satan (vv. 2, 11; cf. 1:20; Job. 38:7; Luke 10:18) or some other fallen angel. If, on the other hand, "fallen" simply describes his condition as having come to earth from heaven, an unfallen angel is probably in view. Since this angelic being simply carries out God's instructions faithfully, I tend to think he is an unfallen angel. The "bottomless pit" (lit. shaft of the abyss) is the abode of Satan (v. 11; 20:1-3), some demons (cf. Luke 8:31; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6), and the beast (11:7; 17:8). It is evidently a preliminary prison, not their final abode, which is the lake of fire (i.e., hell, 19:20; 20:10; cf. Matt. 25:41), from which this angel is about to release some of them temporarily. The angel received the key to the door of this pit from a greater authority who is probably God.

9:2 John saw smoke rising from the shaft leading to an underground chamber. The smoke probably symbolizes the terribleness of the place from which the locusts emerge (cf. Eph. 2:2). In Revelation smoke usually relates to judgment, doom, and torment (vv. 17, 18; 18:9; 19:3) though it also has

³²⁰Ryrie, p. 61.

³²¹Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 26.

connections with holy things (8:4; 15:8). The context specifies a negative connotation here (cf. Gen. 19:28; Exod. 19:18). What John saw resembled smoke billowing out of an active volcano.

- 9:3 What he saw was probably literal locusts (cf. Exod. 10:12-20).³²² The Old Testament attests the destructive power of locusts (cf. Deut. 28:38; 2 Chron. 7:13; Joel 2:25). They often swarmed in apparently limitless numbers (cf. Ps. 105:34; Nah. 3:15). Joel likened what would come on the earth in the day of the Lord to a locust invasion (Joel 1—2). The locust is a symbol of destruction throughout the Old Testament (cf. 1 Kings 8:37; Ps. 78:46). Yet the locusts John saw had the power to hurt people as scorpions can, which normal locusts do not. They also had a leader (v. 11), which normal locusts do not (Prov. 30:27). Probably these are demons who assume some of the characteristics of locusts.³²³

"Should we assume the prophet saw something like a motion picture of the future in his vision and then attempted to explain it in terms of images he understood? Or did he see a picture precisely in the images he gives, images which paint reality rather than describing it? Which description of those options is 'more literal'? Is it the one that focuses on how it might look to us, so we explain what he meant in words and images very different from the prophet's terms and images? Or should one focus on how it looked to the prophet and how it appears in the ancient text? We would thus attempt to understand his words in their literary character, both by examining the image in context and the Old Testament images and background(s) it evokes."³²⁴

- 9:4 God commissioned these creatures to inflict severe pain on the earth-dwellers who did not have God's mark of ownership and protection on their foreheads (cf. 7:3-8). Normally locusts eat vegetation, but these creatures will afflict human beings.
- 9:5 They could not kill people, and their mission lasted only five months. The wound they caused would be very painful but not fatal.

"The scorpion belongs to the largest and most malignant of all insect tribes. Its general appearance is like a lobster, but much more hideous. Its sting located near the end of its tail

³²²Newell, p. 129-32. Cf. Joel 1:6; 2:4-10. Others, such as Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, have suggested that John saw modern instruments of warfare.

³²³Moffatt, 5:406; Mounce, p. 194; Ladd, p. 131. Spirit beings later appear as frogs (16:13).

³²⁴Darrell L. Bock, "Interpreting the Bible—How Texts Speak to Us," in *Progressive Dispensationalism*, p. 91. He believed John saw locusts.

is not always fatal, but can be. It ranks with the snake in its hostility toward human beings (cf. Luke 10:19; 11:12)."³²⁵

9:6 Because of the influence of these scorpion-like locusts, people will seek death but will not be able to escape their pain. They long for death rather than repenting.

Since 4:1 John had been reporting what he saw, but now he spoke as a prophet predicting the future.

"For the first time the Apostle ceases to be the exponent of what he saw, and becomes the direct organ of the Spirit . . ."³²⁶

This is one of the indications that Revelation is prophetic rather than only apocalyptic in genre.

The characteristics of the locusts 9:7-11

9:7 John proceeded to describe the creatures he saw from head to tail. Some interpreters view these beings as natural locusts while others believe they represent an army of men. Locusts resemble horses when viewed with magnification. However, John's description of these creatures seems to indicate that they were unusually grotesque and frightening (cf. Joel 2:4). Their crowns (Gr. *stephanos*) probably symbolize their victory over the objects of their oppression. Their resemblance to men suggests their intelligence, but clearly they are not men (cf. vv. 3-4).

9:8 The antennae of locusts are not hair, and while they have hair on their legs the comparison with the hair of women suggests hair on their heads. Perhaps the reference to hair like women's, presumable long hair, is to convey their wildness.

"An old Arab proverb is often quoted which says that the locust has a head like a horse, a breast like a lion, feet like a camel, a body like a serpent, and antennae like the hair of a maiden."³²⁷

Long hair in biblical times was a sign of glory, so perhaps they have some glory. Lion-like teeth denote voracity.

³²⁵Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, p. 30.

³²⁶Alford, 4:641.

³²⁷Ladd, p. 132.

- 9:9 Their iron breastplates, which covered the chest and back in John's day, gave them the appearance of invulnerability (cf. v. 17).³²⁸ The sound of their activity will be terrifying, as the sound of battle is (cf. Joel 2:4-5; 2 Kings 7:6; Jer. 47:3). Indeed their sound signifies battle with earth-dwellers.
- 9:10 Their ability and their mission to sting people also suggest abnormal characteristics. This verse reprises verse 5. The repetition serves to stress the awfulness of their power to hurt people.
- 9:11 Their king is the (leading) angel of the abyss. This is further confirmation that the locusts represent demons. The names "Abaddon" in Hebrew and "Apollyon" in Greek both mean "destroyer."³²⁹ The objective of these demons is to destroy people. God grants this lead creature permission here to carry out his objective against unbelievers as part of God's outpouring of wrath on earth-dwellers (cf. Job 2:6). Probably we should identify this angel as one of the hierarchy of fallen angels that emerges from the abyss with the other demons (cf. Eph. 6:12).³³⁰ The revelation of his name simply expresses his objective. Identifying him as Satan is tempting,³³¹ but the text only calls him an angel. The appearance of Satan later (12:3, 9) is much more dramatic than the introduction of this angel.

The announcement of past and coming woes 9:12

This verse is transitional and clarifies that the fifth, sixth, and seventh trumpet judgments are also the first, second, and third woes. It is unclear whether the eagle (8:13) or John is the speaker, though John seems the more likely candidate. "After these things" indicates that the woes are consecutive, not simultaneous.

The sixth trumpet (second woe) 9:13-21

As will become evident, the severity of these judgments increases as the trumpets (woes) unfold.

A deadly attack 9:13-19

- 9:13 Someone near the four horns (symbolic of power) of the golden altar in heaven, probably the angel identified with it in 8:3, gave a command after the sixth angel blew the sixth trumpet (cf. 8:2, 6). Instead of seeing something (cf. v. 1), John now heard something.

³²⁸Robertson, 6:364.

³²⁹Only the Apostle John supplied information bilingually in the New Testament (cf. John 1:38, 42; 4:25; 6:1; 9:7; 11:16; 19:13, 17, 20; 20:16; Rev. 1:7; 3:14; 12:9).

³³⁰Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, pp. 38-39.

³³¹Walvoord, *The Revelation* . . . , p. 163; Smith, *A Revelation* . . . , p. 145.

9:14 This angel instructed the angel who had blown the sixth trumpet to release the four angels who were bound at the Euphrates River. These are evidently four angels that John had not seen before. They must be fallen angels since good angels are not bound (cf. 20:1-3; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). God had a purpose for them to fulfill and ordered their release to accomplish His will (cf. vv. 1-11). Scripture does not record when or why God bound these angels, but evidently He restricted them as punishment. Perhaps He imprisoned them when Satan rebelled against Him.³³²

The Euphrates River undoubtedly refers to just that. This river, including the whole Mesopotamian region that it drains, had been the border between Israel and its enemies to the northeast, namely, Assyria and Babylonia. It was also the eastern frontier of the Roman Empire in John's day.

"In the first century people would have thought of the Parthians, the world's most dreaded cavalry, for they came from this region and filled men with foreboding."³³³

The Parthians were the only warriors the Romans could not and did not defeat.

9:15 These angels were ready for a specific assignment at a specific hour in history (cf. 12:6; 16:12; Matt. 25:34, 41; Mark 10:40; Luke 2:31; 1 Cor. 2:9).

"One article governing all four nouns shows that duration is not in view, but that the occasion of each one of the time designations is one and the same: the appointed hour occurs on the appointed day in the appointed month and in the appointed year. . . . Once again, this sounds the note of divine providence that recurs so often in this book (e.g., *dei* in 1:1, *mellei* in 1:19) . . ."³³⁴

Their task was to put one-third of those who dwell on the earth (i.e., earth-dwellers) to death (cf. 8:13). This will result in approximately half the population of the earth alive at the beginning of the Tribulation being dead at the end of this judgment. One-fourth died under the fourth seal judgment (6:7-8), and many more died as martyrs and for other reasons (cf. Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21-22). However, it is only the earth-dwellers, those in rebellion against God, who suffer death as a result of this woe (cf. 9:20).

³³²Cf. Smith, *A Revelation* . . . , p. 147.

³³³Morris, p. 133.

³³⁴Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, p. 44.

9:16 The "horsemen" may be humans under the control of these four evil angels (cf. Dan. 11:44), or more likely the horsemen are demons. The description of the horses (v. 17) argues for an angelic army as does its leadership, namely, four angels (vv. 14-15). Most interpreters take their number as meaning innumerable, but their number could be literal even if these are human warriors.

"Years ago Red China claimed to have an army of 200 million (cf. *Time*, May 21, 1965, p. 35)."³³⁵

The combined Allied and Axis forces at their peak in World War II totaled about 70 million ³³⁶ An angelic army of 200,000,000 demons is not hard to imagine.

9:17 Now John saw what these horsemen looked like. Horses were swift implements of war in ancient times. Red, blue, and yellow breastplates covered both horses and riders. This was apparently their only armor, and it is defensive armor. Hyacinth is a flower that is most commonly blue, and brimstone is sulfur that is yellow. Lion-like horse heads could be very different from those of ordinary horses or just heads of horses that appear exceptionally bold and majestic. Lions are terrifying (cf. 10:3), fierce (cf. v. 8), and destructive (cf. 13:2). Natural horses do not breath fire, smoke, and brimstone. This verse suggests that this army is probably something other than a human army of cavalry, probably an angelic army (cf. v. 9).³³⁷

9:18 Fire, smoke, and brimstone are natural elements that God used to bring judgment in the past during similar conditions (cf. Gen. 19:24, 28). He may use them again, or they may represent other agents of destruction. "Plagues" recalls the plagues in Egypt (cf. Exod. 11:1 LXX; Rev. 9:20; 11:6; 13:3, 12, 14; 15:1, 6, 8; 16:9, 21; 18:4, 8; 21:9; 22:18). The repetition of the definite article "the" in the Greek text (*tou*) indicates that these are three distinct plagues. Together they will be responsible for the largest death toll in human history so far (cf. v. 15).

9:19 This further description of the horses supports the conclusion that they represent angelic instruments of divine judgment other than natural horses. Some interpreters have suggested that what they represent are modern weapons that shoot both forward and backward, such as missiles. The locusts had the power to injure like scorpions with their tails (v. 10), but these horses have power to kill like serpents with their tails, which is worse (cf. v. 15).

³³⁵Walvoord, "Revelation," p. 953. Most interpreters take the number 200 million as symbolic or as representing demonic forces.

³³⁶*The World Almanac, 1971*, p. 355.

³³⁷Walvoord, *The Revelation . . .*, p. 167, and Hendriksen, p. 148, preferred the view that this is a human army.

The survivors' response 9:20-21

9:20 These three severe judgments (fire, smoke, and brimstone, vv. 17-18) will not move the remaining unbelievers as a whole to repent (cf. Exod. 7:13, 23; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 12, 35; 10:20; 11:10).

"In all cases in the apocalyptic portion of the book, the word about repentance is negative as here."³³⁸

"*Metanoeo ek* ('I repent of') in Revelation denotes a change of mind in rejection of something that is anti-God (cf. 2:21, 22; 9:21; 16:11)."³³⁹

Elsewhere in Scripture the phrase "the works of their hands" refers to idolatry (cf. Deut. 4:28; 27:15; 31:29; 2 Kings 19:18; 22:17; 2 Chron. 32:19; 34:25; Ps. 115:4; 135:15; Isa. 2:8; 17:8; 37:19; Jer. 1:16; 10:3, 9; 25:6, 7, 14; 32:30; 44:8; Hos. 14:3; Mic. 5:13; Hag. 2:14; Acts 7:41). Idolatry is ultimately worship of demons (cf. Deut. 32:17; Ps. 106:37; 1 Cor. 10:20), an understanding that John reflected here. Ironically, these earth-dwellers refuse to stop worshipping demons who are responsible for their misery under this sixth trumpet judgment. In his day people fashioned idol images out of the materials that John mentioned. Today objects that people venerate made of these same materials can be bought in stores. John reminded his readers of the helplessness of these idols (cf. Deut. 4:28; Ps. 115:5-7; 135:15-17; Isa. 44:12-20; Dan. 5:23).

9:21 These unresponsive people will also continue in their moral sins: murders, sorceries, immorality, and stealing (cf. 21:8; 22:15). Idolatry violates the first and second commandments, and these sins are violations of the sixth, seventh, and eighth commandments. The Greek word translated "sorceries" (*pharmakon*) implies the use of drugs. The English word "pharmacy" comes from it. The Greek word can refer to poisons, amulets, charms, magic spells, witchcraft, or any other object or practice that makes someone susceptible to sin (cf. Exod. 22:18; Lev. 20:27; Deut. 18:10-12; 1 Sam. 28:7; Acts 8:9; 13:8; 19:13-15).

These trumpet judgments, as the seals, will grow more intense as they proceed. Most people living on the earth during these days will be so hard of heart that they will not turn to God in repentance. Nevertheless some will become believers in Jesus Christ (ch. 7). Perhaps the salvation of most of them will take place in the earlier part of the Tribulation before these more severe judgments fall.

³³⁸Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, p. 52. Cf. v. 21; 16:9, 11.

³³⁹Ibid.

**E. SUPPLEMENTARY REVELATION OF JOHN'S PREPARATION FOR RECORDING
THE REMAINING JUDGMENTS IN THE GREAT TRIBULATION CH. 10**

John proceeded with his revelation to unfold the future course of events for his readers. We have already seen that God interrupted the sequence of the seven seal judgments with revelation concerning other events happening at approximately the same time. This took place between the sixth and seventh seals (ch. 7). Now He interrupted the sequence of trumpet judgments between the sixth and seventh trumpets with the insertion of other revelation (10:1-11:14).³⁴⁰ The emphasis shifts temporarily from the outpouring of God's wrath on unbelievers to the consolation and encouragement of believers.

1. The appearance of the mighty angel 10:1-4

10:1 Whereas a few commentators have identified this strong angel as Jesus Christ,³⁴¹ the evidence for his being simply another (Gr. *allon*, another of the same kind) strong angel seems more convincing (cf. vv. 5-6). Other commentators have identified him as Gabriel or Michael (cf. Dan. 8:16; 12:7),³⁴² but this is only guessing. He is probably not the same strong angel John saw before (5:2) since there are many strong angels (cf. 18:21). John saw him descending from heaven as a messenger of God (cf. 20:1) and robed in a cloud signifying his celestial origin and connection with judgment (cf. 1:7; 14:14, 15, 16; Matt. 24:30; 26:24; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Luke 21:27). His crown was a rainbow, the symbol of God's faithfulness and mercy (cf. 4:3). His countenance was radiant reflecting the glory and majesty of God. His feet (and legs) were fiery reminiscent of the pillar of fire in the wilderness, a manifestation of God's holiness, mercy, and judgment.

"This scene marks a significant change in John's literary method. Here his personality re-emerges as it did briefly between the sixth and seventh seals (7:13-14), but now for the first and last time in this drama, he leaves the observer's corner and occupies the very center of the stage (e.g., 10:9-11). This new role also involves a change in location from heaven to earth, as the angel descends from heaven (10:1) and stands upon the earth where John hears a voice from heaven (10:4, 8) and goes to him (10:8) . . . The new style is one element among others that heightens the anticipation and accentuates the solemnity of the apocalyptic events to follow."³⁴³

³⁴⁰See the chart "The Literary Structure of Revelation 6—18" at the end of my notes on chapter 7.

³⁴¹E.g., Wiersbe, 2:597.

³⁴²Charles, 1:258-59; Smith, *A Revelation . . .*, pp. 153-54; Swete, p. 177; Mounce, p. 207; Johnson, p. 496; Beasley-Murray, p. 170.

³⁴³Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 59.

- 10:2 The little scroll in his hand must be different from the scroll Jesus Christ unrolled (5:1; 6:1). John used a different and rare Greek word to describe it (*biblaridion*, not *biblion*). The tense of the Greek verb translated "was open" (perfect passive) indicates that someone had opened it and it was then open in his hand. It probably represents a new revelation from God (cf. Ezek. 2:9—3:3; Jer. 15:15-17). The angel stood astride the earth and the sea symbolizing his authority over the whole world (vv. 5, 8; 7:2; cf. Exod. 20:4, 11; Deut. 11:24; Ps. 68:22; 69:34). The implication is that his message involves the whole world. Other less likely views, I think, are that his stance symbolizes the universality of the message,³⁴⁴ or that he was defying the sea's instability.³⁴⁵
- 10:3 His majestic, loud cry produced seven peals of thunder. Comparison with a lion suggests that his powerful cry concerns vengeance. This proves true if what he cried out appears in verse 6. Thunder warns of coming storms, more judgments. These thunders spoke.
- 10:4 An authoritative voice, probably belonging to God or Christ (cf. 1:11, 19; Dan. 12:4, 9), did not permit John to record the judgments these seven thunders revealed (cf. 2 Cor. 12:1-4). This indicates that God has not revealed in Scripture all the judgments that will take place on the earth during the Great Tribulation.³⁴⁶

Apparently John used the intervals between events in his visions to write down what he had seen and heard or at least to make notes.

2. The announcement of the mighty angel 10:5-7

- 10:5 The fact that the angel took an oath and swore by God seems to confirm that he is not God. Lifting the right hand toward God was and is a customary gesture when making a solemn oath (cf. Gen. 14:22; Deut. 32:40; Dan. 12:7). The little book must have been in the angel's left hand.
- 10:6 The oath emphasized the certainty of what he announced. What was about to happen was extremely important. He appealed to God as the eternal Creator who can cause whatever He pleases to happen. This appeal strengthens the force of the oath and the certainty of its outcome. His message was that there would be no more delay.³⁴⁷ Verse 7 explains this affirmation (cf. Dan. 12:7a). The Tribulation martyrs would have to wait no longer for vindication (cf. 6:10). Evidently the seal and trumpet

³⁴⁴Morris, p. 137.

³⁴⁵Swete, p. 127.

³⁴⁶Newell, p. 142.

³⁴⁷The Greek word used here, *chronos*, commonly means "time," but that is obviously not what the angel intended here. "Delay" is the only acceptable translation that makes sense in this context. There will be no delay between this announcement and the blowing of the seventh trumpet (11:15). See Alford, 4:652; Swete, pp. 126-27; Charles, 1:263-64; Beckwith, p. 582.

judgments will take some time to unfold giving earth-dwellers time to repent (6:15-17; 9:20-21), but the bowl judgments will come very quickly allowing little or no time for repentance (cf. 2 Pet. 3:1-9).

- 10:7 In contrast to (Gr. *all'*) delay, when the seventh (trumpet) angel spoke God would fully reveal His mystery. The "mystery of God" probably refers to previously unrevealed details of God's plans for humanity that He was about to make known. Specifically it refers to what will take place so the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of Christ (11:15). The mystery is finished (the aorist passive of *teleo*) in the sense that God would then have no more to reveal about these kingdom plans beyond what He revealed to John. He had revealed His plans for the future kingdom to His servants the prophets in former times but only partially (cf. Heb. 1:1-2). "His servants the prophets" is a common description of the Old Testament prophets in particular (Jer. 7:25; 25:4; Amos 3:7).

3. The instruction of the mighty angel 10:8-11

- 10:8 God or Christ (v. 4) then commanded John to take the little book from the strong angel with authority over the whole planet.
- 10:9 Evidently the little scroll symbolizes God's revelation that John was about to set forth. It is the revelation that the remainder of the Book of Revelation, or at least part of it, contains. Eating is a universal idiom for receiving knowledge (cf. Jer. 15:16; Ezek. 3:1-3). The angel told John that this revelation would taste bitter at first but then he would find it sweet. This order probably suggests that what would come next was more judgment but John would find satisfaction in knowing these things.
- 10:10 John may have actually eaten the little book³⁴⁸ or he may have only devoured it metaphorically. This revelation was pleasant at first because it was a revelation from God (cf. Ps. 119:103). Still as John meditated on it and comprehended the fearful judgments that it predicted he became distressed. The reason for reversing the order of these effects, compared with verse 9, may be to place the bitterness in closer proximity to the judgments that follow.³⁴⁹ The little book may have contained the revelation in 11:1-13,³⁵⁰ or it may have contained more (perhaps chs. 11—19) or all of what follows in Revelation.³⁵¹

³⁴⁸Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, p. 74; Mounce, p. 214.

³⁴⁹Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, p. 74.

³⁵⁰F. F. Bruce, "The Revelation of John," in *A New Testament Commentary*, p. 649; Charles, 1:260; Lilje, p. 158; Charles R. Erdman, *The Revelation of John*, p. 99; Martin Rist, "The Revelation of St. John the Divine," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, 12:442; Mounce, p. 216.

³⁵¹Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, p. 74.

10:11 "They" may refer to God or Jesus Christ (vv. 4, 8) and the strong angel (v. 9). Many interpreters, however, believe this is a third person plural of indefinite reference that expresses reverentially the divine prompting that John experienced (cf. 12:6; 13:16; 16:15).³⁵² "They" told John that he must (Gr. *dei*) prophesy again, as he had been doing (cf. Jer. 1:10; Ezek. 4:7). They wanted him to communicate the new revelation contained in the little scroll that he had consumed. The new prophecies concerned many different peoples, nations, language groups, and kings (cf. 5:9). The specific mention of kings reflects God's sovereignty and anticipates the judgments in 16:14; 17:10; and 17:12.

This renewed commission stresses that what follows would be more burdensome than what John had prophesied so far.

F. SUPPLEMENTARY REVELATION OF THE TWO WITNESSES IN THE GREAT TRIBULATION 11:1-14

John recorded the revelation dealing with the two witnesses to inform his readers of the ministries of these important individuals during the Great Tribulation. This section continues the parenthetical revelation begun in 10:1. It is one of the more difficult chapters to interpret, and students of the book have proposed many different explanations.

1. The temple in Jerusalem 11:1-2

11:1 "And" (Gr. *kai*) ties this chapter closely to the previous one. John's first prophetic assignment after receiving his fresh commission was to provide this information.

Again John became an active participant in his vision (cf. 1:12; 5:4; 7:14; 10:8-10; 19:10; 22:8). John's "measuring rod" was probably a lightweight reed (cf. Ezek. 29:6; 40:5; 42:16-19; Mark 6:8; 3 John 13). The person giving the reed and the instructions was probably the strong angel (10:9-11). John received instruction to perform a symbolic act, as many of his prophetic forerunners had done (cf. Isa. 20:2-5; Ezek. 12:1-17; 40; Zech. 2). The act of measuring probably signifies that the temple is God's possession. One carefully measures what is his own property (cf. 2 Sam. 8:2; Ezek. 40:3—42:20). Sometimes measuring in Scripture anticipated judgment (2 Sam. 8:2; 2 Kings 21:13; Isa. 28:17; Lam. 2:8; Amos 7:7-9).³⁵³ However, since John received instruction not to measure profane areas (v. 2), this measuring is probably an indication of God's favor.

³⁵²Friedrich Dürstler, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John*, p. 305; Alford, 4:654; Lee, 4:638; Beckwith, p. 584; Robertson, 6:374; Ford, p. 160; Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 74.

³⁵³A few references to measuring involve protection (Jer. 31:39; Ezek. 40:2—43:12; Zech. 1:16; 2:1-8), but this can hardly be the connotation here in view of the context (v. 2).

"In other words, John's future prophecies will distinguish between God's favor toward the sanctuary, the altar, and their worshipers and His disapproval of all that is of Gentile orientation because of their profanation of the holy city for half of the future seventieth week. . . . So the measuring is an object lesson of how entities favored by God will fare during the period of Gentile oppression that lies ahead"³⁵⁴

The "temple" (Gr. *naos*, inner temple) refers to both the holy place and the holy of holies excluding the courtyards. This is evidently the temple that the Jews will build in Jerusalem before or during the first half (three and a half years) of Daniel's seventieth week (i.e., the Tribulation; cf. v. 8; 13:14-15; Dan. 9:26-27; 12:11; Matt. 24:15-16; 2 Thess. 2:4).³⁵⁵ The "altar" probably refers to the brazen altar of sacrifice outside the sanctuary to which non-priests will have access. John was to measure (in the sense of quantifying) the worshippers too. This probably means that God will know or perhaps preserve them. These worshipers evidently represent godly Jews who will worship God in this Tribulation temple (cf. Ezek. 14:22; Rom. 11:4-5, 26).

When Jesus Christ returns at the Second Coming He will build a new millennial temple that will replace this Tribulation temple (Ezek. 40).

Some interpreters who favor a more symbolic understanding of this verse take the temple as a reference to the church (cf. 1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21; 1 Pet. 3:5).³⁵⁶

"The church will be protected in the coming disaster."³⁵⁷

However if the temple is the church, who are the worshipers, what is the altar, and why are the Gentiles segregated from it? Such an interpretation mixes the literal and the figurative hopelessly.

11:2 "Leave out" (Gr. *ekballo*, lit. cast out) implies removal from divine favor (cf. Matt. 22:13; 25:30; 3 John 10). The court outside the temple corresponds to the court to which Gentiles had access in the first century, which lay outside the court into which only Jews could come. The Tribulation temple will evidently have similar courtyards. Not measuring

³⁵⁴Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, pp. 80-81.

³⁵⁵See John F. Walvoord, "Will Israel Build a Temple in Jerusalem?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125:498 (April-June 1968):99-106; Thomas S. McCall, "How Soon the Tribulation Temple?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128:512 (October-December 1971):341-51; and idem, "Problems in Rebuilding the Tribulation Temple," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129:513 (January-March 1972):75-80. See also Martin Levin, "Time for a New Temple?" *Time*, 16 October 1989, pp. 64-65.

³⁵⁶E.g., Johnson, pp. 499-502; Mounce, p. 221.

³⁵⁷Morris, p. 147.

amounts to exclusion from God's favor as measuring amounts to enjoying His favor (v. 1). The nations are the Gentiles, specifically hostile, unbelieving Gentiles (cf. v. 18; 14:8; 19:15; 20:3). These Gentiles will oppress the holy city, which is earthly Jerusalem (cf. v. 8; 21:22; Luke 21:24).³⁵⁸ The 42 months are the last half of the Tribulation since this will be the time when Gentile hostility to the Jews is intense (cf. Dan. 9:27). The Gentiles will dominate the outer court of the temple and the rest of Jerusalem for 42 months. Anti-Semitism will peak after the Antichrist breaks his covenant with Israel in the middle of Daniel's seventieth week (Dan. 9:27). This interpretation seems more likely than that 42 months refers to the 42 encampments of Israel in the wilderness, or that they represents a period "of measurable duration."³⁵⁹

2. The ministry of the two witnesses 11:3-6

Even though believing Jews will suffer persecution at this time, God will still get His message out. Two witnesses will be especially significant at this time. Valid testimony required two witnesses under the Old Covenant (Deut. 19:15), and both Jesus and the early church sent out emissaries in pairs (Mark 6:7; Luke 10:2; Acts 13:2; 15:39-40).

11:3 Who is speaking in this verse? The speaker seems to be the angel who spoke in verses 1-2, who here speaks for God (cf. v. 8).

God did not reveal the identity of the two witnesses. Many commentators believe they will be Moses and Elijah since these men were prophets and performed the kinds of miracles these witnesses will perform (v. 6).³⁶⁰ Others believe they will be Enoch and Elijah since God took these men to heaven without dying.³⁶¹ Another reason some believe one of these witnesses will be Elijah is Malachi 4:5, which predicts that Elijah will return before Messiah.³⁶² Other less literal interpreters think the two witnesses may represent not two individuals but the faithful witness of the church throughout its persecutions.³⁶³ I agree with those who believe that they will be individuals living at this time rather than former prophets brought back to earth for this ministry (cf. Matt. 11:14).³⁶⁴

³⁵⁸Others view the reference to the holy city as alluding to the Jewish people (e.g., Beckwith, p. 588; Ladd, pp. 152-53). However if the city is people, who are the people in the city? Ladd, p. 153, said they represent believing Israelites.

³⁵⁹Morris, p. 147.

³⁶⁰E.g., Smith, *A Revelation . . .*, p. 169; Tenney, p. 191; Barclay, *The Revelation . . .*, 2:87.

³⁶¹E.g., Seiss, p. 244; Thomas W. Mackay, "Early Christian Millenarianist Interpretation of the Two Witnesses in John's Apocalypse, 11:3-13," in *By Study and Also by Faith*, pp. 252-65, 310.

³⁶²E.g., Gundry, p. 94.

³⁶³E.g., Swete, p. 134; Mounce, p. 223; Beasley-Murray, p. 181; Morris, p. 147. Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, pp. 87-89, gave a good summary of the arguments pro and con for these three major views.

³⁶⁴E.g., Walvoord, *The Revelation . . .*, p. 179; Pentecost, *Things to . . .*, p. 308; Newell, pp. 150-51; Ladd, p. 154; Kelly, p. 226; Wilbur Smith, "Revelation," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1510; Beckwith, p. 595; Daniel K. K. Wong, "The Two Witnesses in Revelation 11," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154:615 (July-September 1997):344-54.

They will "prophesy," namely, communicate messages from God. Their ministry will last 1,260 days (i.e., 42 months of 30 days per month, or three and a half years; Dan. 12:11).³⁶⁵ This period also appears to be the Great Tribulation (i.e., the last half of Daniel's seventieth week), the focus of John's vision in this chapter.³⁶⁶ Some interpreters, including the early church fathers Victorinus, Hippolytus, and Augustine, believed that the two witnesses would minister in the first half of the Tribulation.³⁶⁷ Nonetheless, the context strongly favors the last half of the Tribulation.

The two witnesses will wear "sackcloth," the dress that in biblical times signified approaching judgment and needed repentance (cf. Isa. 22:12; Jer. 4:8; 6:26; Jon. 3:5, 6, 8; Matt. 11:21).

- 11:4 The ministry of these two witnesses resembles that of Zerubbabel and Joshua who sought to restore Israel after a previous exile (Zech. 4:2, 3, 11-14). There is only one lampstand in the Zechariah passage, but there are two here representing each of the two witnesses. In the Zechariah passage it is the Holy Spirit who empowered Zerubbabel and Joshua (Zech. 4:14), and the comparison strongly suggests that these latter-day witnesses will also receive power from Him (cf. 1:4). They will be God's anointed servants who bear the light of His truth. They are dependent on the Spirit and speak for God, who controls the whole earth.
- 11:5 These witnesses will be able to protect themselves by calling down fire on their enemies who try to harm them, as Elijah did (cf. 2 Kings 1:10-14). This is probably the meaning rather than the bizarre notion that fire will actually proceed from their mouths. No one will be able to kill them until God permits this at the very end of their ministry (v. 7).
- 11:6 God will also empower them to do other miracles similar to what Elijah (cf. 1 Kings 17:1, 7; 18:1; Luke 4:25; James 5:17) and Moses (Exod. 7:17-21; 9:14; 11:10; 1 Sam. 4:8) did. The length of their ministry will be the same as the drought that God sent during Elijah's day. It will also be for the same purpose, namely, to punish His people for their sins and to lead them to repentance. However the two witnesses will be able to exercise their power whenever they wish, not like Moses who could only perform miracles at God's specific command.

This will be the fifth period in history when God will enable a few people to do unusually spectacular signs and wonders. The first four periods were

³⁶⁵The fact that John sometimes described the Great Tribulation in terms of days, at other times in months, or at still other times in years is probably just for the sake of literary variety.

³⁶⁶Swete, p. 131; Walvoord, *The Revelation . . .*, p. 182.

³⁶⁷T. F. Glasson, *The Revelation of John*, p. 70; Newell, pp. 159-60; Johnson, p. 502, Wiersbe, 2:598, and McGee, 5:981, also held this view.

the times of Moses and Joshua, of Elijah and Elisha, of Daniel and his three friends, and the time of Jesus Christ's earthly ministry and that of His apostles.

"Here is a fundamental clue to the understanding of biblical prophecy: eschatological events are foreshadowed in historical events."³⁶⁸

3. The death of the two witnesses 11:7-10

- 11:7 It is only when they have finished their ministry that God will permit the beast to kill the two witnesses. They will not die prematurely. This is the first of 36 references to "the beast" in Revelation (cf. Dan. 7:21). He is Antichrist, as later passages will show. This verse describes him as having his origin in the abyss, the abode of Satan and his demons (cf. 9:1-3, 11; Luke 8:31).
- 11:8 The beast will add insult to injury by allowing the corpses of the two witnesses to lie in the street unburied. This was the worst indignity that someone could perpetrate on a person in biblical times (cf. Ps. 79:2-3). "Mystically" (Gr. *pneumatikos*, "spiritually") indicates a comparative rather than a literal meaning. The city will be similar to Sodom and Egypt in that it will be extremely wicked, morally degraded, antagonistic toward God, and oppressive toward God's people because of Antichrist's influence. The place of Jesus Christ's crucifixion identifies this city as Jerusalem (cf. Jer. 22:8).³⁶⁹
- 11:9 Evidently people from all over the world will be able to view the corpses, probably by television. Alternatively people from all these groups (cf. 5:9; 7:9) may be in Jerusalem at this time and will see them. The correspondence of three and a half days to the three and a half years of the Great Tribulation may only be coincidental. Nonetheless it draws attention to the fact that God's servants will only suffer a short time whereas those under His wrath will suffer much longer.
- 11:10 This is the only instance of rejoicing during the Tribulation recorded in this book. It reflects the widespread wickedness of that day (cf. 1 Kings 18:17; 21:20). Earth-dwellers will celebrate because they do not have to listen to messages from God any longer. This will be the world's last great Mardi Gras type celebration.

³⁶⁸Ladd, p. 156.

³⁶⁹Other views are that it is every city that has opposed God's servants through history (Mounce, pp. 226-27; Morris, p. 150; Kiddle, p. 199), Rome, or Babylon.

4. The resurrection of the two witnesses 11:11-13

- 11:11 The breath of life from God will revive the witnesses' dead bodies (cf. Gen. 6:17; 7:15, 22; 2 Kings 13:20-21; Ezek. 37:5, 10). Their resurrections will terrify onlookers because these God-haters could do no more to silence their enemies than kill them. The use of the prophetic present tense in the verbs in this verse pictures what is future as already fact.
- 11:12 The witnesses, and probably those beholding them before they ascend, will hear the "voice from heaven." It probably belongs to Jesus Christ (cf. 4:1). "The cloud" evidently refers to the shekinah in which Jesus Christ ascended (Acts 1:9). Their ascension is also similar to that of Elijah (2 Kings 2:11) and to Christians at the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:17). In the case of the two witnesses, their enemies will watch them ascend.

One writer who believed the witnesses stand for all Christians wrote as follows.

"In the fullest sense this is to be fulfilled in the rapture Paul describes (1 Thes. iv. 17)."³⁷⁰

- 11:13 Following this ascension an earthquake (cf. 6:12; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18; Matt. 27:51-52; 28:2) will destroy 10 percent of Jerusalem and will cause 7,000 people to die.³⁷¹ Those who will not die will give glory to God. This does not necessarily mean that they will all become believers,³⁷² but they will acknowledge God's hand in these events at least.³⁷³ Perhaps they only give glory to God as the demons gave glory to Jesus when He confronted them during His earthly ministry.

5. The end of the second woe 11:14

This verse is transitional (cf. 9:12). It refers to the end of the second woe (the sixth trumpet, 9:21) and ties this judgment in with the third woe (the seventh trumpet). It clarifies that God interjected the revelations of the mighty angel and the little scroll (10:1-11) and the two witnesses (11:1-13) into the chronological sequence of trumpet judgments. He did so to give supplementary, encouraging information. The final woe will follow "quickly" (Gr. *tachy*, "soon," cf. 2:16; 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20) on the heels of the second woe.

³⁷⁰Morris, p. 151.

³⁷¹Beasley-Murray, p. 187, called this number "an obviously generalized figure."

³⁷²This is the view of Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, pp. 98-99; and Smith, *A Revelation . . .*, p. 175.

³⁷³Walvoord, *The Revelation . . .*, p. 183; Newell, p. 157.

G. THE SEVENTH TRUMPET JUDGMENT 11:15-19

John's revelation continued to unfold future events as God revealed these to him in his vision. The scene John saw next was in heaven. The seventh trumpet judgment did not begin immediately (cf. 8:1-5), but John received information preparatory to it (11:15—15:8).

11:15 When the seventh angel sounded loud voices in heaven announced that the long-expected reign of Jesus Christ over the world would begin soon (20:1-10; cf. Ps. 2:2; Isa. 9:6-7; Ezek. 21:26-27; Dan. 2:35, 44, 4:3; 6:26; 7:14, 26-27; Zech. 14:9). "Has become" (Gr. *egeneto*) is proleptic.³⁷⁴ This will happen after the seventh trumpet has run its course.³⁷⁵ The loud voices probably belong to the whole host of heaven. "Lord" refers to God the Father.

"Jesus will return and assume the throne of His father David in this future crisis, at which time He will replace the satanically energized sovereignty of world rulers that has prevailed for so long. The whole theme of Revelation is the purging of evil from the world so that it can become the domain of the King of kings (cf. 19:16). Only a physical kingdom on earth will satisfy this."³⁷⁶

"He" includes both the Father and His Christ. The earthly reign of Christ will continue in the new heaven and earth when He will turn over control to the Father and "God will be all in all" (21:1—22:5; cf. Dan 2:44; 7:14, 27; 1 Cor. 15:24, 27-28).

11:16 The 24 elders' (4:10; 5:8, 14; 7:13-14) response to this announcement was to prostrate themselves before God. Worship in heaven contrasts with rebellion on earth.

11:17 The elders thank God for taking His power in hand and finally reigning.³⁷⁷ In the vision He was about to do this. "Lord God, the Almighty" stresses God's irresistible power and sovereignty, which now become evident. "Who art and who wast" emphasizes God's uninterrupted existence, which makes His endless rule possible. Until now God had allowed powers hostile to His people to control the earth, but now He will begin to rule directly.

The elders' statement has led some interpreters to conclude that it signals the beginning of Jesus Christ's reign. In view of the events that seem to

³⁷⁴Düsterdieck, pp. 328-29; Robertson, 6:384.

³⁷⁵Charles, 1:294; Kiddle, p. 207.

³⁷⁶Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, p. 106.

³⁷⁷This is the only use of *eucharisteo*, "I give thanks," in Revelation.

follow this one and precede the beginning of His reign in chapter 20, a different understanding is preferable. It seems better to regard the elders' statement as anticipatory of the inauguration of that reign.

"The event is so certain that throughout this section it is repeatedly spoken of as already having taken place."³⁷⁸

11:18 The elders continue to anticipate the beginning of Messiah's rule on earth by foreseeing the raging response of unbelieving Gentiles (cf. 16:14, 16, 19; 20:8-9; Ps. 2:1, 5, 12) and the outpouring of God's holy wrath (cf. Matt. 3:7; Luke 3:7; Rom. 2:5, 8; 5:9; 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9). They also see the judgment of the dead and the rewarding of believers. They not only give thanks that Christ reigns supremely (v. 17) but that He judges righteously and rewards graciously (v. 18).

"Although rewards are all of grace (Rom. 4:4), they vary according to what each has done (I Cor 3:8)."³⁷⁹

"The elders in their song make no attempt to separate the different phases of judgment as they are separated in the closing chapters of Revelation. They simply sing of that future judgment as though it were one event, much on the order of other Scriptures that do not distinguish future judgments from each other (cf. Mark 4:29; John 5:25, 28-29; Acts 17:31; 24:21)."³⁸⁰

The elders distinguished two groups of believers: the Old Testament and New Testament prophets, who communicated divine revelation, and the saints, namely, other believers.³⁸¹ They further described these saints as even (ascensive use of "and," Gr. *kai*) those who fear God's name both small and great (e.g., both slaves and nobles; cf. 13:16; 19:5, 18; 20:12). The elders also anticipated the destruction of the wicked who have been responsible for the divine judgments that have destroyed the earth. John would soon learn of the destruction of some of these destroyers, namely, Babylon, the beast, the false prophet, and Satan.

11:19 John then saw the temple in heaven opened (cf. Heb. 9:23).³⁸² This event, as the others in this pericope, is proleptic (cf. 15:5).³⁸³ The opening of the temple probably pictures the immediate fellowship with God that believers

³⁷⁸Mounce, p. 231.

³⁷⁹Ibid., p. 232.

³⁸⁰Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, pp. 110-11.

³⁸¹See Stanton, *Kept from . . .*, pp. 65-69, for evidence that these are Tribulation saints in contrast to church-age Christians. The term may also include Old Testament saints.

³⁸²This chapter opens with the measuring of the temple and closes with the opening of the temple, though in the first case the temple is on earth and in the second it is in heaven.

³⁸³Düsterdieck, p. 331.

will enjoy following these judgments. In the temple, John viewed the ark of God's covenant, the emblem of His faithfulness, presence, and atonement to the Israelites. The last chronological reference to the ark in the Old Testament is in 2 Chronicles 35:3. What happened to it after that is unknown. Many scholars believe it perished in Shishak's invasion, during Manasseh's apostasy, when Nebuchadnezzar burned the temple in 586 B.C., or during the Babylonian captivity (cf. 1 Kings 14:26; 2 Kings 25:9; 2 Chron. 33:7; Jer. 3:16.³⁸⁴ There was no ark in the second temple.³⁸⁵ What John saw, however, was not the earthly ark but its heavenly counterpart (cf. Heb. 9:24). Its appearance in the vision suggests that God would resume dealing with Israel and would soon fulfill His covenant promises to that nation.

As elsewhere, the storm theophany portrays the manifestation of God's presence (cf. 4:5; 16:18; Exod. 19:16-19) and His wrathful judgment (cf. 8:5; 10:3; 16:18).³⁸⁶ It concludes this part of John's vision that proleptically anticipates the end of the Tribulation judgments and the inauguration of God's kingdom.

This verse is transitional concluding the present pericope and introducing what follows.

There is no revelation in this pericope (vv. 15-19) of the judgment announced by the blowing of the seventh trumpet. The record of this judgment appears in chapter 16. There we have a prophecy of seven bowl judgments. It appears that as the seven trumpet judgments were a revelation of the seventh seal judgment so the seven bowl judgments will be a revelation of the seventh trumpet judgment.³⁸⁷ Consequently the revelation in chapters 12—15 seems to be another insertion of information about this time, the Great Tribulation, not advancing the chronological sequence of events on earth (cf. 7:1-17 and 10:1-11:14). The chronological progression resumes again in 16:1.

H. SUPPLEMENTARY REVELATION OF SATAN'S ACTIVITY IN THE GREAT TRIBULATION CHS. 12—13

God gave John knowledge of the forces and persons behind the climax of anti-God hostility so he could understand the bowl judgments, which the seventh trumpet judgment contained.

³⁸⁴Jewish tradition held that Jeremiah hid the ark in a cave on Mt. Sinai (2 Macc. 2:4-8).

³⁸⁵Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, 5:219:5. The "second temple" refers to the temple that Nehemiah built, which Herod the Great modernized, and which later perished in the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

³⁸⁶Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom . . .*, p. 300, believed that the seventh trumpet is the second advent of Jesus Christ to this earth. More explanation of his view follows in the exposition of chapter 16.

³⁸⁷Bullinger, pp. 368-69; Ladd, p. 160.

1. The activity of Satan himself 12:1-17

God gave John revelation of Satan's activity, especially during the Great Tribulation. He did so to enable his readers to understand better the reasons for and the forces behind the events of this strategic period of history.

"The method of narration beginning at this point differs from anything previous, because it focuses on the secret maneuvers that lie behind the visible conflict to be portrayed under the seven bowls . . . That future struggle is merely the outworking of a conflict between God and Satan that has lasted throughout history since Satan's fall. This prepares the way for all that is anti-Christian to enter the world at 13:1."³⁸⁸

Many ancient civilizations had myths that resemble this story.³⁸⁹

The dragon's hostility toward the male child 12:1-6

This pericope furnishes the plot for the drama that unfolds in the rest of the chapter.

12:1 John saw a "sign," something that signified or represented something else (cf. v. 3; 13:13-14; 15:1; 16:14; 19:29). Usually John used the Greek word *semeion* ("sign") to describe something miraculous that points to some deeper spiritual significance connected with an event or object (cf. John 2:11, 18, et al.). He called this one a "great sign" (Gr. *mega semeion*).

"In this section [chs. 12—14] there is what might be called a Book of Signs. While no signs (*semeia*; . . .) appear in chapters 1 to 11, at least seven signs are mentioned in chapters 12 to 19 (cf. the seven signs in John 1—11). Three are in heaven (12:1, 3; 15:1); four on earth (13:13-14; 16:14; 19:20). Only one is a sign of good (12:1); the others are omens of evil or judgment from God. These signs explain and amplify previous material (e.g., the beast in 11:7 is more fully described in ch. 13) and also advance the drama to its final acts. More specifically, chs. 12 to 14 contain seven further images though only two are directly identified as signs."³⁹⁰

This sign was "in heaven," not the sky but the heavenly scene John had been viewing in contrast with what he saw happening on earth. What this woman signifies puzzles interpreters. Some have felt that John was alluding to something that his original readers knew about, namely, the

³⁸⁸Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, p. 117.

³⁸⁹For discussion, see Beasley-Murray, pp. 192-97.

³⁹⁰Johnson, p. 510.

"mother of the gods" represented on Roman coins.³⁹¹ Others see her as standing for "the believing covenant-messianic community" including the church.³⁹² That this is not a symbol of Mary the mother of Jesus, as some have suggested,³⁹³ seems clear from the fact that she will be the object of persecution during the Tribulation (v. 13; cf. v. 17).³⁹⁴

In view of Old Testament imagery (cf. Isa. 54:1-6; Jer. 3:20; Ezek. 16:8-14; Hos. 2:19-20) and the following reasons, the "woman" seems to symbolize the nation of Israel.³⁹⁵ She wears a crown (Gr. *stephanos*) with the sun, moon, and stars, as God pictured Israel in one of the nation's early symbolic representations (Gen. 37:9-11; cf. Isa. 26:17-18; 60:1-3, 20). There are many figurative references to Israel as a travailing woman in the Old Testament (Is. 26:17-18; 66:7-9; Jer. 4:31; 13:21; Mic. 4:10; 5:3). She eventually gave birth to Christ (v. 5). In Genesis 37:9-10, the sun corresponds to Jacob, the moon to Rachel, and the 12 stars to Israel's 12 sons (cf. 7:5-8; 21:12).

12:2 In John's vision the woman was about to give birth and cried out in labor pains. Evidently this represents Israel's pain before Jesus Christ's appearing at His first coming.³⁹⁶

12:3 The second "sign" John saw was the "dragon" whom God identified in verse 9 and 20:2 as Satan. "Dragon" (Gr. *drakon*) occurs 12 times in the New Testament and only in the Book of Revelation. In every instance it refers to Satan (12:3, 4, 7, 9, 13, 16, 17; 13:2, 4, 11; 16:13; 20:2). A dragon symbolizes a powerful, aggressive, deadly foe. His red color suggests bloodshed.³⁹⁷ His seven heads and ten horns probably represent seven nations and ten rulers (17:12). Ten kings will rule under his authority, but when Antichrist rises to preeminence among them he will subdue three of them leaving only seven (Dan. 7:7-8, 20, 24; Rev. 13:1). The seven royal crowns (Gr. *diadema*) picture the political authority of these seven rulers during the Great Tribulation.

A less literal interpretation regards the ten horns as simply symbolic of the dragon's mighty strength.

³⁹¹See Tenney, p. 337; Stauffer, pp. 151-52.

³⁹²E.g., Johnson, p. 514.

³⁹³E.g., Chilton, *The Days . . .*, pp. 298-99.

³⁹⁴Commentators have suggested many other identifications. See Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, pp. 117-19, for further discussion of the most popular views.

³⁹⁵Newell, pp. 170-71, gave nine reasons why this woman is Israel. Morris, p. 156, amazingly agreed with this identification. Mounce, p. 237, saw the woman as "the messianic community, the ideal Israel," i.e., Israel and the church. Ladd, p. 167, viewed the woman as "the ideal church in heaven; her children are the actual historical people of God on earth."

³⁹⁶Kiddle, p. 220; Walvoord, *The Revelation . . .*, p. 188; Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 121.

³⁹⁷Newell, p. 172; Moses Stuart, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse*, p. 621; Lange, p. 246; Scott, p. 337.

"The point of the seven heads is not immediately obvious."³⁹⁸

12:4 The "stars" probably represent the angels Satan led in rebellion against God (cf. vv. 8-9; 9:1; Dan. 8:10; Jude 6; 2 Pet. 2:4).³⁹⁹ Satan has extensive authority, which this description reflects. God cast Satan and these angels out of heaven to earth.⁴⁰⁰ That is, they were no longer at home in God's presence though they presently have access to Him. Satan proceeded to take out his vengeance by trying to prevent the appearance of Messiah (cf. Exod. 1:15-22; 1 Sam. 18:10-11; 2 Chron. 22:10; Matt. 2:16). The birth referred to is evidently that of Jesus Christ at His first advent (v. 5; cf. Matt. 2:13).

"All Satanic activities are carried on under the double motive of *ambition to rule and be worshipped*, and, *hatred toward the One whom God has chosen to take the kingdom* Satan has usurped."⁴⁰¹

12:5 The birth of Jesus and His ascension are the events in view here. Satan failed to destroy Jesus at His birth, and because he also failed to destroy Him during His life and in His death, Jesus Christ ascended victoriously into heaven. Satan cannot persecute Him there. He will yet rule the world with an iron shepherd's rod (Ps. 2). The emphases in this whole review of Satan's opposition to Jesus are Jesus' victory and Satan's continuing antagonism.

12:6 Since Satan cannot destroy Jesus Christ he turns his attention to Israel. John saw Israel as having fled into the wilderness where God protected her 1,260 days (three and a half years), the second half of the tribulation period (v. 14, 11:2-3; cf. Matt. 24:16; Mark 13:14). Throughout Scripture a wilderness often represents a place of desolation, safety, discipline, and testing. The passive "be nourished" suggests that others, perhaps Gentiles but definitely God and angels (cf. Dan. 12:1), will care for the Jews at this time.⁴⁰²

The dragon's expulsion from heaven 12:7-12

12:7 Michael the archangel (Jude 9) is the leader of God's angelic army. He is Israel's special patron (Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1). He evidently holds high rank among unfallen angels as Satan does among the fallen. John saw him engaged in battle with Satan and his angels, the demons. Michael battled

³⁹⁸Morris, p. 158.

³⁹⁹Lenski, p. 356; Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 124.

⁴⁰⁰Govett, 2:21-23; William H. Simcox, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, p. 126; Charles, 1:320.

⁴⁰¹Newell, p. 174.

⁴⁰²Alford, 4:669; Robertson, 6:391.

with Satan in the past (Jude 9), but the conflict in view here evidently takes place just before the last half of the Tribulation.

12:8 In John's vision Satan's forces proved weaker, and God threw them out of heaven. Consequently Satan no longer had access to heaven (cf. 20:11; Dan. 2:35; Zech. 10:10). God will no longer hear Satan's accusations against believers.⁴⁰³

12:9 Here God identified the dragon as Satan. He called him the "great dragon" because he is fierce and cruel in nature. The title "serpent of old" stresses his crafty and subtle character (cf. 20:2; Gen. 3:1-5; 2 Cor. 11:3). The name "Devil" means accuser or slanderer.

"This name for the evil one would have made a specially strong impact in the first century, for there was a well-known and well-hated figure called the *delator*, the paid informer. He made his living by accusing people before the authorities."⁴⁰⁴

"Satan" means adversary. He is the one who deceives the whole world because he is consummately deceptive.⁴⁰⁵ God cast Satan's angels out of His presence with him. The threefold repetition of "thrown down" in this verse stresses the ignominious fate of Satan and these angels.

Satan is in the heavens now; he has access to God (Job 1:6; Rev. 12:10). His being thrown down to the earth with his angels will evidently take place at the middle of the Tribulation. This conclusion harmonizes with the evidence of unusual Satanic activity on earth including heart hardening described in the revelation of the Great Tribulation (chs. 6—11 and 13—18).

12:10 John then heard another outburst of praise in heaven. This one seems to have come from the Tribulation martyrs (6:10; cf. v. 10). Their rejoicing is proleptic anticipating the imminent expulsion of Satan. God's salvation (victory), the manifestation of His power, and His kingdom (both millennial and eternal phases) will have come even closer when this happens. Likewise the manifestation of the authority of His Anointed One will be nearer (cf. 11:15; Ps. 2:8). The way will then be more open than it was previously for the establishment of God's kingdom on the earth.

Satan's malevolent work of accusing believers before God will cease (cf. Job 1:6). However, he will continue to persecute the living brethren of the

⁴⁰³Swete, p. 154.

⁴⁰⁴Morris, p. 161. Cf. Barclay, 2:102.

⁴⁰⁵See Gregory H. Harris, "Satan's Work as a Deceiver," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156:622 (April-June 1999):190-202.

martyrs still on earth even though he can no longer accuse them in heaven. Satan accused believers day and night, just as steadily as the four living beings praise God (4:8).

- 12:11 This verse contains the second stanza of the song of praise begun in verse 10. "They" refers to believers whom Satan formerly accused before God. Jesus Christ's death is the basis for believers' ultimate victory over Satan even though he has accused us. Because of the proleptic nature of this song, the singers were probably referring to believers who would yet suffer martyrdom during the last half of the Tribulation. The word of God to which they bear testimony is another key to their success along with the Lamb's blood (cf. 1:2, 9; 6:9; 20:4). They would consent to die rather than proving unfaithful to Christ.

"The blood of the martyrs, rather than signaling the triumph of Satan, shows instead that they have gained the victory over the dragon by their acceptance of Jesus' Cross and their obedient suffering with him. This is one of John's chief themes (1:9; 6:9; 14:12; 20:4).⁴⁰⁶

- 12:12 Here we have the third and final stanza in the martyrs' praise. Heaven-dwellers can rejoice in view of Satan's punishment (cf. Ps. 96:11; Isa. 49:13). He is no longer among them. However everyone living on the earth, especially believers, must beware because he now moves among them more antagonistically than ever. Furthermore he knows that his time is short. He will have only 1,260 days before Jesus Christ returns to the earth and binds him (20:1-2).

The dragon's vengeance on the woman 12:13-17

The revelation of Satan's activity, which the song of the martyrs (vv. 10-12) interrupted, now resumes.

- 12:13 Satan will concentrate his vengeance on Israelites during the Great Tribulation, under the sovereign control of God, since He cannot antagonize Christ. The Israelites will flee from Satan in the future as they fled from Pharaoh in the past (cf. Exod. 14:5; Josh. 24:6). Jesus predicted this flight in the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:15-28; Mark 13:14-23). The reason Satan will oppose the Jews is that Christ, his archenemy, came from them and is one of them.
- 12:14 The Israelites will receive divine assistance in fleeing from the dragon (passive "were given"). God bore the Israelites "on eagles wings" when He enabled them to escape from Pharaoh (Exod. 19:4; Deut. 32:11; cf. Isa. 40:31). Therefore we should probably understand the eagle to be

⁴⁰⁶Johnson, p. 517.

metaphorical describing the way God will save them, namely, with strength and safety.⁴⁰⁷ The comparison between an eagle that can fly overhead and an earth-bound serpent implies the superior protection of God.

Evidently many Israelites will flee from Jerusalem into desolate places to escape Satan's persecution (cf. Zech. 14:1-8; Matt. 24:16; Mark 13:14). Some commentators have felt that mountainous Petra in Edom (modern Jordan) is a place where all that God predicted here could take place (cf. Matt. 24:16). However the Jews could flee to any mountainous region of safety. God will nourish these Israelites in their place of refuge, possibly as He fed the Israelites in the wilderness and Elijah by the brook Cherith.

The reference to a time, times, and half a time identifies this activity as taking place during the Great Tribulation (Dan. 7:25; 12:7; cf. Rev. 11:2; 12:6; 13:5). "Times" refers to years as is clear from the Hebrew of Daniel 11:13 that reads "at the end of times, even years."⁴⁰⁸ No one will be able to buy or sell during the Great Tribulation without the mark of the beast (13:17), so perhaps God's provisions will again be miraculous.

The "serpent" is another name for the dragon (v. 9). Even though this period will be a time of intense persecution of Jews, God will preserve many of them, as He explained here (cf. 7:3-8).

12:15 Perhaps Satan will use literal water to try to drown this group of Israelites.⁴⁰⁹ If they take refuge in a place such as Petra this might seem to be a possibility. Another possibility is that he will pursue them with soldiers as a river (cf. Jer. 46:7-8; 47:2-3).⁴¹⁰ A flood is also a biblical metaphor for overwhelming evil (Ps. 18:4; 124:2-4; Isa. 43:2). Probably this is a picturesque way of describing Satan's attempt to destroy the Jews who will have congregated in Palestine following the Antichrist's covenant with them. Both water and fire (cf. 9:17; 11:5) proceeding from the mouth picture punishment in Scripture.

Note the many parallels between Israel's exodus from Egypt and her past preservation in the wilderness, including rescue from water (the Red Sea; cf. v. 15), and this future flight. The similarities have led some commentators to conclude that the 42 months refer to Israel's 42 camping stations (Num. 33) and that what John described was in the past. Yet it seems clear that John was describing a future exodus.

⁴⁰⁷ Another possibility is that the eagle represents angelic assistance (cf. 8:13).

⁴⁰⁸ The various references in Revelation to a time, times, and half a time, three and one half years, and 1,260 days all refer to the same period: the Great Tribulation.

⁴⁰⁹ Düsterdieck, pp. 353-54; Bullinger, p. 416; Smith, *A Revelation . . .*, pp. 190-91.

⁴¹⁰ Govett, 2:62-64.

12:16 Evidently the earth (the physical ground, Gr. *ge*) will assist the Israelites in escaping from the serpent. In the past the ground swallowed the Egyptians (Exod. 15:12) and later Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Num. 16:28-33; 26:10; Deut. 11:6; Ps. 106:17). Perhaps God will do similar miracles to preserve the fleeing Jews in the future.

Two-thirds of these Israelites will die (Zech. 13:8) and one-third will escape. Some of those who perish will probably be believers, the martyrs of verse 11.

12:17 Enraged because of his lack of success in completely annihilating all fleeing Jews Satan will proceed to concentrate his attack on those who do not flee. Jews who believe in Jesus Christ become his special target, those who hold fast to the truth that God and Christ revealed. Specifically this group seems to be the 144,000 (7:1-8; 14:1-5).⁴¹¹

"Granting the continuity of 12:1—14:5, one must see the portrayal of the victorious 144,000 in 14:1-5 as a sequel to the battle of the dragon's two emissaries with 'the rest of her seed' in chapter 13. The extended section is a connected sequence from this point on with the mention of the dragon's animosity toward that seed here, his stationing of himself on the sands of the sea in 12:18, the appearance of the earthly agents he will use to inflict his damage in 13:1, 11, and the proleptic scene of the victorious victims of his persecution after the conflict is over in 14:1-5. This sequence says rather plainly that 'the rest of her seed' is none other than the 144,000."⁴¹²

2. The activity of Satan's agents ch. 13

John also received information about Satan's chief instruments through whom he will pursue his goals during the Tribulation. He recorded this to enable his readers to identify these individuals and to respond properly. This chapter records the continuation of the dragon's activities that John described in chapter 12.

⁴¹¹See Stephen L. Homcy, "'To Him Who Overcomes': A Fresh Look at What 'Victory' Means for the Believer According to the Book of Revelation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38:2 (June 1995):193-201.

⁴¹²Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, p. 142. Ladd, p. 174, believed "the rest of her offspring" are real Christians in contrast to the mass of professing Christians (i.e., Christendom).

The beast out of the sea 13:1-10

John stressed three things about this beast: his conspiracy with the dragon (vv. 3-4), his success in deceiving the whole world (vv. 3-4, 8), and his success in temporarily defeating God's saints (vv. 6-7a).⁴¹³

"The initial description of this creature identifies it as the culminating empire of Daniel's vision of the end (Dan. 7), but it speedily becomes evident that John has in view the empire as embodied in its ruler."⁴¹⁴

Characteristics of the beast 13:1-4

13:1 The dragon stood on the seashore watching a beast come out of the sea, in John's vision (cf. Dan. 7:2, 3, 7, 8, 19-27).⁴¹⁵ The implication is that the dragon summoned the beast out of the sea.⁴¹⁶ Evidently this was part of his plan to destroy the rest of the woman's offspring (12:17).

When the dragon was in position, John saw a new scene in his vision ("I saw," Gr. *eidon*). The sea may represent the mass of humanity (cf. 17:15; Dan. 7:2-3). However this interpretation cannot explain the sands of the seashore or the origin of the beast from the earth (v. 11). A literal sea is impossible since this beast is a person, as we shall see. The ancient world often associated evil with the sea and used the sea as a figure for the abyss (cf. Job 16:12-13; Ps. 74:13-14; 87:4; 89:9-10; Isa. 27:1; 51:9-10; 57:20; Dan. 7:3; Rom. 10:7).⁴¹⁷ This figurative use of the sea seems best since elsewhere John said that the beast came out of the abyss (11:7; 17:8).

The beast had many of the same characteristics as the dragon. However, they also correspond to the features of the fourth kingdom that Daniel saw in his vision (cf. Dan. 7:7-8). In Daniel's vision the 10 horns represented 10 rulers (Dan. 7:24). Here the Antichrist has authority over 10 rulers (cf. Rev. 17).⁴¹⁸

"The ten-nation confederacy of the future anticipated in these prophecies [i.e., Dan. 2 and 7] would naturally be

⁴¹³Paul S. Minear, *I Saw a New Earth: An Introduction to the Visions of the Apocalypse*, p. 118.

⁴¹⁴Beasley-Murray, p. 206.

⁴¹⁵The AV and NKJV rendering "I stood" does not have as good textual support, I believe, as the NASB and NIV "he stood."

⁴¹⁶Robertson, 6:397; Johnson, p. 523; Mounce, p. 248.

⁴¹⁷Swete, p. 158; Mounce, pp. 249-50; Morris, p. 165.

⁴¹⁸The view that the first beast is a real person who will rule the world during the Great Tribulation (Dan. 7:25)—rather than the personification of evil, or the threat of heresy, or Nero revived (based on the Nero redivivus legend), or false prophets collectively—dates back to the early church fathers. See Johnson, pp. 521-25, 530. Beasley-Murray, pp. 210-11, gave a good, short summary of the Nero redivivus view. See also Andy M. Woods, "The First Beast of Revelation 13 Has Not Yet Appeared in World History: A Comparison of the Preterist and Futurist Views" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2002).

considered a revival of the Roman Empire if for no other reason than that it is portrayed as an integral part of the fourth empire."⁴¹⁹

As Satan, the beast had seven heads that apparently represent the remaining seven rulers of nations after three of them disappear (Dan. 7:8). The 10 regal crowns are symbols of governmental authority (cf. 12:3).

"There are a number of suggestions as to why the diadems are placed on the horns rather than on the heads of the beast. The most plausible is that his claim to authority rests on brute force."⁴²⁰

The blasphemous names reflect the beast's opposition to God (cf. vv. 5-6; 2 Thess. 2:4).

The beast is evidently Antichrist who is the head of a future empire (cf. 13:8, 18; 17:8).⁴²¹ He embodies the malevolent forces operative in this empire.⁴²² He will be the deification of secular authority.⁴²³

The repetition of heads, horns, and diadems (12:3) suggests that there is a close affinity between the dragon and this beast. Yet there are some differences in the descriptions of these heads, horns, and crowns.

"The conflict of 12:1-5 transpires while the seven world empires are running their course, but at 13:1 the focus has shifted to the last of these kingdoms when the beast will enjoy his supremacy over the ten kings who act as subrulers under his authority (cf. 17:12)."⁴²⁴

John received more information about the identity of these heads, horns, and diadems in chapter 17.

13:2 This beast possessed qualities of three animals, perhaps swiftness, agility, vigilance, craftiness, and fierce cruelty; brutality; and strength and majesty. In Daniel, these animals represented three kingdoms that previously ruled the world. These kingdoms are Greece (Dan. 7:6), Medo-

⁴¹⁹John F. Walvoord, "Revival of Rome," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 126:504 (October-December 1969):323. See also idem, *The Nations . . .*, pp. 83, 102; and idem, "Prophecy of the Ten-Nation Confederacy," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124:494 (April-June 1967):99-105.

⁴²⁰Mounce, p. 250.

⁴²¹Walvoord, *The Revelation . . .*, p. 200; Swete, p. 161; Lee, 4:689-90; Johnson, p. 521; Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 153; Beckwith, p. 636. No past governmental entity is similar enough to what John described to qualify as the fulfillment of this empire.

⁴²²Philip E. Hughes, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 145.

⁴²³Mounce, p. 251.

⁴²⁴Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 154. Cf. Scott, p. 270; Smith, *A Revelation . . .*, p. 193.

Persia (Dan. 7:5), and Babylon (Dan. 7:4). The fourth kingdom that Daniel described (Dan. 7:23) includes Antichrist's kingdom. The kingdom the beast rules and represents seems to reflect his personal qualities.

"The fact that the leopard of Greece, the bear of Medo-Persia, and the lion of old Babylon (*Daniel 7*) are all seen in this Beast, shows how all-inclusive of human things will be his character; he sums up all the brilliancy (Greece), all of the massive ponderousness of power (Persia), all of the absolute autocratic royal dominion (Babylon), that the Gentiles have ever known."⁴²⁵

Antichrist will derive his power and position from Satan (cf. 2 Thess. 2:9). Similarly Jesus Christ receives these things from His Father.

- 13:3 If the beast's heads represent nations (v. 1), verse 3 seems to be saying that one of the nations under Satan's authority perished, but then it revived.⁴²⁶
- 13:4 The apparent resurrection of this nation will be so amazing to the world that many people will give their allegiance and their worship to Antichrist (cf. vv. 8, 12; 14:9, 11; 20:4). In so doing they will also submit to Satan who is behind him. Antichrist's ability to revive this nation will make him appear invincible. The expression, "Who is like the beast?" (v. 4) seems to be a parody of Old Testament praises of God (cf. Exod. 15:11; Ps. 35:10; 113:5; Isa. 40:18, 25; 46:5; Jer. 49:19; Mic. 7:18). Later the Lamb will prove superior to the beast (14:1-5; 17:14; 19:11-21).

Activities of the beast 13:5-8

The notable abilities of the beast are blasphemy against God and deception of people. These activities also marked Antiochus Epiphanes, the prototype of Antichrist (Dan. 7:8, 11, 20, 25; 12:7).

- 13:5 God (cf. 6:4, 8; 7:2; 9:5; Dan. 4:17, 25, 32) will give authority to the beast to act as he will during the Great Tribulation, the last three and one-half years of the Tribulation.
- 13:6 He will blaspheme God by claiming to be God (2 Thess. 2:4). This is evidently what he will do throughout the Great Tribulation, not just at one point in it.⁴²⁷ He will speak against God and God's dwelling place, His

⁴²⁵Newell, p. 184.

⁴²⁶Gregory H. Harris, "The Wound of the Beast in the Tribulation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156:624 (October-December 1999):459-68, argued for the physical resurrection of the Beast himself, as have many other able scholars.

⁴²⁷*Enoixen*, "he opened," is a constative aorist (Robertson, 6:401). The phrase "he opened his mouth" often indicates the beginning of a prolonged discourse (cf. Matt. 5:2; Acts 8:35).

heavenly tabernacle (Dan. 7:25). The phrase "those who dwell in heaven" defines the tabernacle in terms of its inhabitants, namely, God and the holy angels. Apparently the beast will share the dragon's antagonism to God and the angels for having cast the dragon out of heaven (12:7-9, 12).

- 13:7 He will wage war against believers and overcome them (i.e., kill them, v. 15) and will become a worldwide dictator (Dan. 7:21, 23). No other ruler has ever been able to rule the entire world.

"Incidentally this shows that something more than the Neronic persecution is in mind, for that was not world-wide."⁴²⁸

"This verse furnishes a most important key to the proper understanding of events occurring during the tribulation period. Since authority is given to him [the beast] over *all kindreds, and tongues, and nations* upon his ascent from the sea, any passage pertaining to rivalry of kings or conflict among kings in the 'time of the end' (such as Daniel 7:8, 24; 11:40-44) must refer to a time preceding this universal dictatorship and therefore to the first half of the tribulation."⁴²⁹

- 13:8 Unbelievers around the world will not only serve Antichrist but also worship him. The "book of life of the Lamb" contains the names of God's elect (cf. Eph. 1:4). These believers will not worship him (Matt. 24:24). The long and unusual description of unbelievers in this verse has the effect of assuring believers during this time that they are indeed secure.

The response of believers to the beast 13:9-10

- 13:9 God and John called on the readers of this book to pay attention. Particularly those living at this time in the future should do so. Note that John made no reference to "the churches" as in similar exhortations in chapters 2 and 3 (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). This supports the fact that Christians (i.e., believers living in the church age) will not be present on the earth at this time (3:10). It is what follows (v. 10) that this verse announces, not what has preceded.
- 13:10 God promised the saints that those He has destined for captivity (i.e., Antichrist, his followers, and the saints) will eventually end up as captives (cf. Jer. 15:2; 43:11). Those who kill others (the others being believers in Jesus Christ, v. 7) will die (cf. Matt. 26:52). This assurance that God will execute justice should encourage the saints to persevere steadfastly and to

⁴²⁸Morris, p. 169.

⁴²⁹Smith, *A Revelation . . .*, p. 199.

trust God during this period of intense persecution and martyrdom (cf. 14:12). The whole verse is an encouragement for believers to submit to the sovereignty of God realizing that He has permitted Antichrist's activity but that they are secure. It also assures them of divine retribution and urges them to persevere faithfully.

THE FIRST BEAST IS THE LITTLE HORN		
The First Beast (Rev. 13:1-8)		The Little Horn (Dan. 7:7-28)
"All who dwell on the earth will worship him" (13:8).	Both have a worldwide empire.	"It will devour the whole earth and tread it down and crush it" (7:7, 23).
"The woman . . . was nourished [in the wilderness] for a time and times and half a time" (12:14).	Both have victory over the saints for three and one-half years.	"The saints . . . will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time" (7:25).
"The beast was . . . thrown alive into the lake of fire" (19:20).	Both are destroyed by Messiah at His second advent.	"The beast was slain . . . and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever" (7:11, 26).
"Those who had not worshiped the beast . . . came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years" (20:4-6).	Immediately following both their destructions the saints will receive the messianic kingdom.	"Then the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints" (7:22, 27).

The beast out of the earth 13:11-18

Most interpreters who see the first beast as an individual also see the second beast as one. Others who see the first beast as a power or movement tend to view the second beast similarly. Many of the Reformers identified the second beast as the papacy or as specific

popes. Many modern interpreters view the first beast as the personification of secular power in opposition to the church and the second beast as the personification of false religion.⁴³⁰ However it seems best to take these beasts as representing individuals.

13:11 *Kai eidon*, "and I saw," marks another new scene in the vision that John had been observing since 12:1 (cf. v. 1). John saw another beast (Gr. *allo therion*, one of the same kind) rise to prominence out of the earth. The Greek word translated "earth" (*ges*) refers to the land in contrast to the sea (v. 1).

"In the minds of the ancients, none of the terrestrial animals could compare in magnitude with monsters from the deep, so coming out of the earth in itself indicated a degree of inferiority in power of the second beast to the first."⁴³¹

It is probably not valid to see a reference to Palestine in this reference to the earth.

"To argue that the earth means Palestine and that therefore this character is a Jew is reading into the passage more than it says."⁴³²

If the sea represents the abyss (v. 1), the earth probably represents planet earth. Clearly this second beast is a servant of the dragon, but his connections with the dragon are not as obvious as those of the first beast.

His two horns may symbolize some political power but less power than that of the first beast (cf. v. 1; 5:6).⁴³³ Probably in his external conduct this second beast was peaceful, as a lamb, but his words will prove satanic (cf. Matt. 7:15). His words reveal his true loyalty. He is a false prophet (16:13; 19:20; 20:10).

"Preterist interpreters admit that it is impossible to find any ancient historical figure who is the counterpart of the second beast."⁴³⁴

13:12 The second beast will represent the first beast by acting as his prophet (19:20; 20:10; cf. Exod. 7:1).⁴³⁵ He will be his effective agent in directing the persecution of believers. He will lead the worship of the first beast evidently as the leader of a worldwide religious movement. This is a

⁴³⁰E.g., Mounce, p. 349.

⁴³¹Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 172.

⁴³²Walvoord, *The Revelation . . .*, p. 205.

⁴³³Stuart, p. 646.

⁴³⁴Ladd, p. 183.

⁴³⁵Compare the ministries of Moses and Aaron (Exod. 4:16; 7:9), and the Lord and Elijah (1 Kings 17:1).

satanic counterfeit of the Holy Spirit's ministry in pointing people to Christ. The reference to the first beast's fatal wound being healed also highlights the comparison with Christ who rose from the dead. Believers worship Christ because He rose from the dead (cf. Acts 17:30-31), and unbelievers will worship the beast because he did a similar thing (cf. v. 14). Here some type of personal rejuvenation seems to be in view, not just the revitalization of a nation (cf. v. 3).

- 13:13 Like Pharaoh's magicians, only with greater effectiveness, the second beast will have authority to perform supernatural miracles (cf. Exod. 7:11, 22; 8:7). These will be genuine signs and wonders, not just tricks (16:13-14; 19:20; Matt. 24:4-5, 11, 24-25 2 Thess. 2:9).⁴³⁶ Like Elijah and the two witnesses, he will even be able to call down fire from heaven.
- 13:14 This power will make many earth-dwellers erroneously conclude that his authority is supreme. He will be able to produce some type of convincing likeness of Antichrist (cf. v. 15; 14:9, 11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4), perhaps a statue (cf. Dan. 3:4-6) or even an android (cf. v. 15). The false prophet will be the beast's "Minister of Propaganda."⁴³⁷ The description of the first beast as having been fatally wounded by the sword and then having come back to life apparently refers to his resuscitation (cf. v. 12).
- 13:15 This verse may mean that the second beast will give life (Gr. *pneuma*, breath) to an inanimate object or that he will only appear to do so. In either case he will deceive many people (v. 14).

"Belief in statues which spoke and performed miracles is widely attested in ancient literature."⁴³⁸

The image will speak and will put to death those who do not worship the beast (cf. Dan. 3:-11), possibly by issuing commands for executions. Evidently these events will all take place in Jerusalem and probably in the temple that will stand there at this time (cf. 11:1-2; 2 Thess. 2:4). We should not conclude that every last believer will die at this time (i.e., during the Great Tribulation; cf. 12:13-16; 13:17-18).

- 13:16 The second beast also implements the marking of beast-worshippers. We should probably interpret "all" to mean all classes rather than all individuals since John mentioned six classes of people: social, economic, and cultural. However taken together these three groups comprise the entire population. This marking corresponds among unbelievers to the sealing of God's servants in chapter 7. It probably will begin early in the

⁴³⁶See Gregory H. Harris, "Satan's Deceptive Miracles in the Tribulation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156:623 (July-September 1999):308-24.

⁴³⁷Bruce, p. 653.

⁴³⁸Mounce, p. 261. He cited several sources. Cf. Charles, 1:361, for additional sources.

Great Tribulation shortly after the sealing of the 144,000.⁴³⁹ Those who receive this mark will do so willingly.⁴⁴⁰

"The choice of right hand or forehead is presumably for conspicuousness. It could not be hidden. It may also be meant as a travesty of the Jewish custom of wearing phylacteries (little boxes containing extracts from the Bible) on the left hand (or forearm) and on the head."⁴⁴¹

The mark of the beast is evidently a brand-like mark, similar to a tattoo, that will identify beast-worshippers and will enable them to buy and sell. It probably connects with ancient customs. Domestic slave owners sometimes branded their slaves with their mark. Those bearing the mark of the beast show by their mark that they are his slaves. Sometimes Roman soldiers branded themselves with the mark of their general if they were particularly fond of him. Those devoted to the beast will take his mark. The same Greek word translated "mark" (*charagma*) also described the seal attached to legal documents that bore the name of the emperor and the date.

A less literal view understands the mark as, "John's way of symbolically describing authentic ownership and loyalty."⁴⁴²

13:17 Many believers will not take the mark of the beast (cf. 7:3; 14:1, 9-11). Perhaps they will be able to survive by pooling their resources, by obtaining the necessities of life in clandestine ways (cf. 12:16), and through God's supernatural provisions. Those earth-dwellers who worship the beast will accept his law and authority. Coins bore the image of the head and the inscription of the emperor. Those who bear the mark of the beast demonstrate by this that they belong to him. When a person burned a pinch of incense to worship Caesar, he received a certificate verifying that he had done so. This preserved him from death by persecution and enabled him to buy and sell.⁴⁴³ The mark of the beast appears to be such a certificate of worship that a person may only obtain by affirming his or her veneration of Antichrist.

The interchangeability of the beast's name and the number of his name evidently indicates that the name, written in letters, has a numerical equivalent (v. 18).⁴⁴⁴

⁴³⁹Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 180.

⁴⁴⁰Düsterdieck, p. 381.

⁴⁴¹Morris, pp. 172-73.

⁴⁴²Johnson, p. 532.

⁴⁴³Barclay, *The Revelation . . .*, 2:129-30.

⁴⁴⁴Charles, 1:364; Robertson, 6:406.

13:18 John indicated that it would take wisdom (Gr. *sophia*) to figure out the number of the beast (cf. 17:9). This wisdom is the understanding and skill necessary to solve the problem (cf. Dan. 9:22; 12:10). By identifying the beast's number believers in the Tribulation will be able to recognize him for who he is. Calculating or counting (Gr. *psephisato*) is the key to the puzzle.

The number 666 has, of course, been the subject of much study by interpreters.

"Most students work from the fact that in the ancient world (where men lacked our convenient Arabic numerals) it was usual to employ letters to denote numbers. In Greek the first nine letters of the alphabet were used for the units, the next for the tens, and so on. The problem then is to find a name which gives a total of 666 when the numbers signified by its letters are added together."⁴⁴⁵

"The sheer disagreement and confusion created through the years by the gematria method [the method described above] should have long ago warned the church that it was on the wrong track."⁴⁴⁶

On the other hand, this disagreement and confusion may be due in part to the fact that the meaning of this number may not be evident until the Antichrist appears.⁴⁴⁷

"As to the man whom the number 'Six hundred and sixty and six' represents, God will give full 'understanding' when it is needed, in those three and half [*sic*] years of horror and danger."⁴⁴⁸

Another approach takes the numbers 666 as Scripture uses them symbolically elsewhere.⁴⁴⁹ The number seven frequently occurs in Scripture. The Israelites understood seven to represent a completed work of God (e.g., the seven days of creation, etc.). The number three often stands for the fullness of something (e.g., the Trinity, etc.). Consequently 777 would indicate something authenticated as divine. However "666" would appear as a deficient counterfeit to a believer who knows the significance of these numbers. This is especially true since the number six

⁴⁴⁵Morris, pp. 173-74. For the way some people identified Nero and Hitler as the beast by this method, called gematria, see Barclay, *The Revelation* . . . , 2:131-33. Smith, *A Revelation* . . . , pp. 206-7, also discussed this number extensively.

⁴⁴⁶Johnson, p. 534.

⁴⁴⁷Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, pp. 182-85.

⁴⁴⁸Newell, p. 205.

⁴⁴⁹Walvoord, *The Revelation* . . . , p. 210; Ladd, p. 187.

often connects with human rather than divine activities in Scripture (e.g., man works six days a week, etc.). Verse 18 says 666 is the number of "man." The article "a" is absent in the Greek text, and though the reader may supply it legitimately here, it seems best not to do so.

I think that neither the identity of the Antichrist nor the number of his name will be evident until he appears and fulfills prophecy. Then wise believers will be able to calculate his number as well as identify his person. Until then both aspects of Antichrist's identity will remain a mystery.⁴⁵⁰

"I would suggest that we not waste our time trying to identify a person by this number. Instead, we need to present Jesus Christ that we might reduce the population of those who have to go through the Great Tribulation Period and who will therefore know what the number of the Beast is."⁴⁵¹

The dragon and the two beasts mentioned in chapters 12 and 13 are a counterfeit of the divine Trinity.⁴⁵² The dragon seeks worship that belongs only to God. The first beast seeks to rule the world, which is Jesus Christ's prerogative. The second beast glorifies the first beast, which is a counterfeit of the Holy Spirit's ministry of glorifying Christ.⁴⁵³

Note that chapters 12 and 13 also paint a picture of the Great Tribulation in which there is finally one government, one religion, and one economic system for the whole world. This will be a time of great persecution and martyrdom for believers. Rather than getting better and better, as postmillennialists believe, the world will get worse before Jesus Christ's second coming. As we see world events shaping up for this scenario, we should allow them to motivate us to redeem the time before the Rapture or death terminates our ministries here. On the other hand, we should also rejoice that our Savior's second coming is drawing near (Matt. 6:10).

⁴⁵⁰See Stephen J. Nichols, "Prophecy Makes Strange Bedfellows: On the History of Identifying the Antichrist," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44:1 (March 2001):75-85.

⁴⁵¹McGee, 5:1005. Cf. Phil. 3:10.

⁴⁵²See Vern Poythress, "Counterfeiting in the Book of Revelation as a Perspective on Non-Christian Culture," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:3 (September 1997):411-18.

⁴⁵³Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom . . .*, pp. 302-9, discussed the revelation about the "beast" and the "false prophet" helpfully.

**I. SUPPLEMENTARY REVELATION OF PREPARATIONS FOR THE FINAL
JUDGMENTS IN THE GREAT TRIBULATION CHS. 14—15⁴⁵⁴**

1. Judgment at the end of the Great Tribulation ch. 14

John recorded these scenes of his vision to assure his readers of the triumph of believers and the judgment of unbelievers at the end of the Tribulation.

"The two previous chapters have prepared Christians for the reality that as the end draws near they will be harassed and sacrificed like sheep. This section shows that their sacrifice is not meaningless.

"Chapter 14 briefly answers two pressing questions: What becomes of those who refuse to receive the mark of the beast and are killed (vv. 1-5)? What happens to the beast and his servants (vv. 6-20)?"⁴⁵⁵

This chapter contains several incidents John saw in heaven and on earth that continue the parenthetic revelation begun in 12:1. While he saw some things in heaven, most of what he saw transpired on the earth. What he saw in heaven only provides background information for what he saw on earth in his vision. From revelation of the defeat of evil forces (ch. 13), John turned to the triumph of the forces of good.

"It is the opposite side of the picture, a victorious stance of the Lamb and His followers after their temporary setbacks portrayed in chapter 13.

"The whole of chapter 14 is proleptic. As a summary of the Millennium (20:4-6), the first five verses feature the Lamb in place of the beast, the Lamb's followers with His and the Father's seal in place of the beast's followers with the mark of the beast, and the divinely controlled Mount Zion in place of the pagan-controlled earth . . . The remainder of the chapter furnishes a proleptic outline of the catastrophes and the bliss that receives a chronological and more detailed treatment in 16:17—22:5. In this fashion, the chapter is a sort of *intermezzo* to provide encouragement by telling the ultimate triumph for those who refuse the beast's mark and to predict the doom of those who do receive it."⁴⁵⁶

The triumph of the 144,000 14:1-5

14:1 "And I looked" (Gr. *kai eidon*) introduces three scenes in chapter 14 (vv. 1, 6, 14), as this phrase did twice in chapter 13 (vv. 1, 11). "Behold" (Gr.

⁴⁵⁴For a study of the many parallels between chapters 14 and 15 and Exodus 19—24, see William H. Shea, "Literary and Theological Parallels Between Revelation 14—15 and Exodus 19—24," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 12:2 (Autumn 2001):164-79.

⁴⁵⁵Johnson, p. 537.

⁴⁵⁶Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, pp. 188-89.

idou, cf. v. 14) calls special attention to the greatness of the sight that John saw here.

John saw in this scene the time yet future at the end of the Great Tribulation when Jesus Christ will return to the earth. His second coming does not take place here but in 19:11-21. John only saw it as happening in his vision here. He saw the Lamb standing on earth, specifically on Mt. Zion, with the 144,000 Jewish witnesses that God had sealed for the Tribulation (7:3; cf. Zech. 14:4-5). The contrast of the gentle Lamb standing and the fierce dragon pursuing (12:13-17) and the evil beasts arising (13:1, 11) is particularly striking.

Amillennialists and some dispensationalists⁴⁵⁷ take Mt. Zion (cf. 11:1, 18; 12:5) to refer to the heavenly Jerusalem (cf. Heb. 12:22). Some interpreters take it as the new Jerusalem that God will bring down to earth from heaven (21:1—22:5).⁴⁵⁸

"To interpret this as a heavenly city . . . involves numerous problems If this group is the same as the 144,000 of chapter 7, they are specifically said to be sealed and kept safely through the tribulation. In this case, they move on into the millennial earth without going to the third heaven [God's abode], since this is the meaning of the seal (cf. 7:3)."⁴⁵⁹

Others take Mt. Zion as a figure for strength (cf. Ps. 2:6; 48:2; 78:68; 87:2; 125:1; Isa. 28:16; 59:20; Obad. 17, 21; Mic. 4:7).⁴⁶⁰ However Zion, as that name occurs elsewhere in Scripture, usually refers to earthly Jerusalem (cf. 2 Sam. 5:7; Ps. 48:1; Isa. 2:3; 24:23; Joel 2:32; Obad. 17, 21; Mic. 4:1, 7; Zech. 14:10).⁴⁶¹ I think it probably does here too.

"Further, the argument that the 144,000 must be in heaven as they hear the song before the throne may be disputed. There is no statement to the effect that they hear the song, only the declaration that they alone can learn it [v. 3]."⁴⁶²

Apparently their sealing (7:3) protects them from God's wrath but not from the wrath of the dragon and the beasts (cf. 12:12, 17). Some of them

⁴⁵⁷E.g., Ryrie, p. 88; Smith, *A Revelation . . .*, p. 208; Wiersbe, 2:607.

⁴⁵⁸Ladd, pp. 189-90; Mounce, p. 267.

⁴⁵⁹Walvoord, *The Revelation . . .*, p. 214.

⁴⁶⁰Swete, p. 177.

⁴⁶¹See Newell, p. 209; McGee, 5:1006.

⁴⁶²Walvoord, *The Revelation . . .*, p. 214.

will evidently die as martyrs (13:15).⁴⁶³ The seal is the earnest of their ultimate victory (cf. 22:4).

14:2 John did not identify the person who spoke from heaven. This could be the voice of Christ (cf. 1:15; Ezek. 1:24; 43:2), the Tribulation martyrs (7:10), an angel (cf. 6:1; Dan. 10:6), or many angels (5:8, 11; 7:11; 19:6). Perhaps the last option is best in view of how John described it here and in the next verse (pl. "they sang"). These angels do not include the four living creatures and the 24 elders, however (v. 3).

14:3 These angels sang a new song. A new song in the Old Testament was a song of praise to God for new mercies (cf. Ps. 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 144:9; 149:1; Isa. 42:10).

"A 'new song' is one which, in consequence of some new mighty deeds of God, comes from a new impulse of gratitude in the heart, xl. 13, and frequently in the Psalms, Isa. xlii. 10, Judith vi. 13, Apoc. v. 9."⁴⁶⁴

The song this group sang in heaven is one that only the 144,000 of all God's creatures could learn. Probably they were the only ones who could learn it in the sense that they were the only ones who could appreciate what it expressed (cf. 15:2). God had purchased them from the earth for their special ministry in the Great Tribulation (cf. v. 4), not just for salvation.

14:4 Three occurrences of "these" (Gr. *houtoi*) in this verse identify the 144,000 as worthy of special honor. First, with women (emphatic in the Greek text) they had not been defiled because they were celibates (Gr. *parthenoi*, virgins). Should we understand this word literally or figuratively? Literally the text would mean that these males had no sexual relations with women.

"One of the special criteria for these slaves of God was that they have no intercourse with women. . . . So in the future Great Tribulation, virginity will be requisite for this special group."⁴⁶⁵

Figuratively it would mean that they had remained faithful to the Lord, as the NIV translation "they kept themselves pure" suggests (cf. 2 Kings 19:21; Isa. 37:22; Jer. 18:13; 31:4, 21; Lam. 2:13; Amos 5:2; 2 Cor. 11:2).

⁴⁶³Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, pp. 192, 194. Walvoord, *The Revelation* . . . , p. 216, believed that none of the 144,000 would die during the Great Tribulation.

⁴⁶⁴Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*, 1:402.

⁴⁶⁵Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, p. 195. Cf. Alford, 4:685-86; Newell, pp. 215-16; Wiersbe, 2:607.

"It is better . . . to relate the reference to purity to the defilement of idolatry. In fact, John seems to use *molyno* [defile] this way elsewhere of cult prostitution (3:4; cf. 2:14, 20, 22)."⁴⁶⁶

I think the balance of evidence is slightly in favor of the literal interpretation. If this seems too severe, it may be helpful to remember that Paul advised the Corinthians to remain unmarried because of the nature of the distressing times in which they lived (1 Cor. 7:26; cf. Matt. 19:12). A figurative interpretation of "celebrates" could be the correct one, however. Of course, both may be true; they may be unmarried and faithful spiritually.⁴⁶⁷

Second, the 144,000 receive special commendation because they followed the Lamb faithfully during their lives. This was especially difficult due to the time in which they lived, the Great Tribulation.

Third, they receive honor because they not only experienced purchase by God but because they were firstfruits to God. Some view this as expressing the idea that they are the first of others who will follow, specifically believers who will enter the Millennium as living believers.⁴⁶⁸ However there will be no others who follow that are just like the 144,000; they are unique. Probably the firstfruits figure represents them as a special gift to God. This is the idea behind two-thirds of the references to firstfruits in the Old Testament.⁴⁶⁹

14:5 Furthermore, they spoke the truth even though deception abounded (13:14; cf. Isa. 53:9; Zeph. 3:13; John 8:44; 1 Pet. 2:22). In short, they were blameless, that is, perfectly acceptable to God as firstfruit sacrifices (cf. Phil. 2:15; Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 1:19; Jude 24).

Four climactic announcements 14:6-13

"And I saw" (Gr. *kai eidon*) signals another scene of this vision on earth. In this one John heard four announcements that provide incentives for remaining faithful to God and resisting the beasts. Angels made the first three announcements, and a voice from heaven gave the fourth.

The everlasting gospel 14:6-7

14:6 John next saw another angel (cf. 7:2; 8:3; 10:1) flying between heaven and earth (cf. 8:13). He was "another" probably like Michael (12:7), the

⁴⁶⁶Johnson, p. 539. Cf. Walvoord, *The Revelation . . .*, p. 216; Ladd, p. 191.

⁴⁶⁷McGee, 5:1008.

⁴⁶⁸Walvoord, *The Revelation . . .*, p. 216; Ryrie, p. 89; Smith, *A Revelation . . .*, pp. 210-11.

⁴⁶⁹Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 198.

nearest specific angel in the context. This is the first of six specific angels who individually participate in the events recorded in this chapter (vv. 8, 9, 15, 17, 18). He was flying in midheaven, so nothing hindered people on earth from hearing his words.

He had an "eternal gospel" to preach to the worldwide population. "Gospel" means good news. What this good news is comes out in the next verse. It is "eternal" because it has eternal significance.

14:7 The angel spoke loudly revealing his urgency and concern. The loudness of his voice implies that everyone will hear his message. He called earth-dwellers to fear God (cf. Eccles. 12:13; Luke 12:5), to acknowledge their accountability to Him (cf. Rom. 1:32). To give God glory means to repent having acknowledged His attributes (cf. Deut. 6:13; 10:20; Matt. 4:10; Acts 14:15-17).⁴⁷⁰ The positive response to this invitation appears in 15:4 and the negative response in 16:9, 11 and 21. The reason for fearing God is that the hour of His judgment has come. This is the very last chance that these unbelievers will have to change their allegiance from Satan to God before the final judgments of the Great Tribulation begin.

The angel referred to natural revelation in making this appeal.⁴⁷¹ God is worthy of worship because He is the Creator, and He has the right to judge what He has created (cf. Neh. 9:6; Ps. 33:6-9; 146:6). The four categories of creation encompass all of it. The first four bowl judgments will affect each of these four aspects of creation (16:2-9).

The fall of Babylon 14:8

The fact that separate and succeeding angels make these announcements stresses their importance and their sequential relationship. A second angel followed the first with the message that Babylon had fallen. This is another proleptic message in this case given before Babylon falls. It anticipates that event (ch. 18; cf. 11:7 and 13:1-8).⁴⁷² The repetition of "fallen" is for emphasis, and the aorist tense of this verb stresses the imminence of Babylon's fall.

One popular view concerning the identity of "Babylon" is that it is a code word for Rome, which the Christians used to disguise references to Rome. That use occurs elsewhere in the New Testament (cf. 1 Pet. 5:13). The other view is that "Babylon" is literal Babylon on the Euphrates River. The second option is better in Revelation because in this book place names describe literal locations (cf. 1:9; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14) unless specifically identified as figurative (e.g., 11:8). Furthermore "the great," Nebuchadnezzar's description of Babylon (cf. Dan. 4:30), always modifies the literal

⁴⁷⁰Swete, p. 182; Lenski, p. 430.

⁴⁷¹Some commentators believed the eternal gospel is the witness of natural revelation that has gone out since Creation (e.g., Wiersbe, 2:607).

⁴⁷²Newell, p. 235.

Babylon in Revelation. Viewing this place as literal Babylon does not exclude further implications of the religious and political systems that have arisen from the city, which become the focus of the revelation later (chs. 17, 18).⁴⁷³ "Babylon" will epitomize ungodliness in the world during the Tribulation, as it has throughout human history since the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9). Like "Hollywood" the name represents the world system as well as being the name of a particular city.

The angel personified Babylon as a temptress who gives wine to a man to seduce him to commit fornication (cf. 17:2, 4). The man would not choose to drink this wine without her influence.⁴⁷⁴ However what this man drinks comes ultimately from the cup of God's wrath that He gives, indirectly through Babylon, to those whom He will punish (cf. v. 10; Ps. 60:3; 75:8; Isa. 51:17, 22). This wine not only leads all who drink it to commit sexual licentiousness but every kind of excess that expresses unfaithfulness to God (cf. 17:1, 2, 5, 15, 16; 18:3, 9; 19:2).⁴⁷⁵

The fate of beast-worshippers 14:9-12

14:9 A third angel followed the former two with a third message in this sequence warning the beast-worshippers of their judgment (cf. 13:11-17). The goal of this warning is to alert potential beast-worshippers to their doom, if they follow the beast, and to encourage believers to remain faithful (cf. Matt. 10:28).⁴⁷⁶

14:10 The beast will kill people who do not follow him, but those who follow the beast will receive worse judgment from God.⁴⁷⁷ The combination of "wrath" (Gr. *orges*, settled indignation) and "anger" (Gr. *thymou*, vehement fury) stresses the reality and severity of God's hostility (cf. Num. 12:9; 22:22). Normally people added water to wine to dilute it, but God will not weaken His punishment of beast-worshippers. Their torment will be excruciating (cf. Gen. 19:24; Isa. 34:8-10), but this is not a reference to their eternal torment. Their final torment will be in the lake of fire removed from the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb (19:20; 20:10; 21:8, 27; 22:14-15; cf. Matt. 25:41; Mark 9:43; 2 Thess. 1:8-9).

"The opposite case is that of the overcomer who will receive open recognition in the presence of the Father and His angels (3:5)."⁴⁷⁸

14:11 An endless trail of ascending smoke is the constant reminder of the permanent misery of beast-worshippers (cf. 19:3; Gen. 19:28). The

⁴⁷³Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 207; Walvoord, *The Revelation . . .*, p. 218.

⁴⁷⁴Robert Wall, *Revelation*, p. 185.

⁴⁷⁵Hughes, p. 162.

⁴⁷⁶Mounce, p. 274.

⁴⁷⁷Contrast the blessing of the faithful in 14:1-5.

⁴⁷⁸Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 211.

temporary judgments of beast-worshippers under the coming bowl judgments now give way to judgment that is eternal (cf. Matt. 25:46; Rom. 2:3-9; 2 Thess. 1:6-9). If the ceaseless praise of the Lamb by the living creatures is eternal (4:5), so must be the punishment of these unbelievers since the same phrase, "forever and ever," describes both.

"The modern vogue of dispensing with hell has no counterpart in Revelation."⁴⁷⁹

"This is the most horrible picture of eternal punishment in the entirety of Revelation . . ."⁴⁸⁰

14:12 This verse contains John's word of encouragement to believers in the Great Tribulation (cf. 13:10b, 18; 17:9). It is better to experience the beast's punishment, even martyrdom, than God's punishment.

This verse is not saying that if genuine believers apostatize and worship the beast they will lose their salvation and suffer eternal punishment. It is saying that if they worship the beast they will experience temporal punishment from God along with beast-worshippers (v. 10). This temporal punishment is only the first phase of the punishment that unbelievers will experience (v. 11), but it is the only phase that believers will experience (cf. Rom. 8:231-39).

In view of their hope believers in the Great Tribulation should persevere in obedience and trust, good works and faith in God, plus ethical conduct and reliance on Jesus Christ. This is an encouragement to persevere, not a guarantee that the saints will persevere.⁴⁸¹ Obedience to God's commandments and continuing trust in Jesus will see the faithful through these days of tribulation successfully.

The blessedness of those who die in Christ 14:13

This "voice" was probably the Lamb's (1:10-11, 19; cf. 10:4, 8; 11:12; 14:2; 18:4; 21:3). The voice told John to record that it would be a blessing for the believers who live during the Great Tribulation to die as martyrs. They will receive a unique blessing reserved for no one else.⁴⁸² This is the second of seven beatitudes in the book (cf. 1:3; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14). Here, as often in Scripture, the blessing assures a future reward for present obedience to God.⁴⁸³

⁴⁷⁹Morris, p. 181. See also C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, ch. 8: Hell; Mounce, pp. 276-77; and Robert A. Peterson, "Does the Bible Teach Annihilationism?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156:621 (January-March 1999):13-27.

⁴⁸⁰Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, p. 212.

⁴⁸¹Beckwith, p. 658; Moffatt, 5:439; Robertson, 6:413. See Robert N. Wilkin, "The Mark of the Beast and Perseverance; Revelation 14:9-12," *Grace Evangelical Society News* 6:6 (June 1991):2-3.

⁴⁸²Moffatt, 5:439; Robertson, 6:413.

⁴⁸³Beckwith, p. 422.

"The faithfulness of the martyrs unto death is not a legalistic work which merits eternal bliss, but a manifestation of their devotion to Christ. These works follow them in the sense that there can be no separation between what a man is and what he does."⁴⁸⁴

Many believers will die as martyrs for refusing to worship the beast (13:15). They will die "in the Lord" in the sense of dying as their Lord did, namely, for His faithfulness to God.⁴⁸⁵ "From now on" means from this time in the Tribulation on, specifically during the bowl judgments. They will thereby escape the intense persecution of the beast, which they would otherwise experience, if they remained faithful to Christ (cf. 12:17).

The Holy Spirit added (cf. 22:17) that they would also experience blessing because they would be at rest beyond the grave and because God would then reward their faithful deeds (cf. 1 Tim. 5:24-25; Heb. 6:10). In contrast, the beast-worshippers have no rest (v. 11) and receive punishment for their unfaithfulness to God (v. 10).

"God does not save anyone for his works, but He does reward us for our works. Our works (good or bad) are like tin cans tied to a dog's tail; we cannot get away from them. They will follow us to the *bema* seat of Christ."⁴⁸⁶

This is a positive incentive to remain faithful that balances the negative warning previously given (vv. 9-12).

The reaping and treading of God's harvest 14:14-20

This is the final scene that furnishes background information before the revelation of the seven bowl judgments. Again what John saw was mainly on the earth.

"The total scene in 14:14-20 closes the section on coming judgment (14:6-20) with a proleptic summary in anticipation of the more detailed account of the same in chapters 15-20 . . ."⁴⁸⁷

14:14 "And I looked" (Gr. *kai idou*) again marks a new scene and an advance to another important subject. The whole description is very similar to Daniel's prophecy of Messiah's second coming (Dan. 7:13-14). The cloud probably represents the glory of God, the shekinah. The person John saw was evidently Jesus Christ, though some commentators think he was an angel in view of verse 15. This seems clear since John saw Him wearing a victor's crown (Gr. *stephanon*) and holding a sharp sickle (Gr. *drepanon*)

⁴⁸⁴Mounce, p. 278.

⁴⁸⁵The word order makes this interpretation preferable to the one that takes "in the Lord" as simply a designation of believers who are "in Christ."

⁴⁸⁶McGee, 5:1011.

⁴⁸⁷Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, p. 218.

oxy) with which He does the work of judging (cf. Mark 4:29). Since the sickle is sharp the reaper can do His work swiftly and completely.⁴⁸⁸ "Son of Man" is a messianic title of Jesus Christ in Scripture (cf. 1:13; Dan. 7:13-14; Matt. 8:20; 24:30; 26:64; John 5:27). That He receives and follows the instructions of an angel (v. 15) does not imply His inferiority to an angel. It only indicates that an angel will signal God's proper time for judging, and then the Son will proceed to judge.

14:15 Another angel (cf. v. 9) came out of the opened heavenly temple (cf. 11:19; 15:5) and announced that the time to judge those living on the earth had arrived. Three previous angels (vv. 6, 7, 9) announced that judgment was coming, and now this one conveyed the command to execute it. The harvest was "ripe" (Gr. *exeranthe*).⁴⁸⁹ The earth-dwellers during this late stage in the Tribulation were ready for judgment (cf. 19:11-21).⁴⁹⁰

"The harvest is an OT figure used for divine judgment (Hos 6:11; Joel 3:13), especially on Babylon (Jer 51:33). Jesus also likens the final judgment to the harvest of the earth (Matt 13:30, 39)."⁴⁹¹

14:16 The Judge (John 5:27) then judged those on the earth. This judgment will occur at the end of the Tribulation (19:17-21). This is a proleptic description of what Revelation will describe further in its sequential unfolding of events.⁴⁹²

"The brevity of the statement dramatizes the suddenness of the judgment."⁴⁹³

14:17 The fifth angel in this group came out of the heavenly temple ready to execute judgment (cf. Matt. 13:30, 39-42, 49-50).

14:18 Another angel, the sixth in this chapter, came out from the golden altar of incense in heaven (8:3). This is probably an allusion to his responding to the Tribulation saints' prayers for vengeance from under the altar (6:9-10). His "power over fire" may indicate his authority to execute punishment. It seems clear from verse 19 that this angel was addressing the angel with the sickle, not Jesus Christ.

John saw a different crop here ready for harvest.

⁴⁸⁸Lenski, p. 445.

⁴⁸⁹Some scholars take this word as describing an over-ripe harvest and others simply a ripe one.

⁴⁹⁰The idea that this is a harvest of believers (Alford, 4:691-92; et al.) runs counter to the context (14:1-5, 12-13), which is a judgment of unbelievers (cf. Joel 3:13).

⁴⁹¹Johnson, p. 543.

⁴⁹²Robertson, 6:415.

⁴⁹³Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 221.

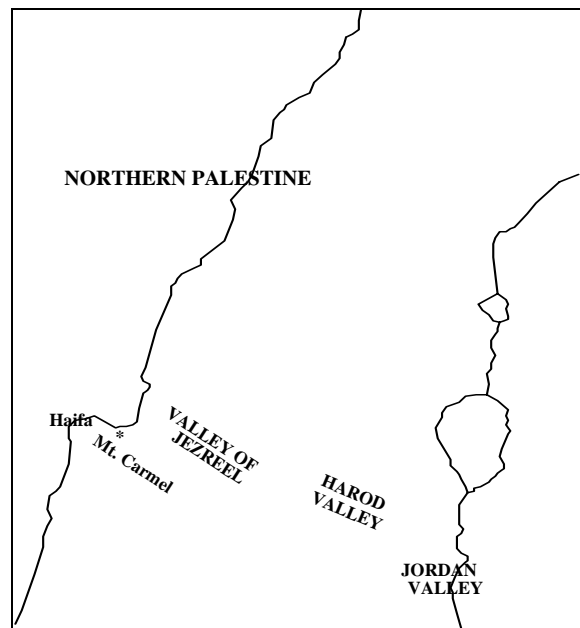
"Following the pattern of Joel 3:13, the scene furnishes two pictures of the same judgment for the same reason that Joel does, i.e., to emphasize the terror of it."⁴⁹⁴

The two reapings seem to describe a single judgment at the end of the Great Tribulation (19:15, 17-21). The vine may represent Israel and the wheat Gentiles.

14:19 The earth had yielded a crop of unbelievers that now, at the end of the Tribulation, would come into judgment. The angel took them from the earth to undergo judgment in God's great grape press (cf. Isa. 63:1-6; Lam. 1:15; Joel 3:13).

"In Biblical days grapes were trampled by foot in a trough which had a duct leading to a lower basin where the juice collected. The treading of grapes was a familiar figure for the execution of divine wrath upon the enemies of God."⁴⁹⁵

14:20 Since the city in view escapes this judgment, Babylon is evidently not the city in view. It is instead Jerusalem. The Old Testament predicted that a final battle would take place near Jerusalem, in the Valley of Jehoshaphat (i.e., the Kidron Valley just to the east of Jerusalem; Joel 3:12-14; Zech. 14:4; cf. Rev. 11:2). It seems probable that blood will literally flow up to the height of horses' bridles (about four and one-half feet) in some places in that valley. Obviously many people will have to die for this amount of blood to flow.



Blood came out from the wine press of God's wrath for a distance of 200 miles (lit. 1,600 stadia). Evidently this figure describes the judgment that will take place all over Palestine, not just in the Valley of Jehoshaphat near Jerusalem, at this time. Much of this action will take place in the Valley of Jezreel in northern Israel (i.e., the battle of Armageddon; 19:17-

⁴⁹⁴Ibid., p. 220. Cf. Isa. 34:1-3, 6; 63:1-6.

⁴⁹⁵Mounce, p. 282. Cf. Robertson, 6:416; J. P. M. Sweet, *Revelation*, p. 232.

19). There God will put vast numbers of people to death (cf. Isa. 63:1-6). The blood will evidently drain out of the Jezreel Valley for a distance of 200 miles probably eastward down the Harod Valley to the Jordan Valley and south into the Dead Sea.

Many interpreters believe that what we read in this verse is simply a symbolic way of picturing a terrible judgment.⁴⁹⁶ Amillennial interpreters generally take this description as picturing the blotting out of all humankind.

This chapter contains a prophetic preview of the major events yet future from John's perspective in his vision. That is, they deal with events leading up to the end of the Great Tribulation.

2. Preparation for the bowl judgments ch. 15

John recorded what he saw in this chapter to heighten further his readers' expectation for the climactic judgments of the Great Tribulation that we read in chapter 16 (cf. 8:1-5). This chapter continues supplementary revelation begun in 12:1 and the emphasis on preparation for the final judgments of the Great Tribulation begun in 14:1.

"Following the sign of the seven angels with the seven last plagues, the fifteenth chapter has two visions, the first one picturing the victors fresh from their triumph and the second describing the white-and-gold clad angels who hold the seven bowls."⁴⁹⁷

". . . it is not the image of a domestic bowl which John wished to conjure up in our minds, but the cup of God's wrath, of which the prophets frequently spoke and to which John himself has already referred (in 14:8 and 10) [cf. Isa. 51:17, 22]."⁴⁹⁸

The announcement of the seven last judgments 15:1

This verse serves as a superscription for chapters 15 and 16 and even, perhaps, for the rest of the book.⁴⁹⁹

"And I saw" (Gr. *kai idou*) again introduces a new scene, this time in heaven (cf. 13:1, 11; 14:1, 6, 14; 15:2, 5). The "sign" John saw signified God's final judgments on earth-dwellers during the Tribulation (cf. 12:1, 3).⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁶E.g., Wiersbe, 2:608.

⁴⁹⁷Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 228.

⁴⁹⁸Beasley-Murray, p. 231.

⁴⁹⁹Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Revelation*, pp. 137-40, argued that verse 1 concludes the previous revelation rather than introducing what follows, but his reasoning is unsatisfying.

⁵⁰⁰The former signs were the woman and the dragon.

"They [the signs] point beyond themselves and disclose the theological meaning of history."⁵⁰¹

This sign, however, is both great and marvelous, especially awesome. It is awesome because it signifies the climax of the outpouring of God's wrath on nature, humankind, the dragon, and the two beasts. The sign itself is the seven angels who control seven plagues. As with the seals and trumpets, angels were God's agents in pouring out His wrath in this series of judgments. These angels were now ready to do their duty (cf. Ps. 103:20). They appear seven times as a group (vv. 6, 7, 8; 16:1; 17:1; 21:9) and nine times individually (vv. 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 12, 17; 17:7; 21:9). John simply introduced them here. They do not begin to act until verse 6 (cf. 8:2; 12:6; 21:2).

The bowl "plagues" that follow have many similarities to the plagues that God sent on Egypt, as we shall see. All seven of these judgments repeat in varied ways the plagues of Egypt. These similarities suggest that God's purpose in both series of judgments is the same: to punish godless idolaters and to liberate the godly for future blessing and service.

The praise of the Tribulation martyrs 15:2-4

15:2 John again "saw" (cf. vv. 1, 5) the sea of glass that was similar to crystal (4:6; cf. Exod. 24:10; Ezek. 1:22), though here he wrote that it also had fire in it. The sea most likely represents the holiness and majesty of God that separate Him from His creation (cf. 4:6). The fire suggests the judgment that is about to come. Another view is that the fiery sea represents the persecution by the beast during the Tribulation.⁵⁰² The people standing on this sea appear to be the Tribulation martyrs (6:9-11; 7:9-17; 12:11; 14:1-5, 13). They had overcome the beast, his image, and the number of his name, three specific entities that combine to heighten appreciation for their victory.

God probably intended that we see allusions to the Exodus and the crossing of the Red Sea here. Jesus Christ will lead these believers in a great deliverance as Moses led the Israelites long ago. However, these overcome stand on the sea, not beside it, as they give thanks to God (cf. Exod. 15). Harps denote dedication to the service of God (1 Chron. 16:42; cf. Rev. 5:8; 14:2).

15:3 These martyrs sang two songs as seems clear from the repetition of the words "the song." Moses recorded two songs in praise of God's faithfulness and deliverance of the Israelites. Of these the one in Exodus 15 seems slightly more appropriate for these martyrs to echo than the one in Deuteronomy 32 because it is a song of victory. Nevertheless they both contain similar emphases. The song of the Lamb seems to be a song not recorded elsewhere in Scripture, though some commentators have

⁵⁰¹Mounce, p. 285.

⁵⁰²McGee, 5:1017.

suggested several different Psalms. Probably this song follows in verses 3-4. In the case of both songs, the genitive "of" is probably subjective: Moses and the Lamb were responsible for these songs, not the subjects of them.

"Moses celebrated a deliverance by the Lord which adumbrated a greater deliverance to come. The greater redemption eclipsed the former by a similar degree as the second redeemer transcended the first. Moses and the Lamb are no more to be bracketed than the promised land of Israel is to be equated with the kingdom of God. The unity of God's purpose and the continuity of God's people under both covenants include a disjunction of his action in Christ and of his people's experience of redemption."⁵⁰³

The first part of this song extols God's works and ways. Specifically God's works in judging His enemies are in view. His might makes judgment possible. His ways of judging are just and faithful. His sovereignty makes His judgment necessary.

15:4 It is inevitable that everyone fears God and glorifies Him. The rhetorical questions make this crystal clear (cf. 13:4). This will happen after He finishes judging (cf. Ps. 86:8-10; Jer. 10:7). One reason for this fear and glory is God's unapproachable majesty (Gr. *hosios*). Another is the fact that everyone will worship Him when Christ returns because He has purged the earth. He will reveal His righteous acts when He judges the earth.

Note that the martyrs do not refer to what they did in overcoming the beast but to what God is and did.

The preparation of the agents of judgment 15:5-8

15:5 "After these things I looked" (Gr. *meta tauta eidon*) indicates a transition to a new vision and a new subject: the bowl judgments. These are in a category of their own. John saw the heavenly temple opened. This gave the seven angels who carried the bowl judgments egress from God's presence. He is the one who sends them. The "tabernacle of testimony" refers to the temple as the building that housed God's law, which the earth-dwellers disregard. God was now going to hold them to it and judge them by it.

15:6 The seven angels now came out from God's presence (cf. v. 1). Each of them had received a plague (judgment) from God. Their clean linen garments represent holiness and righteousness (cf. 19:8, 14), and their

⁵⁰³Beasley-Murray, p. 235.

golden sashes mark them as on a punitive mission (cf. 1:18). Their clothing befits their purpose, which is to purify the earth.⁵⁰⁴

- 15:7 One of the living creatures (4:6) gave each angel a bowl full of God's wrath. It is interesting that God described the prayers of the saints as being held in bowls in 5:8. These prayers thus connect with the outpouring of these judgments in a suggestive cause and effect relationship. The two sets of bowls in chapters five and here are different, however, and they contain different things. The priests in Israel's earthly temple also used bowls in their worship (1 Kings. 7:50; 2 Kings 12:13; 25:15). The reference to the living God "who lives forever and ever" adds more solemnity to an already solemn scene (cf. 10:6; Deut. 32:40; Heb. 10:31).
- 15:8 The smoke probably symbolizes the presence of God (cf. Exod. 19:18; 40:34; 1 Kings 8:10-11; 2 Chron. 5:11-14; 7:1-3; Isa. 6:4; Ezek. 11:23; 44:4). No one could enter God's presence until He had finished judging the earth-dwellers. This indicates the climactic nature of these judgments.

This chapter is really more of a prelude to chapter 16 than a conclusion to chapters 12—14. Chapters 12—14 record prophetically historical information about the Great Tribulation but not in the chronological sequence of the three sets of seven judgments (seals, trumpets, and bowls). Chapter 15 is similar to 8:1 in that it prepares for the next set of judgments. It prepares for the resumption of the chronological progression of events on earth that ended temporarily in 11:19.

J. THE SEVEN BOWL JUDGMENTS CH. 16

John revealed the outpouring of the bowls to enable his readers to understand the climactic judgments of the Great Tribulation. The setting of John's vision in this chapter is the earth.

"These plagues are not the expression of God's wrath against sin in general, nor are they punishments for individual wrongdoing. They are the outpouring of his wrath upon him who would frustrate the divine purpose in the world—the beast—and upon those who have given their loyalty to him.

"These plagues are God's answer to Satan's last and greatest effort to frustrate the divine rule."⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰⁴Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, pp. 242-43.

⁵⁰⁵Ladd, p. 209.

1. The commencement of the bowl judgments 16:1

The voice John heard was evidently God's (cf. 15:8; 16:17). The fact that God told all seven angels to pour out their bowls seems to indicate that these judgments will follow each other in rapid succession.

The frequent use of the Greek adjective *megales* in this chapter indicates the unusual severity and intensity of the bowl judgments. The NASB translators rendered this word "loud" here and in verse 17; "fierce" in verse 9; "great" in verses 12, 14, 18 (twice), and 19 (twice); and "huge" and "severe" in verse 21.⁵⁰⁶

The relationship in time of the bowl judgments to the trumpet judgments has been a matter of disagreement among futurist commentators. On the one hand there are some similarities between them, as a side by side comparison reveals.⁵⁰⁷

TRIBULATION JUDGMENTS			
	Seals (ch. 6)	Trumpets (chs. 8—9)	Bowls (ch. 16)
1.	Antichrist	Storm	Sores
2.	War	Meteor	Bloody Seas
3.	Famine	Bitterness	Bloody Springs
4.	Death (1/4 of Population)	Darkness	Fire
5.	Imprecations	Locusts	Darkness
6.	Earthquake	Horses (1/3 of Population)	Invasion
7.	7 Trumpets	7 Bowls	Earthquake & Hail

However the differences make it most difficult to conclude that they are identical judgments.⁵⁰⁸ It seems more likely that the bowls constitute the seventh trumpet as the trumpets constitute the seventh seal. This would make the bowls the last plagues to come on the earth at the end of the Great Tribulation (15:1). Many details in the text, to be pointed out below, support the conclusion that this is the correct interpretation.

"The first four affect individuals directly either through personal affliction or through objects of nature, and the last three are on more of an international scale, leading the way to a final major confrontation."⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁶The word also occurs nine times in chapter 18, which is an elaboration on the seventh bowl judgment introduced in 16:17-21.

⁵⁰⁷See Beasley-Murray, pp. 238-39.

⁵⁰⁸See Swete, p. 200; Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, pp. 525-43.

⁵⁰⁹*Ibid.*, p. 248.

"After almost a century of insipid preaching from America's pulpits, the average man believes that God is all sweetness and light and would not discipline or punish anyone. Well, this Book of Revelation tells a different story!"⁵¹⁰

2. The first bowl 16:2

The first four trumpet judgments fall on man's environment rather than on man himself, but the first bowl judgment falls directly on man himself. This plague resulted in some loathsome (bad) and malignant (evil) sores breaking out on the beast-worshippers (cf. Exod. 9:9-11; Lev. 13:18-27; Deut. 28:27, 35; Job 2:7).⁵¹¹ This appears to be some type of skin ulcer that breaks out on the surface of the body. Might this be the result of germ warfare (cf. v. 17)? Believers who apostatize and worship the beast may suffer from this plague (cf. 14:9-12), but the faithful will be in a safe refuge (cf. 12:13-17) or God may protect them in other ways.

"It is an awesome thought to consider almost the entire population of the world suffering from a painful malady that nothing can cure. Constant pain affects a person's disposition so that he finds it difficult to get along with other people. Human relations during that period will certainly be at their worst."⁵¹²

3. The second bowl 16:3

This judgment resulted in the destruction of all sea life, not just one-third of it as in the second trumpet (8:8-9). This may involve actual coagulated, rotting blood or a liquid that resembles blood (cf. Exod. 7:19-25). I think it probably means real blood. Some commentators interpret the sea as the masses of humanity, but this sea is no more symbolic than the waters that Moses turned to blood.

"The sea is a great reservoir of life. It is teeming with life, and the salty water is a cathartic for the filth of the earth. However, in this plague, blood is the token of death; the sea becomes a grave of death instead of a womb of life."⁵¹³

4. The third bowl 16:4

All the fresh water sources (springs, rivers, lakes, etc.) become blood in this plague (cf. 8:11; Exod. 7:24; Ps. 78:43-44). If the water is literal water, should we not understand the blood as literal blood too? People cannot exist long without any water to drink. However other cataclysmic changes follow that will evidently make water available again (cf. vv. 17-21).

⁵¹⁰McGee, 5:1022.

⁵¹¹The same Greek word, *helkos*, occurs in the Septuagint translation of these Old Testament passages.

⁵¹²Wiersbe, 2:609-10.

⁵¹³McGee, 5:1023.

5. Ascriptions of angelic and martyr praise 16:5-7

John heard praise of God in heaven that interrupted his narration of the outpouring of the bowls of wrath briefly.

16:5 The "angel of the waters" evidently refers to the angel responsible for the sea and fresh water, the superintendent of God's water department. Scripture reveals that angels affect the elemental forces of nature (cf. Ps. 104:4; Heb. 1:7; Rev. 7:1; 9:11; 14:18). This angel attributes righteousness to the eternal God for judging in kind (cf. 15:3-4; Gal. 6:7). The holy and righteous God can judge humanity according to the *lex talionis* principle because He is eternal.

16:6 Specifically, God poured out blood on the earth-dwellers because they poured out the blood of His saints and prophets. He makes the punishment fit the crime (cf. Isa. 49:26).

"Pharaoh tried to drown the Jewish boy babies, but it was his own army that eventually drowned in the Red Sea [Exod. 1:22; 14:28]. Haman planned to hang Mordecai on the gallows and to exterminate the Jews; but he himself was hanged on the gallows, and his family was exterminated (Es. 7:10; 9:10). King Saul refused to obey God and slay the Amalekites, so he was slain by an Amalekite (2 Sam. 1:1-6)."⁵¹⁴

The saints refer to all believers, and the prophets are those who delivered messages from God to humankind (cf. 11:18; 18:24). The angel affirmed that those guilty of slaying the saints and prophets deserve what they get. They took lives contrary to God's will, and now God is taking their lives in exchange.

16:7 The Tribulation martyrs offer their "amen" from under the altar (6:9; 15:3-4). The altar was the personification of those associated with it earlier in John's vision (cf. 9:13; Gen. 4:10; Luke 19:40; Heb. 12:24). God always judges consistently with His character, which these martyrs describe as being almighty, true, and righteous.

6. The fourth bowl 16:8-9

16:8 The fourth trumpet judgment darkened the sun (8:12), but this judgment increased the sun's intensity. There is a definite article before "men" in the Greek text. The men in view are evidently the people who have the mark of the beast and who worship him (v. 2). The faithful will apparently

⁵¹⁴Ibid., 2:610. At least an Amalekite claimed to have slain Saul.

escape this judgment. Similarly the Israelites escaped some of the plagues on Egypt.

16:9 Evidently climatic changes will take place resulting in the sun's heat becoming much hotter than normal (cf. Deut. 32:24; Isa. 24:6; 42:25; Mal. 4:1; perhaps the destruction of the ozone layer?). Nevertheless instead of repenting the beast-worshippers curse God (cf. vv. 11, 21). They recognize His sovereignty, but they refuse to honor Him as sovereign (cf. Rom. 1:28; 2:24; 1 Tim. 6:1; James 2:7). Deserved judgment hardens the callous heart even more, as it did Pharaoh.⁵¹⁵

"This is the only chapter in the visional portion of the book that speaks of widespread human blasphemy, the other references being to blasphemy from the beast (13:1, 5-6; 17:3). These men have now taken on the character of the god whom they serve . . . They blame God for the first four plagues, rather than blaming their own sinfulness."⁵¹⁶

Previously some people repented because of the earthquake in Jerusalem (11:13), but now none do. Giving God glory is the result of repentance.

7. The fifth bowl 16:10-11

16:10 The darkening of the (first) beast's throne appears to be literal; light will diminish (cf. Exod. 10:21-23; Isa. 60:2; Joel 2:1-2, 31; Mark 13:24). Another possibility is that this may be a figurative darkening in which God somehow complicates the rule of the beast.⁵¹⁷

". . . in terms reminiscent of the ancient battles of Israel, John describes the eschatological defeat of the forces of evil, the kings from the East."⁵¹⁸

The weakness of this figurative interpretation is that the fifth trumpet judgment involved literal darkness (9:2) as did the ninth Egyptian plague (Exod. 10:21-22). God also darkened Jerusalem when Jesus Christ died on the cross (Matt. 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44). Since the beast's kingdom is worldwide, this darkening amounts to a global judgment. Perhaps the faithful remnant will remain unaffected by this judgment as it did earlier in Egypt (cf. Exod. 10:23).

This judgment of worldwide darkness inflicts excruciating pain on the beast-worshippers also. Just how darkness will cause so much pain is hard

⁵¹⁵Ford, p. 262; Robertson, 6:422.

⁵¹⁶Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 257.

⁵¹⁷Kiddle, pp. 321-22; Hughes, p. 175; Caird, p. 204.

⁵¹⁸Johnson, p. 550.

to understand, but the chaos that darkness caused in Egypt may suggest some ways.

16:11 The earth-dwellers still fail to repent and continue to blaspheme God. The title "the God of heaven" recalls the pride of Nebuchadnezzar and his successors (cf. Dan. 2:44). One evidence that the bowl judgments will follow each other quickly is that the sores of the first bowl are still on people in the darkness of the fifth bowl. The bowl judgments come in swift succession, one right after another. In contrast, each of the seal and trumpet bowls ended before the next one began.

"The Scriptures plainly refute the notion that wicked men will quickly repent when faced with catastrophic warnings of judgment. When confronted with the righteous judgment of God, their blasphemy is deepened and their evil purpose is accentuated."⁵¹⁹

8. The sixth bowl 16:12-16

The final three bowl judgments all have political consequences.

16:12 The problem that this judgment poses for earth-dwellers is not a result of the judgment itself but its consequences, namely, war. It does not inflict a plague on people but serves as a preparation for the final eschatological battle.⁵²⁰ The Euphrates River is the northeastern border of the land God promised to Abraham's descendants (Gen. 15:18; Deut. 1:7; 11:24; Josh. 1:4).⁵²¹ Now God dries up this river that had previously turned into blood (v. 4) so the kings of the East can cross with their armies (cf. Dan. 11:44; Isa. 11:15). God earlier dried up the Red Sea so the Israelites could advance on the Promised Land from the west (Exod. 14:21-22; cf. Isa. 11:16). He also dried up the Jordan River so they could cross over from the east (Josh. 3:13-17; 4:23). Elijah too parted the waters of the Jordan (2 Kings 2:8). Cyrus may have conquered Babylon by draining the Euphrates and marching into the city over the riverbed (cf. Jer. 50:38; 51:36).⁵²² All these previous incidents should help us believe that a literal fulfillment of this prophecy is possible.

Some interpreters believe this is an Oriental invasion of Babylon in the future that will be similar to Cyrus' invasion of it in the past.⁵²³ However, these are probably the Oriental armies that will assemble in Israel for the

⁵¹⁹Walvoord, *The Revelation . . .*, p. 235.

⁵²⁰Ladd, p. 212.

⁵²¹The Bible calls the Euphrates River (cf. Gen. 2:14), the eastern border of the Promised Land, the great river; and it calls the Mediterranean Sea, the western border of the Promised Land, the great sea.

⁵²²Herodotus, 1:191. Some cuneiform documents have cast doubt on the trustworthiness of Herodotus' account. See Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3:191.

⁵²³E.g., Swete, p. 205.

battle of Armageddon referred to in verses 13-16.⁵²⁴ The drying up of the Euphrates will be an immediate help to these advancing armies, but it will set them up for defeat, as was true of Pharaoh's army.

". . . in the Old Testament a mighty action of God is frequently associated with the drying up of waters, as the Red Sea (Ex. xiv. 21), the Jordan (Jos. iii. 16 f.), and several times in prophecy (Is. xi. 15, Je. li, 36, Zc. x. 11)."⁵²⁵

"A more immediate suggested identification of the kings from the east (i.e., 'the rising of the sun') could be the Parthian rulers who were a continual threat to Rome during John's day, but this was hardly a factor in preparation for the battle of Harmagedon in 16:16."⁵²⁶

Presently some sections of the Euphrates River are dry at certain times of the year due to dams that Iraq has built to create reservoirs. These dams generate power for the Middle East. Perhaps when the Euphrates dries up even artificial light will end in that region.

16:13 Verses 13-16 give further comments on the sixth bowl judgment. They are not an interlude between the sixth and seventh bowls (except verse 15). They reveal that rulers from all over the earth will join the kings of the East in a final great conflict.

The dragon, beast, and false prophet will evidently join in making a proclamation that will mobilize the armies of the world to converge on Palestine. Something proceeding from the mouth suggests a proclamation. This is the first mention of the false prophet, but he is clearly the beast out of the earth (cf. 13:11-17). He deceives the people. What he urges them to do for their advantage results in their destruction eventually.

The three unclean spirits that proceed from their mouths, the agents of this diabolical trio, are demons (fallen angels, v. 14; cf. Matt. 10:1; Mark 1:23-24; 3:11; 5:2, 13; Acts 5:16; 8:7). They resemble frogs in that they are unclean and loathsome (cf. Lev. 11:10-11, 41). The second Egyptian plague involved frogs (Exod. 8:5), but these demons are only like frogs.

16:14 Here John identified the spirits as demons. The demons go out to the kings of the earth deceiving them to assemble their armies in Palestine for the battle of Armageddon. A deceiving spirit earlier lured King Ahab into battle (1 Kings 22:21-23). They will do this under the influence of Satan, the beast, and the false prophet. The demons persuade them, but their

⁵²⁴Walvoord, *The Revelation . . .*, p. 236.

⁵²⁵Morris, p. 197.

⁵²⁶Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 263.

decision is something that God, the ultimate cause, puts in their hearts (17:17).

It may also be the advancing army from the east that moves these kings to assemble for war.⁵²⁷ These kings from all over the world will gather to destroy Israel (cf. Ps. 2:1-3; Joel 2:11; 3:2; Zech. 14:2-3). Satan's purpose in bringing all these soldiers into Palestine in the first place appears to be to annihilate the Jews. When Jesus Christ returns to earth, specifically to the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:1-4), they will unite in opposing Him. However God's sovereign hand will be regulating Satan's activities (Zech. 14:2). This will not be the day of Satan's triumph but that of the Lord God Almighty. He will show Himself supreme in this climactic battle (cf. Joel 2:31).⁵²⁸ The description of this battle follows in 19:11-16.

16:15 Jesus Christ Himself evidently gave this parenthetical invitation and warning (cf. 3:3, 18). His second coming will be as a thief in that it will be sudden, and His enemies will not expect it (cf. Matt. 24:43; Luke 12:39; 1 Thess. 5:2). Believers who understand the revelation of this book, on the other hand, will be expecting His return.⁵²⁹ Jesus Christ urged these faithful believers to be watchful and pure (cf. Matt. 25:1-30).⁵³⁰ The alternative is embarrassment (cf. Exod. 20:26; Lev. 18:6-19; Deut. 23:14; Isa. 47:3; Ezek. 16:37; 23:24-29; Hos. 2:10; Nah. 3:5). This is the third of the seven beatitudes in Revelation (cf. 1:3; 14:13; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14).

Another interpretation sees this encouragement as directed to the Christian readers of this prophecy during the church age, before the Tribulation begins. Advocates of this view point out that by the sixth bowl believers who have not taken refuge (12:13-17) will have suffered martyrdom (13:15; 14:1-5, 13; 15:2). Therefore, according to this view, there will be no believers on the earth by the time the sixth bowl judgment occurs.

"The close similarity to 3:3, 18 and the parenthetical nature of the announcement favor the latter alternative [i.e., this view]."⁵³¹

I think this verse is a general word of encouragement addressed to believers in the Great Tribulation, in view of the context, but applicable to believers in the church age. If believers do not understand that Jesus Christ

⁵²⁷Moffatt, 5:447.

⁵²⁸Gundry, p. 92, believed that the day of the Lord includes the battle of Armageddon but not the Tribulation. Most premillennial interpreters believe this distinction lacks convincing support, and I agree with them.

⁵²⁹Christ's coming for the church will not be as a thief because the church is looking for His return (1 Thess. 5:4; Titus 2:13).

⁵³⁰Walvoord, *The Revelation . . .*, p. 238; Smith, *A Revelation . . .*, p. 235; Newell, p. 258.

⁵³¹Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 267.

will return very soon, they may behave in ways that will be embarrassing when He does return, at the Rapture or the Second Coming.

16:16 "And" (Gr. *kai*) resumes the exposition of the sixth bowl judgment from verse 14. The demons will assemble the kings of the earth and their armies. They will go to what in Hebrew is called "Har-Magedon" (lit. mountain of Megiddo, Megiddo meaning either place of troupes or place of slaughter). John was writing to Greek-speaking readers who were generally unfamiliar with Palestinian geography (cf. 9:11).

This mountain may refer to the small hill on the south-central edge of the Jezreel (Esdraelon) Valley in northern Palestine on which the town of Megiddo stood. Alternatively, "Har-Magedon" may refer to the mountain closest to Megiddo, namely, Mt. Carmel. There God humiliated the host of prophets of Baal who gathered to oppose Him in Elijah's day (cf. 1 Kings 18:16-40). God and Elijah slaughtered them in the Valley of Jezreel. Mt. Tabor is another prominent hill (1,850 feet high) at the east end of this valley. Some believe it is the mountain in view here.⁵³² Probably Har-Magedon refers to the hill country surrounding Megiddo that includes all the mountains that border the approximately 14 by 20 mile Valley of Jezreel. Earlier Deborah and Barak had defeated the Canaanites in this valley (Judg. 4—5), and Gideon had routed the Midianites (Judg. 7). King Josiah also died there when he opposed Pharaoh Neco (2 Chron. 35:22).

"The plain of Megiddo is admittedly not large enough to contain armies from all over the world, so this must be the assembly area for a much larger deployment that covers a two hundred mile distance from north to south and the width of Palestine from east to west (cf. 14:20). Some decisive battles against this massive force will probably occur around Jerusalem (Zech. 14:1-3)."⁵³³

A less literal view sees the name standing for an event rather than any single locality.⁵³⁴

9. The seventh bowl 16:17-21

16:17 This final judgment has the greatest impact of all since the air into which the angel pours his bowl is what humans breathe.⁵³⁵ The loud voice is probably once again God's since it comes from the throne in the heavenly temple (cf. 16:1). With the outpouring of the final bowl God announced

⁵³²Newell, p. 260.

⁵³³Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, pp. 270-71. Cf. Walvoord, *The Revelation . . .*, pp. 238-39; William Sanford Lasor, *The Truth about Armageddon*, p. 146.

⁵³⁴Beasley-Murray, p. 246.

⁵³⁵Swete, p. 210.

that His series of judgments for this period in history was complete. This statement is proleptic since it anticipates the completion of the seventh bowl judgment, which John had yet to reveal (cf. 21:6).

"The pouring out of the seventh vial into the air is probably a gesture pointing to the utter demolition of man's greatest final weapon in human warfare, when once the wrath of God is poured out in the great day of God Almighty."⁵³⁶

"Men would not have the Savior's 'It is finished!' on Calvary; so they must have the awful 'It is done!' from the Judge!"⁵³⁷

16:18 Lightning, thunder, and the greatest earthquake this planet has ever experienced will accompany, and to some extent produce, the desolation that follows. The storm theophany again appears at the end of another series of judgments (cf. 8:5; 11:19). These are signs of divine judgment, but this earthquake is much larger than any previous one (cf. 6:12; 8:5; 11:13, 19; Hag. 2:6; Heb. 12:26-27). It heralds the seventh bowl judgment and the end of the seals and trumpets judgments. All three series of judgments end at the same time.

16:19 A result of this unprecedented earthquake is the splitting of the great city into three parts. The "great city" could refer to Jerusalem (11:8), to Rome,⁵³⁸ or to Babylon on the Euphrates (14:8; 17:18; 18:10, 21),⁵³⁹ to which this verse refers explicitly later. Probably Jerusalem is in view.⁵⁴⁰ It contrasts with the cities of the nations, and the phrase "the great" described it before (11:8). Zechariah's prophecy of topographical changes taking place around Jerusalem at this time argues for a geophysical rather than an ethnographic division (Zech. 14:4).⁵⁴¹

Evidently the earthquake will destroy virtually all the cities of the world. Babylon on the Euphrates is the most significant of these cities (14:8). It is the special object of God's judgment, which the cup of wine that she receives symbolizes. Chapters 17 and 18 will describe the fall of Babylon in more detail.

"The fall of Babylon is the central teaching of the seventh bowl. It is an event already announced in 14:8 and prefigured in the harvest and vintage of 14:14-20. . . .

⁵³⁶Smith, *A Revelation . . .*, p. 236.

⁵³⁷Newell, p. 262. The Greek words used are not the same.

⁵³⁸Mounce, p. 304.

⁵³⁹Ladd, p. 218.

⁵⁴⁰Moffatt, 5:449; Smith, *A Revelation . . .*, p. 237; Ford, p. 264; idem, "The Structure and Meaning of Revelation 16," *Expository Times* 98:11 (August 1987):327-31.

⁵⁴¹Lee, 4:727, believed this would be a division into three people groups.

Stages in Babylon's downfall come in 17:16 and 18:8 . . . ,
but her ultimate collapse is in 19:18-21"⁵⁴²

The government of Iraq has been trying to rebuild Babylon.⁵⁴³ Interpreters have differed on the question of whether someone will rebuild the whole city completely or not. Some believe Iraq will rebuild Babylon mainly in view of what the prophets predicted would happen to Babylon in Isaiah 13 and 14, and in Jeremiah 50 and 51. They say this has not yet taken place.⁵⁴⁴ Others hold that Scripture does not require the rebuilding of Babylon since they believe God has fulfilled these prophecies.⁵⁴⁵ It seems to me that a literal city is in view in Revelation.

16:20 The earthquake will produce other effects. It will level mountains and cause islands to disappear.⁵⁴⁶ As the Flood produced global topographical changes, so will this earthquake. It will prepare the earth for the Edenic conditions that the prophets predicted would characterize the earth during the Millennium. These changes will be a foreview of the final disappearance of the old creation and the creation of a new earth (cf. 20:11; 21:1-2).

16:21 The accompanying storm will include huge hailstones that will fall on the earth crushing people (cf. 8:7). Hail was often an instrument of divine judgment in biblical history (cf. Josh. 10:11; Job 38:22-23; Isa. 28:2, 17; Ezek. 13:11-13; 38:22-23). In spite of all these judgments the hearts of earth-dwellers will remain hard, as Pharaoh's did during the plague of hail in Egypt (cf. Exod. 9:24). They will know that God sent this calamity, but rather than repenting they will shake their fists in God's face. God will stone these blasphemers with these huge hailstones (cf. Lev. 24:16).

"We cannot emphasize too strongly that in the three series of divine judgments—first the seals, second the trumpets, third the vials (or bowls) of wrath—we have those preliminary hardening actions of God upon an impenitent world, by which He prepares that world for the Great Day

⁵⁴²Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 276.

⁵⁴³Charles H. Dyer, *The Rise of Babylon*, pp. 26-32.

⁵⁴⁴E.g., Kenneth Allen, "The Rebuilding and Destruction of Babylon," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 133:529 (January-March 1976):19-27; Charles H. Dyer, "The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17—18," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 144:576 (October-December 1987):440-49; Newell, pp. 253, 265, 268; Henry M. Morris, *The Revelation Record*, pp. 348-49; Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, pp. 290, 307. Cf. 18:2; Zech. 5.

⁵⁴⁵E.g., C. I. Scofield, ed., *The Scofield Reference Bible*, 1917 ed., pp. 1346-47; Pentecost, *Things to . . .*, pp. 368-69; Homer Heater Jr., "Do the Prophets Teach that Babylonia Will Be Rebuilt in the Eschaton?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41:1 (March 1998):23-43.

⁵⁴⁶Caird, p. 209, took this as a figurative way of describing political turmoil. A literal interpretation of these changes does not preclude an earthly reign of Christ, contra Beasley-Murray, p. 247.

of Wrath—at Christ's coming as King of kings, as seen in Revelation 19:11-15. . . .⁵⁴⁷

J. Dwight Pentecost believed that the bowl judgments describe the second advent of Jesus Christ to the earth.

"Since the bowl judgments must span some period of time, we must view the second advent of Christ as an event that encompasses a period of time. In that regard, we find an interesting chronological note in Daniel 12:11-12: 'From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days.' Twelve hundred ninety days span the second half of Daniel's seventieth week, and that time period brings us to the end of the Tribulation period. But the blessings of Messiah's reign are not enjoyed until some forty-five days later. Therefore, it is suggested that the forty-five day period is the period in which the judgments associated with the second advent of Christ are poured out on the earth. And that entire forty-five day period, then, could be called the second advent of Christ.

"Further, it is suggested that the 1,290 days come to their completion with the appearance of the sign of the Son of Man in heaven (Matt. 24:30). The judgments of Revelation 16 follow in a forty-five day period and are concluded with the physical descent of Jesus Christ to the earth. Hence, Revelation 11:15 brings us to the second coming of Jesus Christ back to the earth at which time He will experience the fulfillment of the Father's promise . . . [in Ps. 2:8-9]."⁵⁴⁸

It seems to me that the 45-day period may be the time of preparation for the beginning of the Millennium. It seems unnatural to describe the return of the Lord as taking this long to happen (cf. Acts 1:9-11). Therefore I prefer the view that the bowl judgments describe what happens before Jesus Christ returns rather than when He returns. These judgments then set the stage for the return of Jesus Christ to the earth.

Before recording that event in chapter 19, God led John to give more revelation concerning the fate of Babylon in chapters 17 and 18.⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁷Newell, p. 259.

⁵⁴⁸Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom* . . . , p. 301.

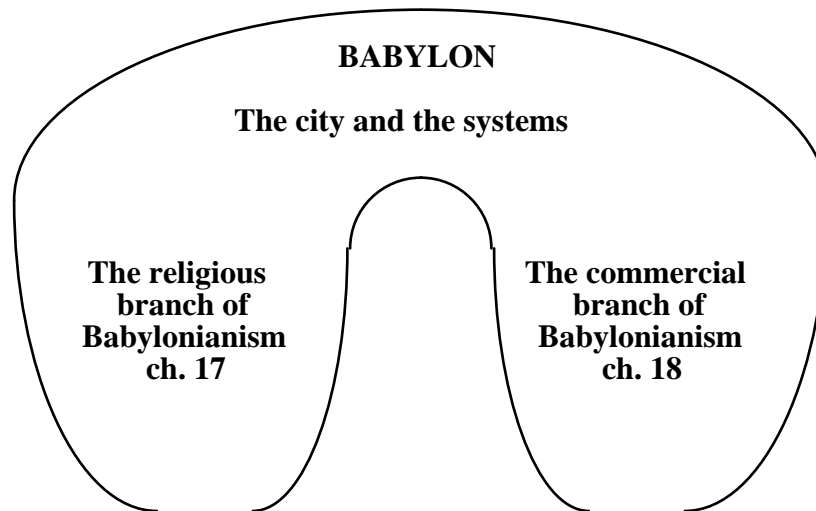
⁵⁴⁹Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, pp. 567-85, viewed the description of the seventh bowl as extending through 22:5. See Chilton, p. 418, for a similar view. Thomas saw all that follows to 22:5 as a result of this final climactic judgment. Most students of Revelation, however, have seen the description of the seventh bowl as limited to 16:17-21 with the consequences of that judgment following through 22:5.

**K. SUPPLEMENTARY REVELATION OF THE JUDGMENT OF UNGODLY SYSTEMS IN
THE GREAT TRIBULATION CHS. 17—18**

Further revelation concerning the destruction of Babylon follows in chapters 17 and 18. Both chapters are parenthetical in that they do not advance the revelation chronologically. They give further supplementary information about matters referred to in the chronological sections (as do 7:1-17; 10:1—11:14; and 12:1—15:8). Babylon in chapters 17 and 18 represents the head of Gentile world power. For this reason many interpreters take the city and empire in view as referring to Rome (cf. 1 Pet. 5:13). Daniel saw Babylon as the gold head of an image that represented Gentile world powers in Daniel 2.

The focus of attention in chapter 17 is on the religious system that God identified with Babylon in Scripture, and that of chapter 18 is on the commercial system He identified with it. Babylon is not just the name of a city in the Middle East. It is also a name that symbolizes the chief characteristics of that city throughout history, which have been a certain religious system and a certain commercial system. We need to keep this double use of the name as a real city and as a symbol in mind as we study these chapters. In a similar way "Rome" may mean the Roman Catholic Church as well as the city of Rome in Italy, and the name "Hollywood" represents both a town and an industry associated with that town.

"She [Babylon] stands for civilized man apart from God, man in organized but godless community."⁵⁵⁰



"The ancient Babylon is better understood here as the archetypal head of all entrenched worldly resistance to God. Babylon is a trans-historical reality including idolatrous kingdoms as diverse as Sodom, Gomorrah, Egypt, Babylon, Tyre, Nineveh, and Rome. Babylon is an eschatological symbol of satanic deception and power; it is a divine mystery that can never be wholly reducible to empirical earthly institutions. It may be said

⁵⁵⁰Morris, pp. 202-3.

that Babylon represents the total culture of the world apart from God, while the divine system is depicted by the New Jerusalem. Rome is simply one manifestation of the total system."⁵⁵¹

1. Religion in the Great Tribulation ch. 17

The Lord gave the revelation of the divine destruction of the religious system identified with Babylon to enable the readers to understand God's plans for this system more exactly.

The invitation of the angel 17:1-2

17:1 The fact that this chapter describes the judgment of Babylon referred to in 14:8 and 16:19 seems clear. It was one of the angels who poured out the bowl judgments who served as John's guide as he viewed these events in his vision. The "great harlot" (Gr. *pornes tes megalas*) is Babylon (v. 5).⁵⁵² She is the personification of spiritual fornication or idolatry (cf. Isa. 23:15-17; Jer. 2:20-31; 13:27; Ezek. 16:17-19; Hos. 2:5; Nah. 3:4).⁵⁵³

"In OT prophetic discourse the imagery of the harlot is commonly used to denote religious apostasy."⁵⁵⁴

It is probably better to translate *epi* as "beside" rather than "on" many waters since she sits astride the beast (v. v. 3). Evidently the beast and she were on the shore in John's vision (cf. John 21:1). The "many waters" represent humankind (v. 15), not a specific geographical site. This fact indicates that it is Babylon as a symbol that is in view here rather than the physical city. Babylon dominates humankind. It is also true, however, that literal Babylon stood beside many waters; it was built on a network of canals (Jer. 51:13). This helps to make the identification more certain.

"She leads the world in the pursuit of false religion whether it be paganism or perverted revealed religion. She is the symbol for a system that reaches back to the tower of Babel (Gen. 10:9-10; 11:1-9) and extends into the future when it will peak under the regime of the beast."⁵⁵⁵

There is similarity between this angel's invitation to John and the one in 21:9. This is the first of many clues that the New Jerusalem (21:9—22:5) is the divine counterpart of humanistic Babylon.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵¹Johnson, p. 554.

⁵⁵²The connection between Babylon and immorality (Gr. *porneia*) was evident as early as 14:8.

⁵⁵³Ford, *Revelation*, p. 277; Wall, p. 205.

⁵⁵⁴Mounce, p. 307.

⁵⁵⁵Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, pp. 282-83. Cf. Seiss, pp. 387-90.

⁵⁵⁶Lee, 4:735; Wall, p. 205.

17:2 The "kings of the earth" are world leaders who personify kingdoms (16:14; et al.). They committed immorality (fornication) with Babylon by uniting with the system she symbolizes.

"Religious compromise necessitated in this kind of association is totally incompatible with the worship of the one true God, and so amounts to spiritual prostitution."⁵⁵⁷

This system made all earth-dwellers, not just kings, "drunk," that is, it had a controlling influence on them. When people reject the truth, they will believe lies (cf. 2 Thess. 2:10-11). Obviously this harlot is different from the woman in chapter 12 and the bride in chapters 19, 21, and 22.

The vision of the system 17:3-6

17:3 The angel carried John away in the Spirit to a wilderness area (cf. 1:10; 4:1; 21:10). This wilderness may refer to the desert near literal Babylon,⁵⁵⁸ or it may anticipate the desolate condition of the harlot.⁵⁵⁹ There he saw a woman, the harlot of verse 1, sitting on a beast.⁵⁶⁰ The description of this animal is exactly the same as Antichrist in 13:1 except that it is scarlet here, probably symbolizing luxury and splendor (cf. 14:8-11; Isa. 1:18; Matt. 27:28-29). She sat in a position of control over Antichrist, and he supported her.

17:4 The woman's clothing was purple, symbolic of royalty, and scarlet, representing luxury (v. 3; cf. Matt. 27:28; Mark 15:17, 20; John 19:2, 5). Her ornaments included gold, precious stones, and pearls, jewelry that made her look like a queen.⁵⁶¹ The cup in her hand added to her royal appearance, but it contained idolatrous abominations (cf. Deut. 18:9; 29:17; 32:16; Jer. 51:7; et al.), namely, unclean things connected with her spiritual immorality. The harlot wore expensive, attractive garments and accessories that made her externally appealing, but she is a counterfeit beauty. What is inside her is unclean.

17:5 It was customary in John's day for Roman prostitutes to wear their names on their headbands.⁵⁶² However, it is not clear whether this woman's name was on a headband or on her forehead (cf. 7:3; 9:4; 13:16-18; 14:1; Jer. 3:3). Her name was a "mystery," namely, something not previously revealed but now made clear. A name in Scripture represents everything

⁵⁵⁷Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, p. 284.

⁵⁵⁸Moffatt, 5:451; Robertson, 6:429.

⁵⁵⁹Düsterdieck, p. 429; Lee, 4:737.

⁵⁶⁰Contrast the description of the rider on the white horse in 19:8, 11, and 14.

⁵⁶¹Contrast the bride of the Lamb whom John saw adorned with bright, clean linen (19:8).

⁵⁶²Swete, p. 214.

about the person who bears it, often the person's reputation. The content of the mystery about this Babylonian system is what John revealed here, especially the new revelation about its evil character and judgment (vv. 17-18).⁵⁶³ The harlot represents Babylon that is a "mother of harlots," not just one herself but the fountainhead of many other evil religious systems and everything anti-Christian (cf. Gen. 10:9-10; 11:1-9).⁵⁶⁴ God attributed all kinds of abominations to her.

"In our day the ecumenical church has faced a lot of problems. It seems that they have recognized psychological differences in people and that it is impossible to water down theologies and practices to suit everyone. So each group will come into this great world ecumenical system but retain some of its peculiarities. For example, those who want to immerse will immerse. Those who want to sprinkle will sprinkle. Those who want elaborate ritual will have it, and those who want no ritual will have that. You see, there is going to be more than the mother harlot—there will be a whole lot of harlots, a regular brothel."⁵⁶⁵

Many writers have traced the religiously apostate system of worship begun in Babylon and carried on through history through Roman Catholicism and the modern Christian ecumenical movement.⁵⁶⁶ However, this description of Babylonianism encompasses all forms of paganism including perversions of Christianity and non-Christian religions.

17:6 She had drunk the blood of believers, the saints generally and witnesses to Jesus Christ specifically (cf. 11:10; 13:7, 15). This system had destroyed true believers and rejoiced in their deaths. This revelation amazed John. A system purporting to honor God was killing His faithful followers!⁵⁶⁷ In his day the Roman Empire was the great manifestation of Babylonianism.

Further revelation of the beast 17:7-14

17:7 The angel promised to interpret these revelations that were so baffling to John, particularly the mystery concerning the woman and the beast. More information about the beast follows in verses 7-14 and more about the woman in verses 15-18. The beast supplied the woman's power and purpose. He had seven heads and 10 horns, which the angel explained later (vv. 9-10).

⁵⁶³Lenski, p. 496.

⁵⁶⁴Alford, 4:707; Scott, p. 342.

⁵⁶⁵McGee, 5:1033.

⁵⁶⁶See Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, for an extended treatment, or Walvoord, "Revelation," pp. 970-71, for a brief one. Ironside, pp. 287-95, is also helpful.

⁵⁶⁷Alternatively John may have wondered why God allowed her to live, or because he did not understand the meaning of what he saw, or because he saw a splendidly attired woman instead of a ruined city.

17:8 The beast, as we have already seen, is Antichrist (13:1-3). Here the angel referred to his resuscitation of a formerly dead nation (cf. 13:3, 12, 14).⁵⁶⁸ Evidently this resuscitation will happen at the middle of the Tribulation.⁵⁶⁹ The beast comes out of the abyss, the home of Satan (11:7) and the hold of his demons (9:1-2, 11), when he revives this nation. This suggests that Satan will give him supernatural powers when he does this. Finally Jesus Christ will destroy him forever (19:20).

The beast's resuscitation of this nation will greatly impress earth-dwellers (i.e., unbelievers; cf. 13:3). They will conclude that he is a divine savior, but really he will be a demonic slaughterer. He will deceive everyone but the elect (i.e., believers; cf. 13:8; Matt. 24:24; Mark 13:22).

17:9 The angel prefaced his identification of the beast's seven heads with a statement that understanding this part of the revelation requires wisdom (cf. 13:18). Evidently many would incorrectly identify these seven heads. Indeed various writers have suggested a multitude of different interpretations. The most popular of these include seven Roman emperors,⁵⁷⁰ the seven hills of Rome,⁵⁷¹ and various non-literal views, such as the following.

"By his use of seven, he indicates completeness or wholeness. The seven heads of the beast symbolize fullness of blasphemy and evil. It is much like our English idiom 'the seven seas,' i.e., all the seas of the world."⁵⁷²

Verses 9-11 are an exposition or clarification of verse 8. The text is always its own best interpreter. The seven heads are "seven kings" (v. 10). They are the heads and personifications of seven empires (cf. Dan. 7:17, 23). The angel also referred to them as "mountains" (v. 9). In the Bible a mountain is a symbol of a prominent government (cf. Ps. 30:7; 68:15-16; Isa. 2:2; 41:15; Jer. 51:25; Dan. 2:35, 44; Hab. 3:6, 10; Zech. 4:7).

"The call for special wisdom in v. 9a probably has in view the ability to grasp this double meaning of the mountains [i.e., as individuals and kingdoms]."⁵⁷³

⁵⁶⁸Ladd, p. 226, held that we should identify the beast itself with its heads, but this leads to a confusion of the figures.

⁵⁶⁹Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 293.

⁵⁷⁰Beckwith, pp. 699, 704-11. For refutation of this view, see Ladd, pp. 228-29.

⁵⁷¹E.g., Newell, p. 263; Mounce, pp. 313-14; Beasley-Murray, p. 256. For extensive evidence that these are kingdoms rather than literal mountains, see Seiss, pp. 391-94.

⁵⁷²Johnson, p. 559.

⁵⁷³Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 296.

The woman sits over the seven rulers and empires, but she is not one of them. She exercises authority over them.

17:10 The seven kings are rulers over seven kingdoms. The prominent one in John's day that "is" was certainly the Roman Empire. The five most prominent world powers preceding Rome that had fallen are probably Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece.⁵⁷⁴ The Old Babylonian Empire may have been the first (Gen. 10:8-10). The seventh kingdom that was yet to come and would remain a little while is the beast's kingdom (13:3; 17:8).⁵⁷⁵ All of these kingdoms have persecuted or will persecute God's people (cf. Ezek. 29—30; Nah. 3:1-19; Isa. 21:9; Jer. 50—51; Dan. 10:13; 11:2-4). Another common view is that the number seven is symbolic and stands for the power of the Roman Empire as a whole.⁵⁷⁶

17:11 Evidently the beast is one of the seven in the sense that his first kingdom is on a par with the seven major empires just mentioned. He is the eighth in that he establishes an eighth major empire with a worldwide government after he revives a previously dead nation having received supernatural powers from Satan. This explanation views the beast's kingdom before his revival as the seventh kingdom and his kingdom after these events as the eighth.⁵⁷⁷ A variation of this view sees the seventh kingdom as the revived Roman Empire and the eighth as the beast's kingdom, which comprises the revived Roman Empire and all other nations.⁵⁷⁸

Jesus Christ will destroy the beast and his (eighth) kingdom when He returns to the earth. It will not just "fall" as the other major empires did.

17:12 The specific identity of the 10 horns (other kings but without kingdoms when John wrote) is not yet clear.⁵⁷⁹ They will be allies of the beast and serve under him in his worldwide government during the Great Tribulation (Dan. 7:23-24). Each of them will rule a kingdom simultaneously with one another and with the beast (cf. Dan. 7:7-8, 24).⁵⁸⁰ They will have authority to rule "for one hour," only very briefly during the Great Tribulation (cf. 18:10, 17, 19). Evidently their short, independent rule will immediately precede the return of Jesus Christ to the earth (v. 14). The beast will give them their authority, but God will permit him to do so.

17:13 The single purpose of these end-time kingdoms is to rule the world (v. 14). The 10 rulers will submit to the Antichrist's leadership to achieve this end.

⁵⁷⁴Seiss, p. 393; cf. Ladd, p. 229; Walvoord, *The Revelation . . .*, p. 251; Alford, 4:710-11.

⁵⁷⁵Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 298; Walvoord, *The Revelation . . .*, p. 254; Kelly, pp. 364-68.

⁵⁷⁶Mounce, p. 315; Beckwith, pp. 704-8.

⁵⁷⁷Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 299.

⁵⁷⁸Walvoord, *The Revelation . . .*, p. 254.

⁵⁷⁹Mounce, p. 317, took them as symbolic of completeness without reference to kings or kingdoms.

⁵⁸⁰Bullinger, pp. 545-48; Walvoord, *The Revelation . . .*, p. 255; Kelly, pp. 368-76.

Evidently he will have to put down three of them who revolt against him (Dan. 7:24; cf. Rev. 12:3; 13:1; 17:3).

17:14 At the very end of the Tribulation these kings will fight against Jesus Christ as He returns to earth (cf. 16:14, 16; 19:19-21). The Lamb will defeat them and will prove to be Lord of lords and King of kings (19:16), the title Antichrist seeks to claim in his worldwide empire.

Those with Christ accompany Him from heaven (cf. 19:14). They are the called, the elect, and the faithful. These are probably three terms for the same group, namely, believers, rather than three different groups of believers. The three terms become progressively more specific. Those chosen for salvation are elected by the Father (cf. Eph. 1:4-5). They are the same ones who then respond to God's grace by faithfully believing on Him. These believers who accompany Christ from heaven will be Christians and Tribulation martyrs.

The judgment of the harlot 17:15-18

17:15 The angel next helped John understand the identity of the waters (v. 1). Water is a common symbol for people in the Old Testament (e.g., Ps. 18:4, 16; 124:4; Isa. 8:7; Jer. 47:2). The harlot exercises a controlling influence over the population of the world, both the faithful (cf. 5:9; 7:9) and the rebellious (cf. 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6). There will be one religious system that will encompass all nations and peoples during the Tribulation (cf. vv. 1-2).

17:16 The beast and his allies will eventually throw off the harlot and thoroughly destroy her. They will plunder her wealth, expose her corruption, and utterly consume her, as dogs ate Jezebel's flesh (1 Kings 21:23-24; 2 Kings 9:30-37; cf. Ps. 27:2; Jer. 10:25; Mic. 3:3; Zeph. 3:3). They will completely desecrate her, as the Israelites burned the bodies of people who committed detestable fornication (cf. Lev. 20:14; 21:9; Josh. 7:15, 25). This will probably occur in the middle of the Tribulation when Antichrist breaks his covenant with Israel and demands that everyone on earth worship him or die (Dan. 9:27; 11:26-38; Matt. 24:15; 2 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 13:8, 15). Satan's kingdom will divide and turn against itself, the sure sign that it cannot endure (cf. Mark 3:23-26).⁵⁸¹

17:17 The ultimate cause of this action is God's sovereign purpose. God has used the forces of evil for His own purposes before (cf. 16:13-14, 16; Judg. 7:22; 1 Sam. 14:20; 2 Chron. 20:23; Jer. 25:9-11; Ezek. 38:21; Hag. 2:2; Zech. 14:14). Nevertheless the sinner is always responsible for his or her actions.

⁵⁸¹Wilcock, p. 165.

"This verse denies the existence of any ultimate dualism in the world. In the final analysis the powers of evil serve the purposes of God."⁵⁸²

The "common purpose" in view in this verse is world domination (v. 13). The allied kings will submit to the beast's leadership because this will help them achieve their goal of attaining universal power and resisting God. This situation will continue until the end of the age, until all God's words about rebellion against Him in the Tribulation have come to fulfillment (cf. 10:7).

17:18 The woman represents "the great city." In the context this undoubtedly refers to Babylon. It is the only city referred to specifically in this chapter (v. 5; cf. 16:18; 14:8). As a system of apostate religion, which Babylon originated (Gen. 10—11) and symbolizes, it reigned over the leaders and kingdoms of the world. Though religion has always guided the decisions of political rulers, this is very clear during the Middle Ages in Europe. Then the popes wielded great influence over the political leaders of the Holy Roman Empire. The influence of Jezebel over King Ahab is a striking parallel in biblical history.

The focus of the revelation in this chapter is the age-old apostate religious system and its relation to government during the seven-year Tribulation period. During the first half of the Tribulation it will be an ecumenical, worldwide body that will stand above government and will be aggressively hostile to true believers in God. At the end of the Great Tribulation, Antichrist will terminate it and demand universal worship of himself.

"In view of the fact that there does not seem to be any religious opposition to the woman, and her sway seems to be complete except for individual saints whom she persecutes, the evidence seems to support the fact that the woman represents an ecumenical or worldwide church embracing all of Christianity religiously, and therefore including not only the Roman Catholic Church but Protestant and Greek Orthodox as well. . . .

"The final form of world religion will not even be Christian in name, and will actually be an atheistic, humanistic, satanic system which denies everything related to the true God, and is the persecutor of all who fail to worship the political ruler."⁵⁸³

2. Commerce in the Great Tribulation ch. 18

God next led John to reveal the destruction of the commercial and economic system that Babylon also symbolizes to inform his readers of its end in the future. "Wall Street" identifies a particular geographical location in New York City, but it also represents an

⁵⁸²Mounce, pp. 319-20.

⁵⁸³Walvoord, "Revival of . . .," pp. 326-27.

economic and commercial system that has its center there. Likewise "Babylon" has throughout history represented a particular economic and commercial system that originated in the geographical city of Babylon as well as a particular religious system.

Many commentators believe chapters 17 and 18 describe the same thing.

"Having portrayed the fate of the harlot-city through the onslaught of the Antichrist and his allies, John composes a dirge over the city in the style of the doom-songs of Old Testament prophets."⁵⁸⁴

What Babylon symbolizes in this chapter is different from what it symbolizes in chapter 17. Nevertheless, the literal city is also in view in both chapters since it is the historical and philosophical headwaters for both systems. In this chapter there are many references to Babylon's commercial activity. Though God did not identify Babylon's religious influence expressly in chapter 17, the harlot seems clearly to symbolize that. The vision in chapter 18 gives further information about the announcements in 14:8 and 16:19-21. The belief that salvation is by works is the bedrock of religious Babylon (Gen. 11:4: "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven."). The desire to glorify self rather than God is the foundation of economic Babylon (Gen. 11:4: "and let us make for ourselves a name").

The parallels between chapters 17 and 18 are as distinctive as the differences. Note Babylon's designation (17:5, 18; cf. 18:2, 10), its description (17:4; cf. 18:6, 16), its deeds (17:2, 6; cf. 18:3, 24), and its destruction (17:16, 17; 18:5, 8).

"The striking parallels between the chapters go beyond coincidence to point to a unified system. That system is identified in both chapters as a city that rules the world."⁵⁸⁵

"The distinction between the two chapters is that between two systems or networks that have the same geographical headquarters. In chapter 17 it is a religious system that operates independently of and in opposition to the true God, but in chapter 18 it is an economic system that does the same."⁵⁸⁶

Premillennialist Alan Johnson did not believe we should look for the rebuilding of ancient Babylon but saw the city only as representing a system.

"He [John] is not writing a literal description, even in poetic or figurative language, of the fall of an earthly city, such as Rome or Jerusalem; but in

⁵⁸⁴Beasley-Murray, p. 262.

⁵⁸⁵Charles H. Dyer, "The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17—18," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 144:575 (January-March 1987):311. McGee, 5:1036, also believed that the city of Babylon will be rebuilt.

⁵⁸⁶Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, pp. 313-14.

portraying the destruction of a city, he describes God's judgment on the great satanic system of evil that has corrupted the earth's history."⁵⁸⁷

I expect that the literal city may be rebuilt and may suffer destruction at the end of the Tribulation. However, I also believe that what is in view here is more than just the literal city. It is also what the city has stood for and promoted throughout history, namely, a satanic system marked by every form of idolatrous humanism.⁵⁸⁸

The first angelic announcement of judgment 18:1-3

18:1 John next saw another scene on earth (Gr. *Meta tauta eidon*, "After these things I saw," cf. 4:1). Another angel of the same kind as in 17:1 (i.e., one who descends from heaven to fulfill a special mission; cf. 10:1; 20:1) announced the next scene that John saw in his vision. This angel possessed great authority and glory, probably indicative of the importance of the judgment he announced. His description has led some interpreters to conclude that he is Jesus Christ.⁵⁸⁹ However his clear identification as an angel and the function he performs seem to mark him as an angel (cf. 14:8).⁵⁹⁰ Evidently his task required great authority.⁵⁹¹ His great glory, with which he illuminated the earth, probably suggests that he had just come from God's presence (cf. Exod. 34:29-35; Ezek. 43:2).

18:2 The repetition of the word "Fallen" (cf. 14:8; Isa. 21:9; Jer. 51:8) probably indicates that God guaranteed this judgment and that it will happen quickly (Gen. 41:32; cf. 2 Pet. 3:8). This is another proleptic announcement in which the angel described a future action as already having happened.⁵⁹²

"It is the prophetic way of declaring that the great purpose of God in triumphing over evil is a *fait accompli*."⁵⁹³

The description of Babylon in this verse is what it will be after God judges it (cf. Isa. 13:21; 34:14; 47:7-9; Jer. 50—51; Ezek. 26—28; Nah. 3; Zeph. 2:15). Ancient Babylon fell to Cyrus the Persian in 539 B.C., but that fall did not fulfill Old Testament prophecies about Babylon completely (cf. Isa. 47:11; Jer. 51:8).⁵⁹⁴ John had described God only through hymns of

⁵⁸⁷Johnson, p. 565. Scofield, pp. 1346-47; Pentecost, *Things to . . .*, pp. 368-69; Heater, pp. 23-43; and Wiersbe, 2:614, also held this view.

⁵⁸⁸Harris, p. 240, preferred the view that a literal city is in view, but he did not know which city.

⁵⁸⁹M. Robert Mulholland, *Revelation, Holy Living in an Unholy World*, p. 284; Chilton, pp. 445-46.

⁵⁹⁰Düsterdieck, p. 442; Beckwith, p. 712.

⁵⁹¹Wilcock, p. 166.

⁵⁹²The prophetic aorist tense of the Greek verb makes this clear.

⁵⁹³Mounce, p. 323.

⁵⁹⁴Kiddle, pp. 359-60; Wilcock, p. 168; Bullinger, p. 553.

worship to this point, and he now similarly described the fall of Babylon through the laments of onlookers.⁵⁹⁵

"The prophecy thus indicates that before the advent of the warrior-king in 19:11-16, Babylon will rise to its greatest heights, not only of idolatry (chap. 17), but also of luxury (chap. 18). . . . Babylon of the future, therefore, will be the center for both false religion and world economic prosperity."⁵⁹⁶

Apparently it is the city that will be the prison of demons, a place where they are safe but kept against their wills (cf. Isa. 13:21-22; 34:11-17; Jer. 51:37). A prison (or haunt) for unclean birds is a figure of desolation (cf. Isa. 34:11, 13; Jer. 50:39). Babylon will become utterly desolate.

- 18:3 This verse is very similar to 17:2. However it seems that in view of the description God gave of Babylon in the rest of chapter 18 it is not exactly the same Babylon pictured in chapter 17. The political, economic, commercial system that originated in Babylon and that leaves God out seems to be in view here. Her philosophy has influenced all the nations that have acted immorally as a result and grown rich at the expense of and in defiance of others. Babylon's influence has been worldwide. Political self-interest and materialism are its chief sins (cf. v. 23).⁵⁹⁷

The prediction of the voice from heaven 18:4-20

The call for God's people to leave Babylon 18:4-8

- 18:4 Another voice from heaven instructed God's people to separate themselves from the system that the city symbolizes so they would avoid getting caught in her judgment. The being speaking is evidently an angel who speaks for God (vv. 4, 5; cf. 11:3; 22:7-8). He called God's people to leave a city (cf. Jer. 50:8; 51:6-9, 45), but beyond that to forsake the enticements of the idolatry, self-sufficiency, love of luxury, and violence that the city symbolizes. The people addressed are faithful believers living in the Tribulation. Unless they separate from her sins, they will be hurt by the judgment coming on her, but if they do separate, they will enjoy protection (cf. 12:14; Matt. 24:16). They should not have the attitude of Lot's wife who hankered after another worldly city that God destroyed (cf. Gen. 19:26; Luke 17:32).
- 18:5 Another reason for abandoning Babylon and Babylonianism is that God is about to judge her. Her sins, like the bricks used to build the tower of

⁵⁹⁵Caird, p. 227; Sweet, p. 267; Mounce, p. 323.

⁵⁹⁶Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 317.

⁵⁹⁷Wall, p. 213.

Babel (Gen. 11:3-4), have accumulated so they finally reach heaven. She has exhausted God's patience (cf. Jer. 51:9).⁵⁹⁸ God has noticed and remembered her sins, and because He is righteous, He must judge them.

18:6 The angel further called on God's enemies whom He will use to pay Babylon back fully for its wicked deeds, pride, and self-indulgent conduct (cf. 17:16-17; Jer. 50:29). This is a call for God's application of the *lex talionis*, the law of retaliation (cf. Matt. 7:2; Gal. 6:7-8). To pay back double is a way of saying to pay back fully (cf. v. 7; Exod. 22:4, 7, 9; Isa. 40:2; 61:7; Jer. 16:18; 17:18; Zech. 9:12).⁵⁹⁹ Babylon had persecuted and murdered the saints (v. 24; 19:2). The cup she used to seduce others will become the instrument of her own punishment (cf. v. 3; 14:10).

"This is not a prayer for personal vengeance by the persecuted saints, but a heavenly interpretation of the divine response to cruelty committed by wicked persons who have passed the point of no return in their moral choices. The last hour has now struck, and it is too late for repentance. This is a judicial pronouncement against a sinful civilization that has reached the ultimate limit of evil."⁶⁰⁰

18:7 Luxurious living provides another reason for Babylon's judgment. Her claims of superiority and self-sufficiency echo those of ancient Babylon (cf. Isa. 47:7-9; Ezek. 27:3; 28:2; Zeph. 2:15). They also recall the words of the Laodicean church (3:17).

18:8 The "one day" may very well be literal (cf. Dan. 5:1, 3-5, 3). It also expresses suddenness, as does the "one hour" in verses 10, 16, and 19. Likewise we could interpret the burning literally. Rebuilt Babylon and the cities that are the centers for this worldwide network of political, commercial activity will evidently burn up in the great earthquake (16:18-19). She will collapse suddenly, not decline gradually. The strength of the Lord God will accomplish this destruction, but He will use means (17:16-17).

Laments over this judgment by those affected 18:9-19

Three groups of people mourn Babylon's destruction in these verses: kings (vv. 9-10; cf. Ezek. 26:15-18), merchants (vv. 11-13, 15-17a; cf. Ezek. 27:36), and sea people (vv. 17b-19; cf. Ezek. 27:29-36).

⁵⁹⁸Walvoord, *The Revelation . . .*, p. 260.

⁵⁹⁹Hailey, pp. 361-62; Hughes, p. 191.

⁶⁰⁰Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, pp. 322-23. Cf. Kiddle, pp. 366-67; Hughes, p. 190.

- 18:9 World government leaders will mourn when they see the collapse of the system that has sustained them and enabled them to live luxuriously. Committing fornication with her is a way of expressing sharing in Babylon's luxury (cf. Ezek. 26:16; 27:30-35).⁶⁰¹ Evidently fire will be the main cause of the city's destruction (cf. vv. 8, 18; 14:11; 17:16; 19:3). The smoke of her burning, the evidence of her fall, is what caused these rulers misery (cf. Gen. 19:28; Isa. 34:10; Ezek. 28:18).
- 18:10 Babylon will fall quickly, in "one hour" (v. 10, cf. v. 19; Jer. 51:8; Ezek. 27). These kings mourn because they have lost their power suddenly. These rulers must be different from the 10 kings who destroy the city (17:16). These woes are an exclamation of sorrow; the earlier ones in the book are announcements of doom (8:13; 12:12).⁶⁰² Doubling the woes increases the perception of the strength of the sorrow. This city was strong, but its Judge is stronger.
- 18:11 The merchants also lament over the destruction of this system further indicating that this is a different system than the religious one symbolized in chapter 17. The collapse of economic Babylon results in merchants being unable to buy and sell goods. They sorrow over the loss of customers and profits that its destruction causes. However the city itself is a treasure that they also regret losing (cf. Ezek. 27:25-31).⁶⁰³ The wailing of the merchants is greater than that of the kings and sea people in this context because their loss is greater. They bemoan the loss of customers, but they previously denied the right to buy and sell to anyone who did not have the mark of the beast (13:17).
- 18:12-13 The variety of the goods John listed suggests how extensive trade will be at this time in history. The market is the world. Most of the items listed were luxuries in John's day (cf. Isa. 23; Ezek. 16:9-13; 27:12-24). There are seven categories into which these 29 items fall. These categories are precious metals and gems, clothing, furnishings, spices, food, animals and implements, and people. People are even buying and selling other human beings.

"Persons are 'bought and sold' (and even traded!) by athletic teams; and our great corporations more and more seek to control the lives of their officers and workers. As people become more enslaved to luxury, with more bills to pay, they find themselves unable to break loose from the 'system.'"⁶⁰⁴

⁶⁰¹Johnson, p. 567.

⁶⁰²Lee, 4:770; Robertson, 6:440.

⁶⁰³Beasley-Murray, p. 267; Wall, p. 216.

⁶⁰⁴Wiersbe, 2:615.

- 18:14 The fruit (Gr. *opora*, lit. ripe autumn fruit) these merchants so desire is no longer available (cf. Jer. 40:10, 12; Jude 12). "Luxurious" and "splendid" refer to food and clothing respectively.⁶⁰⁵ The merchants will also lose their luxurious possessions. People will not be able to find the treasures they once collected. The Greek construction of the last clause indicates that these things will never ever return.⁶⁰⁶
- 18:15 Again the merchants bewail their fate. Selfishness and greed characterize these individuals. They too, like the kings, stand at a distance viewing the destruction of the city (cf. vv. 10, 17).
- 18:16 The description of the city here is very similar to that of the harlot in 17:4. One city is in view in both chapters. This dirge begins and ends the same way as that of the kings in verse 10 did. However the merchants bewail the city's lost opulence and splendor whereas the kings grieved over its broken strength.
- 18:17 The first clause of this verse concludes the mourning of the merchants. It expresses the reason for their sorrow.
- The second part of this verse begins the description of the mourning of sea people. The four groups of sea people represent helmsmen (Gr. *kybrnetes*), passengers (*pas ho epi topon pleon*), sailors (*nautai*), and those who work the sea (*ten thalassan ergazontai*) such as fishermen and divers for pearls.⁶⁰⁷ These too stand at a distance watching the city burn. Perhaps these sea people are of special interest because they represent distributors of goods.
- 18:18 They also lament because of the collapse of this great commercial empire. Their question echoes the one about Tyre in Ezekiel 27:32.⁶⁰⁸ The implied answer is that no city can match Babylon in its material greatness.
- 18:19 Throwing dust on one's head symbolized great grief in the Old Testament (cf. Josh. 7:6; 1 Sam. 4:12; 2 Sam. 1:2; 13:19; 15:32; Job 2:12; Lam. 2:10). People earlier behaved similarly over Tyre's demise (Ezek. 27:30). These sea people also echo the laments and repeat the behavior of the kings (v. 10) and the merchants (vv. 15, 16-17).

"How do *we* see the luxury of this world? Do we see it as it really is? Can we use it without getting it into our hearts? How would you feel if the luxuries in your life which you

⁶⁰⁵Swete, p. 235; Charles, 2:108.

⁶⁰⁶Robertson, 6:442. There are two double negatives.

⁶⁰⁷Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, p. 339.

⁶⁰⁸Lee, 4:774; Wall, p. 217.

have come to consider necessities suddenly went up in smoke?

"Would it break your heart if you saw the things of this world go up in smoke? Or is your heart in heaven, fixed on Christ?"⁶⁰⁹

Heavenly rejoicing over Babylon's fall 18:20

In contrast to the earth-dwellers, God's people will rejoice when Babylon falls (cf. 11:10). The songs in 19:1-5 may be their response to this invitation. Heaven rejoiced over the fall of ancient Babylon too (Jer. 51:48-49).⁶¹⁰ What causes bitter mourning on earth brings great exultation to heaven.

The speaker is evidently the angel (v. 4; cf. 12:12). Saints are all believers. Apostles, who died as martyrs, and prophets are special groups of saints (cf. 11:18). The similar exhortation in 12:12 suggests that all these believers are now in heaven. The reason for this merry-making is that God has pronounced a verdict in their favor. He has vindicated them by punishing their oppressors (cf. 19:2-3).⁶¹¹

Believers characteristically have greater interest in glorifying God and helping other people than they do in hoarding earthly treasures for themselves (Matt. 6:19-34; 22:34-40). The desire of unbelievers to accumulate wealth for themselves has resulted in untold opposition to the gospel and God's servants throughout history (cf. 6:9-11).

The second angelic announcement of judgment 18:21-24

18:21 The angelic act of throwing the millstone into the sea is symbolic of Babylon's fate (cf. Jer. 51:63-64). As it is impossible for that huge stone to rise to the surface, so the economic system that has driven this world virtually throughout its history will sink. It will never rise again (cf. Exod. 15:5; Neh. 9:11).⁶¹² The strong angel (cf. 5:2; 10:1) also explained his symbolic action. Babylon's destruction will be sudden, violent, and permanent.

18:22-23 Many things will end with the destruction of this system. John mentioned the rejoicing of unbelievers, the work of producers of goods, the use of their tools, the light their activities produced (literally and figuratively), and the happiness that resulted. No music, trades, or industry will continue

⁶⁰⁹McGee, 5:1041.

⁶¹⁰Hughes, p. 194.

⁶¹¹This seems more likely than the interpretation that they should rejoice because God was punishing their enemies in kind.

⁶¹²Millstones in John's day often measured four or five feet in diameter, were one foot thick, and weighed thousands of pounds (cf. Mark 9:42; Johnson, p. 568).

(cf. Jer. 25:10). Where there had previously been hustle and bustle, there will then be silence.

The angel gave three reasons for this devastation, two in verse 23 and one in verse 24.⁶¹³ First, men whom the world regards as great have enriched themselves and lifted themselves up in pride because of Babylon's influence (cf. Isa. 23:8). Second, as a result of the first reason Babylon has seduced all nations. She deceived all the nations into thinking that joy, security, honor, and meaning in life come through the accumulation of material wealth. She used sorcery (cf. 9:21) to seduce the nations into following her (cf. 2 Kings 9:22; Isa. 47:9, 12; Nah. 3:4).

18:24 The third reason for Babylon's judgment is that she slew the saints (cf. Jer. 51:35, 36, 49). The angel stated this reason as a fact rather than as an accusation. The responsibility for the blood of God's servants martyred for their testimonies lies at the feet of this system. The murder of prophets is especially serious since they bore the word of God, but killing any saint is bad enough. Unbelievers have killed many believers, directly and indirectly, in their pursuit of material possessions. This verse could hardly apply only to the city of Babylon, though it includes that city. Through her example Babylon has been responsible for all the slayings on the earth, so guilt rests on her shoulders.

"Blood violently shed cries out for vengeance until it is rewarded by the punishment of the murderers [cf. Gen. 4:10]. The destruction of Babylon answers to that punishment."⁶¹⁴

To summarize, it seems that the Babylon John described in this chapter is the commercial system of buying and selling goods to make a profit that includes capitalism. As religious Babylon includes all forms of religion (non-Christian as well as Christian religions), so economic Babylon includes all types of economies (capitalism, socialism, communism, etc.). This economic system will have its headquarters in Babylon on the Euphrates River during the Tribulation, and it will burn up. Self-interest is at the root of this system. Whereas believers have always lived within this system, we have always known that we must not adopt the philosophy that drives it, namely, selfishness. This system has become so much a part of life that it is hard for us to imagine life without it. Nonetheless this chapter teaches that it will end just before Jesus Christ returns at His second coming, and it will exist no longer. This system began when people first assembled to make a name for themselves at Babel (Gen. 11:1-9). As Christians, we need to make sure that we are not citizens of this Babylon, by laying up treasure on earth, but truly citizens of heaven, by laying up treasure there (cf. Matt. 6:19-21). This chapter should challenge us to evaluate our financial goals and to repudiate selfish living.

⁶¹³The Greek word *hoti*, "because," appears twice in verse 23. Each time it introduces a reason.

⁶¹⁴Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, p. 347.

"The destruction of the city of Babylon is the final blow to the times of the Gentiles, which began when the Babylonian army attacked Jerusalem in 605 B.C. (cf. Luke 21:24)."⁶¹⁵

Following this revelation concerning the destruction of the major religious and commercial systems of the world, God moved John along in his vision. He proceeded from the Great Tribulation (chs. 8—18) to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ (ch. 19), the climax of this book.

L. THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST CH. 19

John wrote the record of his vision of events surrounding the Lord Jesus' second coming to share the future vindication of Jesus Christ with his readers. The chapter has two parts: the rejoicing triggered by Babylon's fall (vv. 1-10), and the events surrounding the Lamb's return to the earth (vv. 11-21).

1. The praise of God in heaven 19:1-10

This pericope has strong ties to what precedes (16:17—18:24). It is the concluding revelation concerning the fall of Babylon, the latter-day Egypt and Tyre, and Antichrist, the ultimate Pharaoh of the Exodus and King of Tyre. The praise in this section is in response to the angel's invitation for those in heaven to rejoice (18:20).⁶¹⁶ Verses 9 and 10 conclude the section begun in 17:1-3.⁶¹⁷ The proleptic silence of ruined Babylon on earth now gives way in the narrative to enthusiastic rejoicing in heaven.⁶¹⁸ This is the climactic expression of praise in Revelation (cf. 4:8, 11; 5:9-10, 12-14; 7:10, 12, 15-17; 11:15, 17-18; 15:3-4; 16:5-7).

The four songs in verses 1-5 look back to the judgment of Babylon, and the song in verses 9-10 looks forward to the marriage supper of the Lamb. The harlot dies, but the bride begins to enjoy new life.⁶¹⁹

19:1 This first song praises God for judging the harlot. After John received the revelation about the destruction of commercial Babylon, he evidently heard another angelic chorus singing loudly in heaven (cf. 4:8, 11; 5:12-14). "Hallelujah" means "Praise the Lord." Its only four occurrences in the New Testament are in this pericope (vv. 1, 3, 4, 6), though it occurs frequently in the Psalms.⁶²⁰ There it usually has some connection with the punishment of the ungodly, as it does here (e.g., Ps. 104:35). God is worthy of praise because He has all salvation (cf. 7:10; 12:10), glory (cf. 15:8), and power (cf. 4:11; 7:12; 12:10; 1 Chron. 29:11).

⁶¹⁵Walvoord, "Revelation," p. 973.

⁶¹⁶Charles, 2:117-19; Wall, p. 219.

⁶¹⁷Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, p. 353.

⁶¹⁸Kiddle, p. 375.

⁶¹⁹Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, p. 355.

⁶²⁰Ford C. Ottman, *The Unfolding of the Ages*, p. 402, called this section "heaven's Hallelujah Chorus."

19:2 This group praises God because of His true (fair) and righteous (just) judgments (cf. 15:3; 16:7), especially of the harlot Babylon.

"By now all men have made their choice between God and Satan. Universal worship of the beast and universal rejoicing over the deaths of the two witnesses mark the world not only as guilty but also as irreclaimable. The earth-dwellers have hardened their hearts forever to a point that precludes any possibility of repentance . . . God's judgment of those with this disposition is the special occasion of praise to God."⁶²¹

The angels anticipated God's judgment of the harlot; it had not happened yet. Probably both aspects of Babylonianism are in view here, religious and commercial. The essence of the harlot's guilt lies in her corrupting the earth with her immoralities (cf. 14:8; 17:2; 18:3). By destroying Babylon God will avenge the blood of believers who died as a result of its influences (cf. 18:24; Deut. 32:42-43; 2 Kings 9:7).

The outpouring of God's wrath on the earth-dwellers will come as a consequence of believers' petitions (cf. 5:8; 6:9-11; 8:3-5; 9:13; 10:6; 14:18; 16:7; 19:2).⁶²²

19:3 A second burst of praise from the same group glorified God for judging Babylon finally so its influences will never rise again. This encore heightens the praise in the first song. The divine judgments of Sodom and Gomorrah and Edom were previews of this judgment (cf. Gen. 19:38; Isa. 34:10).⁶²³ The smoke represents the effects of the fire that will destroy Babylon (cf. 17:16; 18:8, 9, 18). It will stop rising when the fire dies out, but the destruction that it symbolizes will be permanent. The punishment of God's enemies will be everlasting (cf. vv. 20, 21; 14:11; Dan. 12:2; Matt. 25:46).

19:4 The 24 elders and the four living creatures echoed these sentiments in a third song of praise (cf. 4:9-10; 5:8, 14; 7:9-11; 14:3). The one who sits on the throne is evidently God the Father. "Amen" voices their approval of the two previous expressions of praise (vv. 1-2, 3), and "Hallelujah" expresses their own praise (cf. 7:12).

19:5 The authoritative voice from the throne probably belonged to an angel (v. 10). It called for added continuous praise from all God's servants (cf. Ps. 113:1; 115:13). Allusions to the Hallel psalms in this pericope connect the

⁶²¹Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, pp. 357-58.

⁶²²Idem, "The Imprecatory . . .," pp. 123-31; or idem, *Revelation* 1—7, pp. 517-24.

⁶²³Hughes, p. 197.

vindication that the psalmists cried out for so often with what was now imminent (cf. Ps. 113:1; 135:1, 20). The bond-servants to whom the voice appealed for praise probably include all the servants of God in heaven, angelic and human, including the saints and prophets (cf. 18:14, 20; 19:2). The angel called for the fear of God since judgment is in view. The call extends to creatures of all classes (cf. Ps. 115:13).

19:6 This praise followed and probably included that of the angels. Together all God's servants in heaven now praised Him for the fact that He reigns. In this proleptic statement they look forward to what is about to happen, namely, Jesus Christ's return to earth and the beginning of His eternal reign.⁶²⁴ Here He receives the title "the Lord our God, the Almighty." This praise is appropriately great since Messiah's earthly reign is the climax of history. Thus John heard a voice that sounded like multitudes of people, the roar of a huge waterfall, and loud claps of thunder announcing its arrival (cf. Ezek. 1:24; 43:2; Dan. 10:6). The singers are evidently angels (cf. 6:1; 10:1-4; 11:15-17; 14:2). This is the last song of praise in the Apocalypse.

19:7 The song begun in verse 6 continues with an exhortation to rejoice and to glorify God (cf. Matt. 5:12). God deserves praise because He has prepared the bride for the Lamb.⁶²⁵

The bride of the Lamb is evidently the church (cf. v. 9; 3:20; 21:2, 9; 22:17; John 3:29; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-32). Even though the translators usually render the Greek word *gyne*, translated "bride," as "wife," here the context clearly shows that a wedding is in view.⁶²⁶ The bride is the Lamb's newly married wife having been joined to Him in heaven immediately after the Rapture.⁶²⁷ God referred to Himself as Israel's husband in the Old Testament (Isa. 54:6; 62:5; Jer. 31:32; Ezek. 16:7-14; Hos. 2:2, 16, 19). However this figure almost always describes Israel as an unfaithful wife.⁶²⁸ Israel cannot be this bride or part of this bride because this bride comes to earth with Christ, but Old Testament saints will not experience resurrection until Christ returns to the earth (Dan. 12:1-2). The fact that the bride in 21:12 and 14 includes Israel indicates that the bride will be a growing body of people that will eventually encompass Israel as well as

⁶²⁴Beckwith, p. 726; Robertson, 6:449; Ladd, p. 246. Mounce, p. 340, took this as a proleptic statement describing the blessedness that will follow the Millennium.

⁶²⁵Hughes, p. 201; Sweet, p. 279.

⁶²⁶*Gyne* clearly describes a bride in other contexts too (e.g., Gen. 29:21; Deut. 22:24 [both in the Septuagint]; Matt. 1:20; Rev. 21:9).

⁶²⁷This is the third of three metaphors in Revelation that describe women. The woman (mother) in chapter 12 is Israel, the harlot in chapter 17 is Babylon; and the bride in chapter 19 is the church.

⁶²⁸Jan Fekkes III, "His Bride Has Prepared Herself": Revelation 19—21 and Isaian Nuptial Imagery," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109:2 (Summer 1990):272-73, argued that only Isaiah used the marriage analogy in a consistently positive way. The prophet did so to show the future relationship between God and the faithful Jewish remnant.

the church. There the bride is the New Jerusalem. However at this time, just before Christ returns to the earth (v. 7), the figure of the bride must describe the church alone.⁶²⁹

Jesus Christ, the Lamb, frequently referred to Himself as a bridegroom (cf. Matt. 9:15; 22:2-14; 25:1-13; Mark 2:19-20; Luke 5:34-35; 14:15-24; John 3:29). For the Jews, the wedding figure stressed the intimate relationship that will exist between God and His people in the earthly messianic kingdom.⁶³⁰

We can clarify the general time and place of the marriage of the Lamb by comparing it with marriage customs in the ancient Near East.⁶³¹ There were three main events involved in a marriage. First, the parents chose a bride for the groom. This takes place presently as the Holy Spirit calls the elect out of the world to be Christ's bride through regeneration. Second, when the time for marriage had come, the groom would leave His home with His friends, go to the home of the bride, and escort her from her home to his. The bride did not know when this would occur. This will take place when Christ comes to take His bride to heaven at the Rapture (cf. John 14:1-2). Third, the groom provided a feast for his bride and his friends at his home that lasted several days. This will take place on earth either at the beginning of the Millennium,⁶³² throughout the Millennium,⁶³³ or beginning with the Millennium and continuing throughout eternity (cf. 21:2, 9).⁶³⁴ The present verse (v. 7) describes the wedding proper, stage two (cf. vv. 8, 14), which had taken place in John's vision. It also announces that the bride is ready for the feast, stage three.

The preparedness of the bride is one reason for the celebration called for in this verse. The bride had prepared herself (cf. Matt. 25:14-23; 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 John 3:3; Jude 21), but the ultimate preparation was God's, so He deserves praise (cf. Matt. 20:1-16; Eph. 5:25-27). The theme of the first song (vv. 1-3) was the destruction of the harlot, and the theme of this one is the wedding of the Lamb to His bride, who is the antithesis of the harlot.

19:8 The angelic chorus continued to describe the preparation of the bride for the wedding feast. God graciously enabled her to clothe herself in fine linen (cf. 6:4; 8:3; 9:5; 15:6; 18:12; 19:14; Gen. 41:42; Dan. 10:5; 12:6-7). "Bright" indicates divine glory,⁶³⁵ and "clean" reflects purity (cf. 21:18, 21). This is dress appropriate for God's presence. Fine linen represents

⁶²⁹Ladd, p. 248, believed there is no real distinction between Israel and the church.

⁶³⁰Swete, p. 246; Lee, 4:731; Robertson, 6:449.

⁶³¹See Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Cultural Aspects of Marriage in the Ancient World," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:539 (July-September 1978):241-52.

⁶³²John F. Walvoord, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*, p. 618. I favor this view.

⁶³³Pentecost, *Things to . . .*, pp. 227-28; McGee, 5:1048.

⁶³⁴Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 365.

⁶³⁵*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "Lampo . . .," by A. Oepke.

righteous deeds, as this verse explains (cf. 14:13). These are the works of the saints rather than their standing before God. Their good deeds that God's grace made possible constitute them dressed appropriately for their righteous Lord (cf. Matt. 22:1-14). The bride's clothing contrasts with the harlot's gaudy garments (cf. 17:4; 18:16).

"Contrast the prostitute and her lovers in the preceding chapters with the Lamb and His chaste bride . . ." ⁶³⁶

19:9 The person who now spoke to John appears to be the same angel who had been guiding him through the revelation concerning Babylon (cf. 17:1, 15). He instructed John to write again (cf. 1:11, 19), this time another beatitude (cf. 14:3). This blessing gives Tribulation saints an additional motivation to remain faithful. Those invited to the Lamb's marriage supper include His friends as well as the bride. This implies the presence of other believers besides church saints at this celebration.⁶³⁷ Those invited to the supper will include the bride and other believers who are not members of the church. These would be Tribulation martyrs and believers who will live through the Tribulation and enter the Millennium alive (cf. 12:13-17; 20:4-5; Matt. 22:11-14; 25:1-13). They may also include Old Testament saints who will experience resurrection at the beginning of the Millennium (cf. Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2).

The angel concluded with the final sentence, "These are true words of God" (cf. 22:6, 8-9). He could have been referring to what we read in the first part of this verse.⁶³⁸ However since this statement concludes all that this angel had revealed since 17:1, it seems better to take it as referring to all the intervening revelation.⁶³⁹

19:10 The wonder of this revelation and the certainty of its fulfillment seem to have overwhelmed John. He fell down to worship the angel because the angel had revealed these things to him (cf. 1:17; Acts 10:25). This was not proper, as the angel explained (cf. 22:9). Human beings should never worship angels (Col. 2:18).⁶⁴⁰ The angel described himself as a fellow-servant of God with John (cf. Heb. 1:14). Angels, like humans, can only bear witness to the testimony borne by Jesus (cf. 1:2, 9; 6:9; 12:17; 20:4; 22:9, 20).

Therefore the angel directed John to worship God (cf. 22:9; John 4:21-24). To emphasize the centrality of Jesus Christ in this testimony and to encourage worship of God, the angel said that the spirit of prophecy is the

⁶³⁶Johnson, p. 571.

⁶³⁷Ladd, p. 250, believed the church is both the bride and those invited.

⁶³⁸Hughes, p. 201.

⁶³⁹Düsterdieck, p. 454; Alford, 4:725.

⁶⁴⁰The beast, who is not even an angel, will receive worship gladly (cf. 13:4, 8, 12, 15).

testimony of Jesus. The last clause of the verse ("for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy") is capable of various interpretations. Some take the genitive "of Jesus" as objective, which yields two possible understandings. Perhaps the angel meant that testimony about Jesus is the common substance of all prophecy, that all prophecy ultimately reveals Him.⁶⁴¹ Alternatively the angel could have meant that the true spirit of prophecy always manifests itself in bearing witness to Jesus; prophecy that does not bear witness to Him is false prophecy.⁶⁴² If the genitive is subjective, the angel meant that the testimony that Jesus has given is the essence of prophetic proclamation.⁶⁴³ This last view seems preferable since it affords the best explanation of why John should not worship the angel: Jesus is the source of revelation, and angels just communicate it. Moreover the phrase "of Jesus" in the preceding clause also seems to be subjective.

2. The return of Christ to earth 19:11-16

On the one hand, the return of Jesus Christ to the earth is the climax of all that has preceded. On the other, it is the first of seven final things that John saw and recorded. These things were Christ's return, Satan's capture, Satan's binding, the Millennium, Satan's final end, the last judgment, and the new heavens and earth including the New Jerusalem. These events are in chronological sequence, as will become clear.⁶⁴⁴ The chronological progression of events on earth resumes from 16:21.⁶⁴⁵

"The second coming of Christ is an absolutely essential theme in New Testament theology. In his cross and resurrection, Christ won a great victory over the powers of evil; by his second coming, he will execute that victory. Apart from his return to purge his creation of evil, redemption remains forever incomplete."⁶⁴⁶

"Those who believe in the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ must also look for his return."⁶⁴⁷

⁶⁴¹Erdman, p. 148; David J. MacLeod, "Heaven's Hallelujah Chorus: An Introduction to the Seven 'Last Things' (Rev. 19:1-10)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156:621 (January-March 1999):83.

⁶⁴²Morris, p. 228.

⁶⁴³Mounce, p. 342; Beasley-Murray, p. 276.

⁶⁴⁴The view that they are non-sequential (e.g., M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, p. 195; Wall, pp. 227-28) rests on similarities between Ezekiel 38—39 and Revelation 19—22, but it fails to account for the differences.

⁶⁴⁵Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 381, 567-85, viewed the second coming of Christ plus everything else through 22:5 as part of the seventh bowl judgment. Most other commentators have seen it as the first event after the seventh bowl judgment. I agree with the majority. See John A. McLean, "The Seventieth Week of Daniel 9:27 as a Literary Key for Understanding the Structure of the Apocalypse of John" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1990).

⁶⁴⁶Ladd, pp. 252-53.

⁶⁴⁷Lilje, p. 244.

19:11 John saw another scene in heaven (Gr. *kai eidon*, "And I saw"). He now saw heaven standing open (cf. Ezek. 1:1), not just a door open (4:1) or the heavenly temple open (11:19). A white horse symbolizes victory over one's enemies (cf. 2 Cor. 2:14). Here John saw Christ rather than Antichrist (6:2) riding a white horse (cf. Isa. 62:11). John described Him as Faithful (trustworthy) and True (righteous, the real Messiah; cf. 3:14).⁶⁴⁸ He came out of heaven to judge the beast and to make war with him on earth (cf. Isa. 11:3-5).

19:12 Jesus Christ's eyes suggest His piercing judgment of sin that takes everything into account (cf. 1:14; 2:18). His many diadems (Gr. *diadema*, regal crowns, cf. 12:3; 13:1) symbolize His right to rule the world as King of kings.⁶⁴⁹ His unknown name was not known to John or to anyone else at that time, but it may become known when Jesus Christ returns (cf. 2:17; Matt. 11:27).

"Throughout the ancient world a name revealed the nature of an individual, who he is and what he is. The unknown name of the Christ comports with the fact that his nature, his relationships to the Father, and even his relationship to humanity, transcend all human understanding."⁶⁵⁰

"It is possible that there is another thought. Those who practiced magic in the first century believed that to know a name gave power over him whose name it was. John may well be saying that no-one has power over Christ. He is supreme. His name is known only to Himself."⁶⁵¹

19:13 The blood on His robe is probably the blood of his enemies in view of the context (cf. Isa. 63:2-3). As many of the symbols in this passage, this one is also proleptic anticipating His victory. The "Word of God" is a familiar title signifying that He is the expression of God's mind and heart (Isa. 49:2; John 1:1, 14; cf. 1 John 1:1). This "word" includes prophecies about God's purposes (v. 9; 1:2; 17:17). It is the same "word" that brought the worlds into existence as God's active agent (John 1:3; cf. Gen. 1:3, 6, 9; Ps. 33:6; Heb. 4:12). As a title in Revelation "Word of God" emphasizes the authoritative declaration that results in the destruction of God's enemies rather than the self-revelation of God.⁶⁵²

19:14 With Christ come armies mounted on horses.

⁶⁴⁸The Antichrist was unfaithful in that he broke his covenant with Israel, and he was untrue in that he deceived people.

⁶⁴⁹Caird, p. 241; Robertson, 6:451-52; David J. MacLeod, "The First 'Last Thing': The Second Coming of Christ (Rev. 19:11-16)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156:622 (April-June 1999):213.

⁶⁵⁰Beasley-Murray, pp. 279-80.

⁶⁵¹Morris, p. 230.

⁶⁵²Mounce, p. 345.

"As the Lamb, Christ is followed by the saints (17:14); as the heavenly Warrior, he is followed by the angels."⁶⁵³

Angels will accompany Jesus Christ at His second coming (Matt. 13:41; 16:27; 24:30-31; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; 2 Thess. 1:7), but it seems unlikely that they are the persons on horses. Rather these seem to be human beings (cf. 17:14; 2:27; Zech. 14:5). Their dress connects them with the Lamb's bride (v. 8).

"This heavenly army, unlike their leader, has no swords or spears. They take no part in the action. They wear no armor because, being immortal, they are immune to injury. They are noncombatant supporters of the Messiah as He wages the war single-handedly . . ."⁶⁵⁴

19:15 Christ will strike down His enemies with a word that His long, tongue-shaped sword (Gr. *hromphaia*) symbolized (cf. 1:16; Isa. 11:4; 49:2). He will destroy His enemies with inflexible righteousness that the iron shepherd's rod that will serve as His scepter pictures (cf. 2:27; 12:5; Ps. 2:9; 45).⁶⁵⁵ He will execute the fierce wrath of God Almighty that these enemies must drink (cf. v. 13; 14:8, 10, 19-20; 16:19; Isa. 63:1-6). God will judge Israel, namely, Jews living when He returns (Ezek. 20:33-38), and the Gentiles living then (Matt. 25:31-46).

19:16 The robe is a symbol of majesty, and the thigh suggests power. Evidently the name appeared on the part of Christ's robe that covered His thigh, which would be most conspicuous.⁶⁵⁶ The title "King of kings" is one that Persian and later rulers of empires ascribed to themselves (cf. Ezra 7:12), but only the Messiah qualifies for it in its true sense (cf. Deut. 10:17).⁶⁵⁷

People living on earth at the time of the Second Coming will see Jesus Christ return (Matt. 24:30).⁶⁵⁸ What a contrast this coming is with the Lord Jesus' first coming: as a baby, in humility and obscurity, riding a donkey into Jerusalem rather than a horse, coming to die rather than to reign.

⁶⁵³Ladd, p. 255.

⁶⁵⁴Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, p. 387.

⁶⁵⁵Ruling includes destroying as well as reigning over (Ps. 2:9).

⁶⁵⁶This interpretation takes the "and" (Gr. *kai*) ascensively meaning "even" specifying the location of the name more exactly.

⁶⁵⁷Moffatt, 5:468-69; Wall, p. 229.

⁶⁵⁸The more important passages on the second coming of Christ are Deut. 30:3; Ps. 2; Isa. 63:1-6; Dan. 2:44-45; 7:13-14; Matt. 24—25; Mark 13; Luke 21; Acts 1:11; Rom. 11:26; 1 Thess. 3:13; 5:1-4; 2 Thess. 1:7—2:12; 2 Pet. 2:1—3:17; Jude 14-15; Rev. 1:7; and 19:11-21. For a concise review of the major revelation in each of these, see John F. Walvoord, "Christ's Coming to Reign," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123:491 (July-September 1966):195-203.

3. The destruction of the wicked on earth 19:17-21

19:17 John saw next an angel standing in the sun, a conspicuous position in which all the birds could see him. He cried loudly for all the birds flying in midheaven to assemble (cf. Ezek. 39:4, 17). Jesus referred to the same battle and mentioned vultures (or eagles, Gr. *aetoi*) being present (Matt. 24:28; Luke 17:37). After the coming battle the site will be a feast for vultures (cf. Ezek. 39:4, 17-20). It is a great supper that God gives to them. This is the battle of Armageddon (16:16). This picture of it stresses the greatness of God's victory over His enemies.⁶⁵⁹ The "great supper of God" is obviously not the same event as the marriage supper of the Lamb (v. 9). The former event will be a scene of great sorrow but the latter one of great joy.

"John took Ezekiel's prophecies [in 39:4, 17-20] broadly enough to foreshadow both Harmagedon and the final attack on Jerusalem (20:8-9). . . . Harmagedon precedes the thousand years and the other battle follows . . ." ⁶⁶⁰

19:18 The angel's invitation to the birds indicates how devastating the destruction of Christ's enemies will be when He returns. Some experts have estimated that perhaps one million birds of prey migrate annually between their nesting places in Africa to the south and Europe and Asia to the north. They cross the only arable land bridge that connects these continents, namely, Palestine.

Jesus Christ will destroy all who resist Him, people from all classes of society and from every status in life (cf. 6:15; 13:16). The indignity of having their bodies unburied is a judgment in kind since they did not bury the bodies of the two witnesses (11:9-10; cf. Ezek. 39:11-15). Their death also recalls the ignominious fate of Jezebel (2 Kings 9:30-37).

The only people left alive will be faithful believers who have not died or suffered martyrdom during the Tribulation (cf. 12:13-17). They will enter the Millennium with mortal bodies and will repopulate the earth (cf. Gen. 9:1).

19:19 John now saw another scene on earth. The beast at this time will have 10 allies (17:12-14; cf. Ps. 2:2). Their armies will represent the worldwide population of earth-dwellers. These armies will unite to oppose Christ (16:13-16). The battle will be over world leadership. When Jesus Christ returns, the beast's 10 allies that will have been fighting each other (Ezek. 38:21; Dan. 11:40-44) will unite against Christ (16:14). This is a description of the judgment portrayed proleptically in 14:14-20. It is

⁶⁵⁹Swete, pp. 255-56; Hughes, p. 207.

⁶⁶⁰Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, p. 394.

surprisingly brief in view of its importance in history. This probably indicates that the battle will not last long (cf. Matt. 24:13-45).

"The Seer is not describing the gradual conquest of evil in the spiritual struggles of the faithful, but a great historic event which brings to an end the Antichrist and his forces and ushers in the long-awaited era of righteousness."⁶⁶¹

19:20 The Lord Jesus Christ will then cast the beast and the false prophet into the lake of fire alive (cf. Num. 16:30; Ps. 55:15; 2 Thess. 2:8). The description of the false prophet vindicates his punishment. They will still be there 1,000 years later (20:10).⁶⁶² The wicked who have died throughout history are not yet in the lake of fire (cf. Matt. 5:22; 10:28; 25:41; Mark 9:43; James 3:6). They are in Hades (or "the grave;" cf. Matt. 16:18; Luke 16:23; Acts 2:27), the temporary abode of dead unbelievers before their resurrection. The Valley of Hinnom, or Gehenna, was a foreview of this lake (cf. 2 Kings 16:3; 23:10; Jer. 7:31-32; 19:6; Matt. 5:22; Mark 9:43). Neither is the lake of fire "the abyss," which is a temporary place of confinement for angels (9:1; 20:1). At the end of the Millennium Christ will cast all unbelievers into the lake of fire (20:14-15). God originally prepared the lake of fire for Satan and his angels (Matt. 25:41).

"Because no one has yet experienced the lake of fire, it is difficult to portray in human language the awful nature of that punishment. The figure of a burning lake is God's chosen imagery for visualizing eternity separated from Him. One should remember that figures of speech are always less than the reality, not more!"⁶⁶³

Brimstone is a sulphurous material that, united with fire, represents indescribable torment (cf. Gen. 19:24-25; Ezek. 38:22).

"The fact that in the gospels hell is pictured not only as a place of fire but also as a place of darkness (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30) suggests that both descriptions use metaphorical language drawn from contemporary Judaism to describe final and irremedial judgment."⁶⁶⁴

19:21 The rest of Jesus Christ's enemies, the 10 kings and their armies, will die in a moment by His word and will go to Hades. There they will await resurrection and final judgement at the end of the Millennium (20:11-15).

⁶⁶¹Mounce, p. 349.

⁶⁶²Thus consignment to the lake of fire does not mean annihilation.

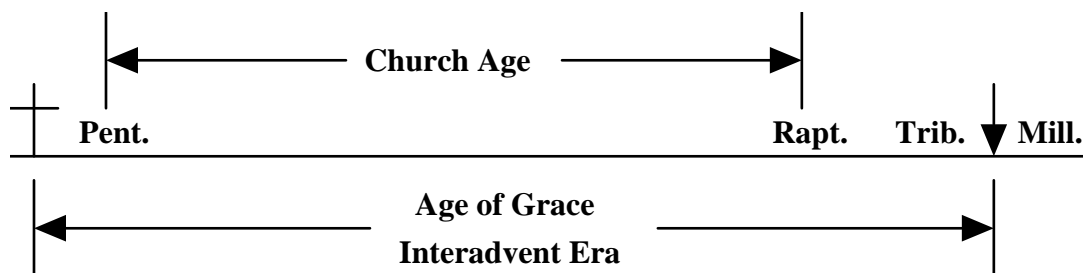
⁶⁶³Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, p. 398.

⁶⁶⁴Ladd, p. 258.

"The rest" probably also includes all earth-dwellers. They had plenty of opportunity to repent but did not do so. How they will die is not clear, but their death proceeds from the mouth of Jesus Christ. Probably the sword proceeding from His mouth represents a word of judgment that He utters. The means that He uses are obscure, as is true of how He created the universe with a word. So many people will die that the birds will have plenty to eat (Ezek. 39:17-20).⁶⁶⁵

Some interpreters have seen the Rapture occurring at the same time as the Second Coming (i.e., posttribulationists). However none of the events John recorded in 19:11-21 correspond to the events predicted to take place at the Rapture (John 14:1-2; 1 Cor. 15:50-58; 1 Thess. 4:15-18). The differences in the descriptions of these two events argue for a pretribulation Rapture.

What is the relationship of the Tribulation to the dispensation of grace? Dispensational writers have suggested several answers. Three of these are the major views. Some have seen the Tribulation as a revival of the dispensation of the law. They believe the dispensation of grace ends at the Rapture.⁶⁶⁶ The major problem with this view is that no other dispensation begins again once it has ended. A second explanation is that the Tribulation is a dispensation itself occurring after the dispensation of grace. Advocates of this view say the dispensation of grace ends with the Rapture and the dispensation of the kingdom begins with Christ's second coming.⁶⁶⁷ Critics of this view point out that the Tribulation does not bear the marks of a full-fledged dispensation. The marks of a dispensation include a change in God's basic governmental relationship with humankind and a consequent change in people's responsibility to God. A third view is that the Tribulation occurs within and at the end of the dispensation of grace.⁶⁶⁸ Every other dispensation also ends with human failure and divine judgment. The Tribulation is the period of divine judgment following believers' failure to fulfill God's will during the interadvent era (i.e., the dispensation of grace). The church age is only a part of this interadvent era, since it began on the day of Pentecost and will end with the Rapture. This view seems to me to be the best explanation. It views the dispensation of grace as identical with the interadvent era rather than with the church age.



⁶⁶⁵For another exposition of this passage, see David J. MacLeod, "The Second 'Last Thing': The Defeat of Antichrist," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156:623 (July-September 1999):325-35.

⁶⁶⁶E.g., Lewis S. Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, p. 100.

⁶⁶⁷E.g., William Evans, *Outline Study of the Bible*, pp. 30-37.

⁶⁶⁸E.g., Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, pp. 56-57; idem, *Dispensationalism*, p. 56.

M. THE MILLENNIAL REIGN OF CHRIST CH. 20

John recorded his vision of Jesus Christ's reign on the earth for 1,000 years to inform his readers of what would take place after He returns to the earth.

"Few verses in the Bible are more crucial to the interpretation of the Bible as a whole than the opening verses in Revelation 20."⁶⁶⁹

Many other passages in Scripture indicate that a reign of peace and righteousness on earth will follow the Second Coming (Ps. 2; 24; 72; 96; Isa. 2; 9:6-7; 11-12; 63:1-6; 65-66; Jer. 23:5-6; 30:8-11; Dan. 2:44; 7:13-14; Hosea 3:4-5; Amos 9:11-15; Micah 4:1-8; Zeph. 3:14-20; Zech. 8:1-8; 14:1-9; Matt. 19:28; 25:31-46; Acts 15:16-18; Rom. 11:25-27; Jude 14-15; Rev. 2:25-28). Therefore it seems clear that chapter 20 describes what will follow chapter 19 in chronological sequence.⁶⁷⁰ Evidently Jesus Christ will begin to reign almost immediately after He returns to the earth.

". . . we may note that the ancient church down to the time of Augustine (354-430) (though not without minor exceptions) unquestionably held to the teaching of an earthly, historical reign of peace that was to follow the defeat of Antichrist and the physical resurrection of the saints but precede both the judgment and the new creation . . ."⁶⁷¹

Mounce, who believed that the Millennium will be an earthly reign of Christ following His second coming, held an unusual view of this period.

"The millennium is not, for John, the messianic age foretold by the prophets of the OT, but a special reward for those who have paid with their lives the price of faithful opposition to the idolatrous claims of Antichrist. . . ."

"In short, John taught a literal millennium, but its essential meaning may be realized in something other than a temporal fulfillment."⁶⁷²

⁶⁶⁹John F. Walvoord, "The Theological Significance of Revelation 20:1-6," in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, p. 227.

⁶⁷⁰See Harold W. Hoehner, "Evidence from Revelation 20," in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*, pp. 235-62. Many amillennialists view 20:1-10 as a recapitulation of 19:11-21 (e.g., R. Fowler White, "Reexamining the Evidence for Recapitulation in Rev 20:1-10," *Westminster Theological Journal* 51 [1989]:319-44; idem, "Making Sense of Rev 20:1-10? Harold Hoehner Versus Recapitulation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:4 [December 1994]:539-51). Dave Mathewson, "A Re-examination of the Millennium in Rev 20:1-6: Consummation and Recapitulation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44:2 (June 2001):237-51, argued for recapitulation but also believed 20:1-6 describes what occurs at the second coming of Christ.

⁶⁷¹Johnson, p. 578. See Mounce, pp. 358-59; Erdman, pp. 154-62; and especially Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, for much evidence to support this statement.

⁶⁷²Mounce, p. 359.

1. The binding of Satan 20:1-3

20:1 The first word, "And," supports the idea of chronological sequence. It implies a continuation from what John just revealed (cf. 19:11, 17, 19; 20:4, 11, 12; 21:1, 2, 22). Amillennial interpreters disagree.

"John says nothing to place this chapter in the time sequence."⁶⁷³

It is logical that having judged the beast and the false prophet (19:20) Jesus Christ should next deal with Satan. God assigned an angel to bind Satan. Previously God cast Satan out of heaven (12:9), and now He cast him out of the earth. This is the end of Satan's "short time" in which God allowed him to spread havoc on the earth (12:12). This angel now has the key to the abyss (cf. 9:1-2, 11; 11:7; 17:8; Luke 8:31; Rom. 10:7). The binding of Satan is real, though the chain must be figurative since it is impossible to bind spirit beings with physical chains (cf. 9:14).⁶⁷⁴

20:2 Four titles make the identity of the bound creature certain. The dragon is his most frequent name in Revelation (12:3, 4, 7, 13, 16, 17; 13:2, 4, 11; 16:13). This title alludes to the serpent of old (cf. Gen. 3).⁶⁷⁵ Devil (v. 10; 2:10; 12:9, 12) and Satan (2:9, 13, 24; 3:9; 12:9) are his more common biblical names.

There is no reason to take this thousand-year time period as symbolic. All the other numbers in Revelation make sense if we interpret them literally, and this one does too. Furthermore it is impossible to prove that any number in Revelation is symbolic.⁶⁷⁶ The repetition of this number six times in this pericope stresses the length of Satan's confinement. God did not reveal the length of the Millennium (from the Latin *mille*, thousand, and *annum* year) before now. Neither did He reveal many other details about the future before He gave John these visions (cf. 17:5).

Morris offered the following reason for taking the thousand years as symbolic.

"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

⁶⁷³Morris, p. 235. Jack Deere answered this objection very effectively in "Premillennialism in Revelation 20:4-6," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:537 (January-March 1978):60-62. Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, pp. 404-5, is also helpful here.

⁶⁷⁴Though Jesus Christ defeated Satan at the Cross (Luke 10:18; John 12:31; 16:11), He did not bind him then nor will He bind him until the beginning of the Millennium. Presently Satan has considerable freedom to attack God's people and to oppose His work (cf. 2:13; 3:9; Eph. 2:2; 6:10-18; 1 Pet. 5:8).

⁶⁷⁵This is an anacoluthon or parenthetical reference (cf. 1:5; et al.; Robertson, 6:257).

⁶⁷⁶Smith, *A Revelation . . .*, p. 269; Walvoord, *The Revelation . . .*, p. 295; Hoehner, p. 249.

surely the way we should take it here. Satan is bound for the perfect period."⁶⁷⁷

Morris acknowledged that God will release Satan at the end of this period (v. 8).⁶⁷⁸ To him the thousand-year reign is a reign of martyrs in heaven that has no relation to the second advent.⁶⁷⁹ However, there is no reason in the text or context to assume that we should interpret 1,000 symbolically. In fact, in view of the other numbers in this book we would expect another literal number here.

"If 1,000 is a symbol, what about 7,000 (11:13), 12,000 (7:5), or 144,000 (7:4)? Are these symbols also? If 1,000 years is a symbolic term, what about 5 months (9:60), 42 months (11:2), and 1,260 days (11:3)? To ask these questions is to show the absurdity of regarding the numbers as figurative, for on what ground could one consistently hold that one, 1,000, is figurative, and the others, including where multiples of 1,000 are used, are literal?"⁶⁸⁰

20:3 The angel will throw Satan into the abyss and then shut and seal the opening to it to guarantee that he will not escape (cf. Dan. 6:17; Matt. 27:66). This action assures his confinement, but it does not specify that he will suffer otherwise. Satan will not have access to the earth but abide in the abyss (bottomless pit, 9:1-2; 11:7; 13:4, 7; 17:8) throughout the Millennium. His confinement will preclude his deceiving the nations, which he had been doing (13:14; 16:13-14).

The nations in view will be the descendants of mortal believers who do not die during the Great Tribulation but live on in the Millennium (11:13; 12:13-17). All unbelievers will evidently perish when Christ returns to the earth (19:19-21). Life spans will be much longer in the Millennium (Isa. 65:20), so the earth's population will increase rapidly, as was the case before the Flood. The children who are born during the Millennium will need to believe on Jesus Christ for salvation, and some of them will not do so. This group will constitute the unbelievers whom Satan leads in rebellion at the end of the Millennium (vv. 8-9). God will release Satan out of divine necessity (*Gr. dei*) to fulfill His plans after the thousand years.⁶⁸¹

⁶⁷⁷Morris, p. 235. Another amillennial writer who took this passage as symbolic is Vern S. Poythress, "Genre and Hermeneutics in Rev 20:1-6," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36:1 (March 1993):41-54.

⁶⁷⁸Morris, p. 236.

⁶⁷⁹Ibid., pp. 234, 237.

⁶⁸⁰Smith, *A Revelation . . .*, p. 269.

⁶⁸¹R. Fowler White, "On the Hermeneutics and Interpretation of Rev 20:1-3: A Preconsummationist Perspective," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42:1 (March 1999):53-66, argued that the epic ideology of victory over the dragon followed by house building constitutes a fundamental hermeneutical

"The final answer as to why God sees this as a necessity with its fruition in another rebellion is hidden in the counsels of God (cf. 1:1; 4:1; Isa. 55:8; Mark 8:31; 13:7; Luke 24:26, 44) . . . Yet one purpose may be a partial answer. Through his release the whole universe will see that after the thousand years of his imprisonment and an ideal reign on earth, Satan is incurably wicked and men's hearts are still perverse enough to allow him to gather an army of such an immense size."⁶⁸²

2. The resurrection of tribulation martyrs 20:4-6

". . . it is not difficult to see why the early church understood John to be teaching a millennium in Revelation 20. Three arguments support this interpretation: (1) the teaching of two resurrections, (2) the binding of Satan, and (3) the ruling of the saints with Christ."⁶⁸³

20:4 John saw a new scene. The purpose of the thrones that John saw was twofold: ruling and judging (cf. Dan. 7:9-10, 22; Matt. 19:28). Those sitting on them are probably the faithful saints who have returned with Christ to the earth (19:7-8, 14, 19; cf. 2:26-28; 3:12, 21).⁶⁸⁴ They receive authority from God to take charge of the earth, the beast's domain, under Christ's rule.

John also saw the souls of some people not yet resurrected. These are quite clearly Tribulation martyrs who died because they held steadfastly to the testimony that Jesus bore and the word of God (cf. 6:9; 12:17; 18:24; 19:2).⁶⁸⁵ They refused to take the mark of the beast or to worship his image and had died for their faith (13:15). John saw them come back to life, that is, they experienced bodily resurrection (cf. v. 5; 1:18, 2:8; 13:14; John 11:25; Acts 1:3; 9:41). Moreover these martyrs will reign with Christ on earth during the Millennium (cf. 5:10). The name "Christ" (Anointed

paradigm for the historical-grammatical, yet non-literal interpretation of Revelation 20:1-3. "Preconsummationist" is a synonym for amillennialist.

⁶⁸²Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, p. 411. For an able exposition of this pericope, see David J. MacLeod, "The Third 'Last Thing': The Binding of Satan (Rev. 20:1-3)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156:624 (October-December 1999):469-86.

⁶⁸³Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, p. 274. Ford, *Revelation*, p. 350, also wrote that the concept of the millennium was generally accepted in the early church. For a popular exposition of this passage, see David J. MacLeod, "The Fourth 'Last Thing': The Millennial Kingdom of Christ (Rev. 20:4-6)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157:625 (January-March 2000):44-67.

⁶⁸⁴Seiss, pp. 457-58; Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, p. 414. Other views are that they are the 24 elders viewed as representatives of the church (Smith, *A Revelation* . . . , p. 270; Walvoord, *The Revelation* . . . , p. 296;), Tribulation saints (Charles, 2:182-83; Caird, p. 252), or the apostles and perhaps some other saints (Swete, p. 261; Beasley-Murray, p. 293).

⁶⁸⁵Ladd, p. 263; Herman Hoeksema, "The Reign of the Saints," *The Researcher* 20:4 (Winter 1990):20-21. Hoeksema is an amillennialist, but I believe his identification is correct.

One) looks back to Psalm 2:2 here, as it does wherever it occurs in Revelation (11:15; 12:10; 20:6), tying this reign to Old Testament expectations of God's kingdom on earth.

"They who were once judged by earth's courts to be worthy of death are now the judges of the earth under Christ."⁶⁸⁶

Many amillennialists believe this reign of Christ refers to His spiritual reign over the hearts of His people or the triumph of the martyrs in a symbolic sense. There are four good reasons why Jesus Christ's reign will be a physical, earthly reign rather than a spiritual, heavenly one. First, Christ will be on earth after He returns (19:11-16). Second, at the end of His reign the saints, who reign with Him, will still be on the earth (v. 9). Third, God promised the saints an earthly reign (5:10). Fourth, the Old Testament Messianic prophecies anticipated an earthly kingdom (e.g., 2 Sam. 7:10-16; Ps. 2:8; Isa. 65:17—66:24; Dan. 7:27; et al.).

20:5 The "rest of the dead" evidently refers to the wicked who are physically dead whom God will raise at the end of the Millennium (v. 12).

The "first" resurrection refers to the first of the two resurrections John spoke of in the context (vv. 4-6, 12). This includes the resurrection of the Tribulation martyrs at the second coming of Christ (v. 4) and other believers resurrected at the same time (i.e., Old Testament saints; Dan. 12:2; John 5:28; cf. 1 Cor. 15:23). The second resurrection in this passage is the resurrection of the wicked at the end of the Millennium (vv. 12-13).⁶⁸⁷ Other names for this "first" resurrection are the resurrection of the just (Luke 14:14; Acts 24:15), the resurrection from among the dead (Luke 20:34-36), the resurrection of life (John 5:29), and the resurrection to everlasting life (Dan. 12:2). This verse clearly opposes the view that there is only one resurrection at the end of history.

The "first" resurrection cannot be first in temporal sequence since God has already resurrected Jesus Christ (Matt. 27:52-53). Furthermore, Christians will have experienced resurrection by this time (1 Thess. 4:16). Various groups of the righteous will experience resurrection at various times. However, God will raise all the wicked at one time, namely, at the end of the Millennium (vv. 12-13).

The times when God will raise the righteous are as follows. First, He raised Jesus Christ who is the Firstfruits of those who sleep (1 Cor. 15:23). Second, He raised some saints near Jerusalem shortly after Jesus' resurrection (Matt. 27:52-53), though this was probably a temporary resuscitation like that of Lazarus. Third, He will raise Christians at the

⁶⁸⁶Johnson, p. 582.

⁶⁸⁷Smith, *A Revelation . . .*, p. 273.

Rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-18). Fourth, He will raise the two witnesses during the Great Tribulation (11:3, 11). Fifth, He will raise the Tribulation martyrs at the beginning of the Millennium (vv. 4-5). Sixth, He will raise the Old Testament saints, probably at the same time (Isa. 26:19-21; Ezek. 37:12-14; Dan. 12:2-4). Seventh, He will apparently raise the saints who die during the Millennium (cf. vv. 12-13). The idea that the resurrection of believers takes place in stages also finds support in 1 Corinthians 15:23.⁶⁸⁸

Amillennialists usually take the first resurrection as a reference to spiritual regeneration. They believe the second resurrection describes a general resurrection of all the dead at the end of time. This view is inconsistent in that it takes "resurrection" figuratively in one case but literally in the other.

"If, in a passage where *two resurrections* are mentioned . . . the first resurrection may be understood to mean *spiritual* rising with Christ, while the second means *literal* rising from the grave;—then there is an end of all significance in language, and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to any thing."⁶⁸⁹

20:6 Revelation's fifth beatitude reveals that those who participate in the first resurrection are blessed and holy. The "second death" is spiritual death beyond physical death (cf. v. 14; 2:11; 21:8). It involves death of the soul (whole person) as well as the body (Matt. 10:28). Specifically the first resurrection involves deliverance from the lake of fire. Those who participate in the first resurrection are also blessed because they will be priests of God and Christ, and they will reign with Christ for 1,000 years. Priests have unlimited access to and intimate fellowship with God. Exactly how they will reign remains to be seen, though the extent of their authority under Christ seems connected with their previous faithfulness (cf. Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 19:12-27).

Note that many of the promises to the overcomers in the letters to the seven churches find their fulfillment in the Millennium (cf. 2:11 with 20:6; 2:26-27 with 20:4; 3:5 with 20:12, 15; and 3:21 with 20:4). This seems to indicate that the rewards Christians receive from the Lord at the judgment seat will also involve serving under Him in the Millennium (cf. Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27) and beyond (22:3, 5).

The phrase "a thousand years" occurs six times in this chapter (vv. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7). Since God revealed that events will occur both before and after

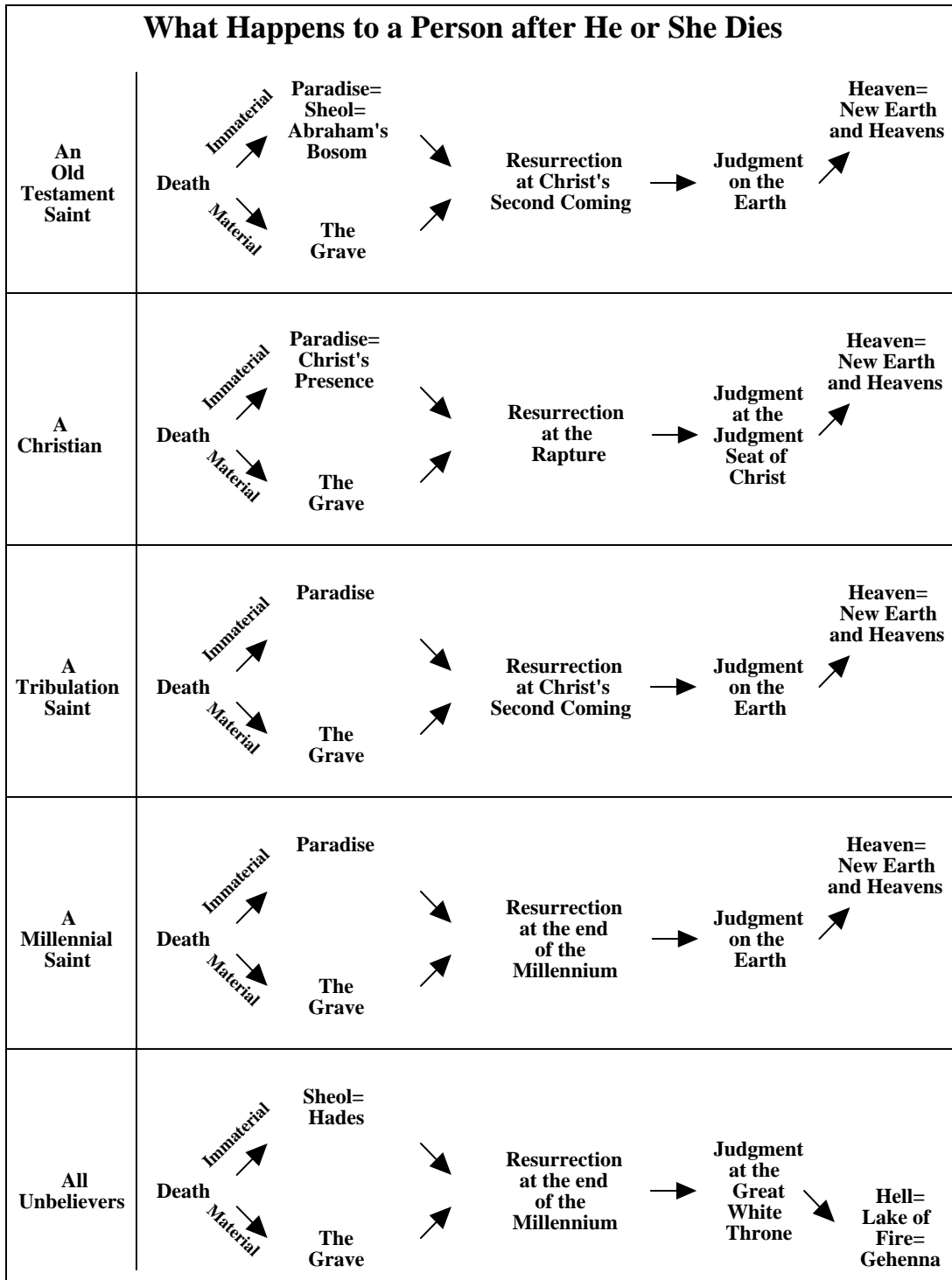
⁶⁸⁸See Roy Aldrich, "Divisions of the First Resurrection," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128:510 (April-June 1971):117-19. He believed the first resurrection refers to the resurrection of the righteous and the second resurrection refers to the resurrection of the unrighteous. Newell, p. 330, also held this view.

⁶⁸⁹Alford, 4:732.

Christ's thousand-year reign, we should undoubtedly interpret this number literally (cf. 11:2, 3; 12:6; 13:5; 20:3). John specifically located this reign yet future in this verse. This is a strong argument against interpreting it simply as Jesus Christ's present reign in human hearts or His reign throughout eternity, as many amillennialists do.

John gave us no information here regarding what life will be like on earth during the Millennium, but many Old Testament passages provide this revelation.⁶⁹⁰ The main point here seems to be that the Millennium will follow Jesus Christ's second coming, the main event in the Book of Revelation.

⁶⁹⁰See John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, pp. 296-323, for a full discussion of government, spiritual life, social, economic, and physical aspects of the Millennium.



There are three major schools of interpretation that deal with millennial prophecies. Amillennialists interpret the Millennium figuratively and believe it does not correspond to any specific era. Some of them teach that it refers to Jesus Christ's rule in the hearts of

His people presently living on earth.⁶⁹¹ Others teach it refers to Christ's rule over His people in heaven throughout eternity. Postmillennialists hold that Christ will return after the Millennium. Some of them believe we should interpret the thousand-year reign of Christ figuratively as referring to the present age in which we live. Others believe it is a literal thousand-year period yet future. Premillennialists take the revelation in these passages more literally as a description of events that will proceed chronologically in order. We believe the Second Coming will precede a literal earthly millennial reign of Jesus Christ.⁶⁹²

Berkouwer articulated the view of many amillennialists regarding this pericope.

"This vision is not a narrative account of a future earthly reign of peace at all, but is the apocalyptic unveiling of the reality of salvation in Christ as a backdrop to the reality of the suffering and martyrdom that still continue as long as the dominion of Christ remains hidden."⁶⁹³

Postmillennialism has not been very popular since the first World War. Since then it has become increasingly clear to most people that the world is not getting better and better but worse and worse. While there has been progress in many areas of life, it seems clear that worldwide peace and the other millennial conditions that the prophets described will never come without divine intervention that will change the course of history. Postmillennialism teaches that world peace and all millennial conditions will precede the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Among premillennialists there are two main groups. "Historic premillennialists" believe that God will fulfill His promises to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3, 7; et al.) through the *spiritual* seed of Abraham, namely, believers whom the Old Testament writers called Israel and the New Testament writers called the church. "Dispensational premillennialists" believe that God will fulfill His promises to Abraham through the *physical* seed of Abraham, namely, the Jewish people whom the writers of both testaments referred to as Israel.

Jesus Christ's earthly reign will be the fulfillment of many prophecies in the Old Testament concerning the reign of a completely faithful descendant of David (2 Sam. 7:10-16; et al.). God promised David that one of his descendants would reign over the Israelites forever, that His kingdom would have no end. Most dispensationalists have believed that this reign will begin after Jesus Christ returns to earth at His second coming, and it will continue through the Millennium and on into eternity forever. We believe that

⁶⁹¹See, for example, Arthur H. Lewis, *The Dark Side of the Millennium: The Problem of Evil in Revelation 20:1-10*. He wrote that the Millennium of chapter 20 is not a perfect state, but the future messianic kingdom is a perfect state. Therefore the Millennium of chapter 20 cannot be the future messianic kingdom, but it is the present age. He believed the kingdom age is really the eternal state of chapters 21 and 22. For a good critique of this book, see Jeffrey L. Townsend, "Is the Present Age the Millennium?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140:559 (July-September 1983):206-24.

⁶⁹²For more information on these views, see John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial . . .*, pp. 263-75, or idem, *The Revelation . . .*, pp. 282-90. See also the diagram of premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism at the end of my comments on chapter 6 in these notes.

⁶⁹³G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ*, p. 307.

since David's kingdom was an earthly kingdom and since David and his successors ruled on the earth, the coming fulfillment of Davidic kingdom promises will take place on the earth. Progressive dispensationalists, on the other hand, believe that Jesus' rule as David's successor began when He ascended into heaven following His resurrection and that it will move to earth at the second coming and will continue throughout eternity. They view the promised Davidic kingdom as having heavenly (already) and earthly (not yet) stages.⁶⁹⁴

3. The final judgment of Satan 20:7-10

- 20:7 At the end of the Millennium God will release Satan from the abyss (cf. 1 Pet. 3:19). Two reasons are implied in the text: to demonstrate the incorrigibility of Satan, and to demonstrate the depravity of humanity.⁶⁹⁵ God may use an angelic agent for this purpose (cf. vv. 1-3).
- 20:8 The devil will then resume his former work of deceiving the nations (v. 3) into thinking they will be better off submitting to his authority than to Jesus Christ's (cf. Gen. 3; Matt. 4). He will eventually gather innumerable soldiers from all parts of the world to fight against Jesus Christ (cf. 7:1; Isa. 11:2; Ezek. 38:3-6; 39:1-2).

"At the close of the Millennium, Satan will be released from the pit and permitted to lead one last revolt against the Lord. Why? As final proof that the heart of man is desperately wicked and can be changed only by God's grace [cf. Jer. 17:9]. Imagine the tragedy of this revolt: people who have been living in a perfect environment, under the perfect government of God's Son, will finally admit the truth [that they hate Him] and rebel against the King! . . .

"In one sense, the millennial kingdom will 'sum up' all that God has said about the heart of man during the various periods of history [dispensations]. It will be a reign of law, and yet law will not change man's sinful heart. Man will still revolt against God [cf. Gen. 2:16-17]. The Millennium will be a period of peace and perfect environment, a time when disobedience will be judged swiftly and with justice; and yet in the end the subjects of the King will follow Satan and rebel against the Lord. A perfect environment cannot produce a perfect heart."⁶⁹⁶

⁶⁹⁴Almost all dispensationalists believe that what is in effect now is some form of God's kingdom program (cf. Matt. 13). The difference of opinion is over whether the present form of the kingdom is a stage of the Davidic Kingdom.

⁶⁹⁵See David J. MacLeod, "The Fifth 'Last Thing': The Release of Satan and Man's Final Rebellion (Rev. 20:7-10)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157:626 (April-June 2000):204-5.

⁶⁹⁶Wiersbe, 2:620.

The people who follow Satan in this rebellion will evidently be those who have not trusted Jesus Christ as their Savior during the Millennium. Even though everyone will know who Jesus Christ is during the Millennium (Jer. 31:33-34), not everyone will trust in Him as Savior. Only believers will enter the Millennium, but everyone born during that time will need to trust Christ to experience eternal salvation.

The phrase "Gog and Magog" (v. 8) evidently refers to the world's rulers and nations in rebellion against God. Gog, the ruler, and Magog, his land, probably have symbolical significance as well as literal meaning much as Babylon does, and they signify Messiah's enemies. People will come from all over the world to rebel against Christ (Ezek. 38:3-6). It seems quite clear that the total invasion by Gog described in Ezekiel 38 and 39 is not in view here, though part of it is.⁶⁹⁷ In view of its description in Ezekiel, Gog's invasion of the Promised Land finds fulfillment in two events. In Revelation 20, we see a worldwide rebellion at the end of the Millennium. The battle of Armageddon (cf. 16:14) will be a similar earlier and limited fulfillment.⁶⁹⁸

"That rebellion of the godless forces from the north will have made such an impression on mankind that after one thousand years, that last rebellion of man bears the same label—Gog and Magog.

"We have passed through a similar situation in this century. World War I was so devastating that when war broke out in Europe, involving many of the same nations and even more, it was also labeled a World War, but it was differentiated by the number two."⁶⁹⁹

20:9 The rebels will occupy Palestine ("the broad plane;" cf. Ezek. 38:9, 11-12, 15-16; 39:2)⁷⁰⁰ and surround the dwelling place ("camp") of believers, even the earthly city of Jerusalem. This city will be Christ's capital during the Millennium (Jer. 3:17; cf. Isa. 24:23; Ezek. 43:7; Mic. 4:7; Zech. 14:9-

⁶⁹⁷One phase of the invasion will occur at the end of the Tribulation (cf. 19:17-21). Similarly chapters 17 and 18 that record the destruction of Babylon allude to Isaiah 21 and Jeremiah 51, which record both future and eschatological destructions of Babylon.

⁶⁹⁸See MacLeod, "The Fifth . . .," p. 209. Meredith G. Kline, "Har Magedon: The End of the Millennium," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39:2 (June 1996):207-22, argued that Har Magedon is Mount Zion, the battle in 20:7-10 is the one described in Ezekiel 38—39, and it is the same as Armageddon in 16:12-16. In this amillennial interpretation Klein followed C. C. Torrey, "Armageddon," *Harvard Theological Review* 31 (1938):237-48.

⁶⁹⁹McGee, 5:1058.

⁷⁰⁰This probably refers to the Plain of Jezreel in northern Israel (cf. Ezek. 11-16). However topographical changes will precede and accompany Christ's second coming, so the location of this plain may not be exactly identifiable now.

11), the center of the world (Ezek. 38:12). Nevertheless, God will destroy the rebels with fire from heaven (cf. Gen. 19:24; Lev. 10:2; 2 Kings 1:10, 12; Ezek. 38:22; 39:6; Luke 9:54). John described the destiny of these mortal rebels in verses 12-15.

Many less literal interpreters understand this verse as a description of the church's final victory over her enemies. They equate this city with the New Jerusalem.⁷⁰¹

20:10 Then God, perhaps using an unnamed agent, will cast Satan, the deceiver, into the lake of fire that He previously prepared for the devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41). The fact that the beast and the false prophet are still there shows that this is a place of conscious torment, not annihilation (19:20).⁷⁰² Furthermore it is a place of eternal judgment: "day and night forever and ever."⁷⁰³ This will be Satan's final abode, and this judgment will constitute the ultimate bruising of his head (cf. Gen. 3:15; John 12:31).

"It is hard for humans to conceive of how literal fire can bring torture to nonphysical beings, but the reality of unbearable pain inflicted on Satan is unquestionable. However the Bible may speak of that future punishment—whether as the lake of fire, outer darkness (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30), wailing and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28), a never-dying worm and unquenchable fire (Mark 9:48), or fire and brimstone—it presents a picture of mental agony and corporeal suffering combined in proportion to the guilt of those who have sinned (Luke 12:47-48) . . ."⁷⁰⁴

4. The judgment of the wicked 20:11-15

20:11 This "And I saw" introduces something else John saw in this vision (cf. 19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 12; 21:1, 2). The continuation of chronological progression seems clear from the continued use of "And" to introduce new information. Note that almost every verse in this chapter begins with "And."

The "great white throne" John saw seems to be different from the thrones he referred to earlier in this chapter (v. 4). It is evidently God's throne in heaven. It is great because it is God's throne and because it is the seat of

⁷⁰¹E.g., Swete, pp. 268-69.

⁷⁰²The Gog of the former invasion of Palestine (19:17-21) is the beast.

⁷⁰³In hell there may be no daylight (cf. Matt. 22:13; 25:30), so the expression "day and night" may mean at all times.

⁷⁰⁴Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, p. 426.

this last judgment. Its whiteness suggests that the verdicts that proceed from it are pure, holy, and righteous (cf. Ps. 97:2; Dan. 7:9). The judgment described here is the last in a number of future judgments (cf. vv. 4-5; Matt. 25:31-46; 2 Cor. 5:10).

The one sitting on this throne is God. This is probably a general reference to the Father and Jesus Christ since both will judge finally (cf. 3:21; 4:2-3, 9; 5:1, 7, 13; 6:16; 7:10, 15; 19:4; 21:5; 22:1, 3, 12; Dan. 7:9-10; John 5:22-23, 26-27; 8:16; 10:30; Heb. 1:3).

John saw earth and heaven flee from God's presence (cf. Ps. 114:3, 7). This seems to indicate that we have come to the end of His dealings with this earth as we know it (cf. 2 Pet. 3:7, 10-12). The flight of the present earth and heaven from God's presence strengthens the description of Him as the ultimate Judge.

20:12 The dead before this throne are evidently the unsaved of all ages who now stand resurrected (v. 5; Dan. 12:2). They come from all classes and groups of humanity. The "books" contain a record of their deeds (cf. Deut. 32:34; Ps. 56:8; Isa. 65:6; Dan. 7:10; Mal. 3:16; Matt. 12:37). The "book of life" contains the names of God's elect (3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:15; 21:27; Isa. 4:3; Ps. 69:28; Dan. 12:1; Luke 10:20; Phil. 4:3). God will condemn those raised to face this judgment because of their works including failure to believe in Jesus Christ (John 6:29). Since He will evaluate their deeds, there seems to be a difference in degrees of punishment as there will be differences in rewards for believers (cf. Matt. 11:20-24).

"The teaching of judgment by works runs throughout both the OT and the NT [cf. Ps. 62:12; Jer. 17:10; Rom. 2:6; 1 Pet. 1:17]."⁷⁰⁵

There is no revelation about what will happen to mortal believers who are alive at the end of the Millennium. Perhaps Satan and his followers will kill them all before God judges the rebels. Another possibility is that they will live through this rebellion and God will give them immortal bodies with which they will be able to enter the new earth. Neither is there information about the divine judgment of these believers. There will probably be a judgment of them since God judges everyone else who has ever lived at one time or another. Probably He will judge them at the end of the Millennium. A resurrection of those of them that died during the Millennium is also probable (cf. Isa. 65:17-20).

20:13 This verse describes the resurrection and judgment of the unrighteous more fully. In logical sequence this verse fits in the middle of the

⁷⁰⁵Mounce, p. 365.

preceding one. This resurrection results in death (cf. v. 6) whereas the previous one (v. 4) resulted in life.

God will resurrect the bodies of all unbelievers and unite them with their spirits, even those bodies decomposed in the sea and in every other way. The special mention of death by drowning and burial at sea may be due to the fact that the ancients regarded these fates as especially abhorrent.⁷⁰⁶ "Death and Hades" probably refer to the state of death and the place of death.⁷⁰⁷ "Hades" is the temporary abode of unbelievers' spirits until the great white throne judgment.⁷⁰⁸ It is a place of conscious torment for unbelievers (Luke 16:23). "Hades" is the New Testament word for this place, and "Sheol" is the Old Testament word.

Another reference to judgment on the basis of deeds again stresses personal responsibility (cf. v. 12; 2:23; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 14:12; 1 Pet. 1:17). God will judge all people on the basis of their works (v. 12; cf. Ps. 62:12; Matt. 25:41-46; Heb. 4:12-13). This is also true of Christians at the judgment seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10; 1 Cor. 3:13; 2 Cor. 5:10).

"The White Throne Judgment will be nothing like our modern court cases. At the White Throne, there will be a Judge but no jury, a prosecution but no defense, a sentence but no appeal. No one will be able to defend himself or accuse God of unrighteousness. What an awesome scene it will be!"⁷⁰⁹

20:14 From this point on there will be no more death (cf. 1 Cor. 15:24-28). God will cast death and Hades into the lake of fire. This is hell, the place of eternal punishment.

"Death and Hades are an inseparable pair, as in i. 18, vi. 8 . . . , representing the two aspects of Death, the physical fact and its spiritual consequences . . . Here they appear as two voracious and insatiable monsters who have swallowed all past generations, but are now forced to disgorge their prey."⁷¹⁰

⁷⁰⁶Swete, p. 273.

⁷⁰⁷Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 433.

⁷⁰⁸Hades is the unseen place where all non-Christians (believers from other dispensations and unbelievers) who die reside until their resurrection (cf. 2 Cor. 5:8). It includes Paradise (Luke 23:43) and Gehenna (Luke 12:5), also called Abraham's bosom and the place of torment and anguish (Luke 16:22-28).

⁷⁰⁹Wiersbe, 2:621.

⁷¹⁰Swete, p. 273.

The "second death" is separation from God in the lake of fire (cf. 19:20; 21:8). Evidently the wicked too will receive resurrection bodies that are different from their former mortal bodies. They will be indestructible.⁷¹¹

"As there is a second and higher life, so there is also a second and deeper death. And as after that life there is no more death (ch. xxi. 4), so after that death there is no more life, ver. 10; Matt. xxv. 41)."⁷¹²

20:15 The names of the wicked will be absent from the book of life. This will confirm their eternal fate (cf. 14:11).

"When taken seriously, this final note evaporates all theories of universalism or *apocatastasis* [restoration] . . ."⁷¹³

Eternal punishment is a doctrine that is becoming increasingly unpopular in our day. Notice that Jesus Christ, the Judge, spoke very plainly when He affirmed it (vv. 14-15; 20:10; 19:20; 14:10; Matt. 18:8; 23:15, 33; 25:46; Mark 9:46).⁷¹⁴

"If we once saw sin as God sees it, we would understand why a place such as hell exists."⁷¹⁵

N. THE ETERNAL STATE 21:1—22:5

The next scenes in John's visions proved to be of conditions that will exist after the Millennium. He recorded this insight to reveal the final home of believers. There are many allusions to Isaiah 60 and 65 and Ezekiel 40—48 in this pericope. The final two chapters also tie up strands of revelation from every major previous section of the book.⁷¹⁶ This pericope is a picture of new beginnings, a sharp contrast with the lake of fire, another final end, in the previous one.

Note some contrasts between the former creation and the future creation.⁷¹⁷

⁷¹¹See Robert A. Peterson, "A Traditionalist Response to John Stott's Arguments for Annihilationism," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:4 (December 1994):553-68.

⁷¹²Alford, 4:735-36.

⁷¹³Johnson, p. 590. Cf. Robertson, 6:465; Ladd, p. 258. See Berkouwer, pp. 387-423, for a very good discussion of eternal punishment.

⁷¹⁴See also David J. MacLeod, "The Sixth 'Last Thing': The Last Judgment and the End of the World (Rev. 20:11-15)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157:627 (July-September 2000):315-30.

⁷¹⁵Wiersbe, 2:621.

⁷¹⁶Johnson, p. 592.

⁷¹⁷Adapted from Wiersbe, 2:621.

Genesis	Revelation
Heavens and earth created (1:1)	New heavens and earth (21:1)
Sun created (1:16)	No need of the sun (21:23)
The night established (1:5)	No night there (21:25; 22:5)
The seas created (1:10)	No more seas (21:1)
The curse announced (3:14-17)	No more curse (22:3)
Death enters history (3:19)	No more death (21:4)
Man driven from the tree (3:24)	Man restored to paradise (22:14)
Sorrow and pain begin (3:17)	No more mourning, crying or pain (21:4)

1. The vision of the new heaven and earth 21:1

John now saw a new scene that elaborated on the passing away of the present earth and heaven to which he had just referred briefly (20:11). The new earth and heaven will come into existence after the Millennium and the great white throne judgment. Many interpreters take the new earth and heaven as a picture of the present age of the church, but this is unwarranted.

The reason God will destroy the present heaven and earth is that He originally made them as the habitat for humanity. However sin so thoroughly corrupted not only the human race but the race's environment that He will destroy it and create a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. This is the final stage in His plan to deliver humanity into the blessing He originally intended people to enjoy.

"Throughout the entire Bible, the ultimate destiny of God's people is an earthly destiny. In typical dualistic Greek thought, the universe was divided into two realms: the earthly or transitory, and the eternal spiritual world. Salvation consisted of the flight of the soul from the sphere of the transitory and ephemeral to the realm of eternal reality. However, biblical thought always places man on a redeemed earth, not in a heavenly realm removed from earthly existence."⁷¹⁸

Is this a creation out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) like the creation of the first heaven and earth (Gen. 1) or a thorough renovation of the present heaven and earth? I favor an entirely new creation in view of 2 Peter 3:10-12.⁷¹⁹

Is the new heaven and earth that John saw the same new heaven and earth that Isaiah predicted (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; cf. Ps. 102:25-26; Isa. 51:6)? We would normally assume that the entities are the same since the terms that describe them are almost identical. However the descriptions of these places vary. Isaiah wrote that people will die in the

⁷¹⁸Ladd, p. 275.

⁷¹⁹Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, pp. 439-40, and Beasley-Murray, p. 307, argued for a completely new creation. For a defense of the renovation interpretation, see Gale Z. Heide, "What Is New about the New Heaven and the New Earth? A Theology of Creation from Revelation 21 and 2 Peter 3," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:1 (March 1997):37-56. A renovation of the present earth will take place earlier, namely, at the beginning of the Millennium.

new earth (Isa. 65:17-20), but John said there will be no more death there (Rev. 21:4). Isaiah predicted that the moon will shine in the new heavens (Isa. 66:22-23), but John implied that there will be no moon there (Rev. 21:23). Apparently Isaiah spoke of both the Millennium and the eternal state generally as new heavens and a new earth (Isa. 65:17—66:24), which is accurate since even in the Millennium the world will experience renovation. John, in the progress of revelation, distinguished these two aspects of the eschaton and applied the name "new heaven and earth" only to the eternal state, which is appropriate since God will eventually destroy the present world and create a new world (cf. 2 Pet. 3:10). Isaiah's view of the future was more general while John's was more specific.⁷²⁰

By the first heaven and earth John quite obviously meant this planet and the heavens above it. He did not mean the abode of God that Scripture also calls heaven elsewhere (i.e., the third heaven of 2 Cor. 12:2; cf. Eph. 4:10; Heb. 4:14).

The new earth will have no seas, but oceans will exist in the Millennium (Ps. 72:8; Jer. 11:9, 11; Ezek. 47:8-20; 48:28; Zech. 9:10; 14:8). This is another indication that what John saw in chapter 21 was not the Millennium but the eternal state that will follow it. The sea is the first of seven evils that John said would not exist in the new creation, the others being death, mourning, weeping, pain, night, and the curse (vv. 4, 25; 22:3, 5). Since these other evils are literal entities, we should probably understand the sea as literal too. The sea is an evil in the sense that it opposes humankind. For example, it was the sea that kept John on the Island of Patmos separate from the churches of Asia.⁷²¹ Presently the seas cover over three-quarters of the earth's surface. Therefore an earth without seas will be a radically different planet. The seas affect the atmosphere, the climate, and other living conditions as well as human transportation. The absence of any sea is the chief characteristic of the new earth, as John described it.

2. John's first vision of the New Jerusalem 21:2-8

21:2 In the same vision, John next saw a city descending out of heaven from God (cf. v. 10; 3:12; Heb. 11:13-16). It was holy in contrast to the former Jerusalem (cf. 11:8; Isa. 52:1; Matt. 4:5; 27:53). As the old Jerusalem was Jesus Christ's capital during the Millennium, so the New Jerusalem will be His capital from then on. In the bride-husband simile, the city is the bride, and Christ is the husband (vv. 9-10; cf. 3:12). Obviously some symbolism is present in the descriptions of the New Jerusalem.

"Just as the four actual kingdoms of Daniel 2, 7 do not literally correspond to the imagery that portrays them, so the New Jerusalem does not literally correspond to the

⁷²⁰Similarly the Old Testament prophets spoke of Messiah's coming but did not distinguish the first coming from the second coming. Later revelation clarified that there would be two comings. This is in harmony with how God has revealed many things in His Word: first generally, then more specifically (e.g., the biblical covenant promises).

⁷²¹Swete, p. 275.

imagery of Revelation 21—22. Though it is an actual literal city, its glory will far surpass the language that John uses to portray it. John's language is an attempt to describe what is in one sense indescribable."⁷²²

The use of the bride figure to describe the New Jerusalem should not lead us to conclude that the New Jerusalem is identical with the church.⁷²³ The bride figure elsewhere describes the church (e.g., 19:7; 2 Cor. 11:2), but here the city is the bride. The bride figure describes different entities in intimate relationship to Christ. The Old Testament also used the bride as a figure to describe Israel's relationship to God (Isa. 62:5; Jer. 2:2; 3:20; Ezek. 16:8; Hos. 2:19-20). This does not mean that Israel, the church, and the New Jerusalem are three names of the same entity. However, this bride of Christ, the New Jerusalem, now evidently encompasses two previous brides of Christ, Israel and the church. The city is the corporate identity of those who reside in it. Like Babylon, it is a real city, but it also represents the people who live there, which in this case include old covenant and new covenant believers. It is the place that Jesus Christ went to the Cross to prepare for His disciples (John 14:2). Like the name "Babylon," "New Jerusalem" probably represents both a real city and what Jerusalem has represented throughout history.

"Revelation as a whole may be characterized as *A Tale of Two Cities*, with the sub-title, *The Harlot and the Bride*."⁷²⁴

There have been several explanations of the relationship of the New Jerusalem to the new earth. It may be that John saw as a city what he had formerly seen as a new heaven and earth. In other words, the New Jerusalem and the new heaven and earth may be two different figures for the eternal state. I favor this view. Thus the eternal dwelling place of believers will be a completely new creation by God that John saw in his visions first as a new world and then as a new city.

Alternatively the New Jerusalem could be a satellite rotating around the new earth. Some hold that the New Jerusalem will be a satellite of the present earth during the Millennium, and when God creates the new earth it will descend out of heaven and be on the surface of the new earth.⁷²⁵ Some believe that the New Jerusalem will be within the new earth.⁷²⁶ The text does not say the New Jerusalem will come down to the new earth, only that John saw it coming down out of heaven from God (cf. v. 10).

⁷²²David L. Turner, "The New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:1—22:5," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, p. 276.

⁷²³Lilje, p. 259, believed the New Jerusalem is a symbol of the church universal.

⁷²⁴Beasley-Murray, p. 315.

⁷²⁵Pentecost, *Things to . . .*, p. 580.

⁷²⁶McGee, 5:1068-72, believed it will be within the transparent sphere of the new earth rather than on its surface.

21:3 For the last of 20 times in his vision John heard a loud voice signifying the importance of the proclamation that followed. "Behold" further stressed its importance. This probably angelic voice (cf. 19:5) announced that God's tabernacle, evidently the entire New Jerusalem, was now among men. Finally the relationship between God and humankind that God has always desired people to enjoy will be a reality (cf. 7:15; Gen. 3:8; 17:7; Exod. 6:7; 29:45; Lev. 26:11-12; Num. 15:41; Deut. 29:13; 2 Sam. 7:24; Jer. 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 31:1, 33; 32:38; Ezek. 11:20; 34:24; 36:28; 37:23, 27; Zech. 2:10; 8:8; 2 Cor. 6:16). God will dwell among his cleansed people, and they will experience intimate fellowship with Him. This is the supreme blessing of the New Jerusalem (cf. Ezek. 37:27; 48:35). This fellowship existed to some extent when God walked with Adam in the Garden of Eden and when He dwelt among the Israelites in the tabernacle and then in the temple, hence the reference to the tabernacle (cf. 13:6; 15:5). It also existed partially when Jesus Christ "tabernacled" among people (John 1:14). It exists today in a spiritual sense as God inhabits the bodies of Christians individually (1 Cor. 6:19-20) and the church corporately (Eph. 2:21-22).

"The essence of v. 3 is the focal point of John's whole description of the new Jerusalem: God's immediate presence with men. The prominence of the theme is evident in v. 3 itself by virtue of a fivefold⁷²⁷ repetition of the same essential truth in that one verse. It is the principal focus again in 21:7 where the promise to the overcomer is that God would be his God and He would be God's son. The glory of God in the city in 21:11 is another indication of God's immediate presence, a presence that is also the direct emphasis of 22:3-4 which speaks of the presence of the throne of God and the Lamb in the city and immediate access to Him for His slaves, enabling them to see His face."⁷²⁸

The plural "peoples" hints at other groups beside Israel in the New Jerusalem. A usual designation for Israel is the "people" (singular, Gr. *laos*) of God. God promised Abraham that He would bless many peoples through the patriarch (Gen. 12:3; cf. Gal. 3:8, 16, 26-29). This is the ultimate fulfillment of that promise.

21:4 Verse 3 describes the benefits of the New Jerusalem positively, and verse 4 does so negatively. Probably God will wipe away all tears at the inception of the eternal state rather than at some time after that. These are tears caused by life in the old creation, not tears of repentance. This

⁷²⁷Some ancient manuscripts add a fifth clause, "[and be] their God."

⁷²⁸Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, p. 443. Cf. Erdman, p. 167.

reference to wiping away tears highlights God's compassion for His people. Sorrow, death, and pain will all end along with the tears, mourning, and crying that result from them. This is a final reversal of the curse (Gen. 3). All these former experiences will be gone forever then. However note that the removal of tears will take place after the judgments, including the judgment seat of Christ when some Christians will suffer the loss of reward (1 Cor. 3:15; cf. 1 John 2:28). The "first" things are the former things, the things associated with the old creation.

"How different is this concept of heaven from that of Hinduism, for example? Here heaven is depicted as a city, with life, activity, interest, and people, as opposed to the Hindu ideal of heaven as a sea into which human life returns like a raindrop to the ocean."⁷²⁹

21:5 John turned from describing the New Jerusalem briefly to describe some of God's utterances (cf. 1:8; 20:11). "Behold" introduces a special pronouncement, namely, that God will bring a new creation into existence. The description of the new creation in the preceding verses was prophetic. Evidently an angel then instructed John to write down what God had said because His words were faithful and true, not incredible (cf. 22:6).⁷³⁰ Less likely it was God who uttered this second statement. Perhaps the vision so enthralled John that he stopped recording it.

21:6 The one sitting on the throne resumed speaking. The judgments of the Tribulation (cf. 16:17) and of the whole old creation stood accomplished (cf. v. 5). He again referred to Himself as the eternal, sovereign God (1:8; cf. 22:13), the originator and terminator of all things (cf. Isa. 44:6). His promise of abundant satisfaction for the thirsty is metaphorical symbolizing His ability to meet the deepest needs of His people (7:17; cf. Isa. 55:1; John 4:13-14; 7:37-39).⁷³¹ This is an invitation to anyone, including believers, to come to God to receive what is truly satisfying from Him freely. It is a beautiful gospel invitation (cf. 3:20; 22:17).

21:7 The overcomer (i.e., every believer) will inherit these things (i.e., the blessings of the new creation). This promise completes and summarizes the other seven promises to overcomers in chapters 2 and 3. Inheriting emphasizes the privilege of obtaining something because of the work of another in contrast to one's own work.

"The phrase 'I will be his God and he will be My son' is defined elsewhere as a statement of special honor, not of regeneration. The Davidic Covenant promised to David's

⁷²⁹Johnson, p. 593.

⁷³⁰Alford, 4:737; Swete, p. 279; Lee, 4:818.

⁷³¹Contrast the cup from which the harlot drank (17:4; 18:3).

son, Solomon, 'I will be a Father to him and he will be a son to Me' (2 Sam. 7:14). The intent of the phrase was to signify a special, intimate relationship.⁷³²

21:8 The sins mentioned here are some that typically characterize unbelievers, the other group in contrast to overcomers. While these sins do mark some believers who follow the dictates of their flesh (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21), they more generally identify the lost. That the unsaved are in view seems clear since their part (i.e., their destiny) will be in the lake of fire.

Since the lake of fire still exists after the passing of the present heaven and earth, hell is probably not in the center of the present earth nor is it connected to this earth. It will exist separate from the new heaven and earth and the new Jerusalem.⁷³³ Even though this passage does not say there will be no more sin in the eternal state, it seems quite clear that there will be none since the consequences of sin will be absent.

3. John's second vision of the New Jerusalem 21:9—22:5

God now provided John with more information about the New Jerusalem (v. 2).⁷³⁴ The chronological progression of the revelation in 19:11—22:5 locates the New Jerusalem in the new creation, not in the Millennium.

John's guide to the city 21:9-10

21:9 One of the angels with the seven bowls of judgment served as John's guide in this part of his vision (cf. 17:1). The fact that one of these particular angels helped John understand both the mystery of Babylon and that of the New Jerusalem sets these two cities in stark contrast.

"It is impossible to dwell both in Babylon and in the new Jerusalem."⁷³⁵

It is quite clear that the "bride," the wife of the Lamb, is the New Jerusalem (v. 10; cf. v. 2).⁷³⁶ From the description that follows it also seems clear that the New Jerusalem is a city. It is not just a person or a group of people, such as Christians.⁷³⁷ This is the first of seven references to the Lamb in this section (vv. 9, 14, 22, 23, 27; 22:1, 3). He becomes

⁷³²Dillow, p. 472. Paul used the two Greek words *huioi*, "sons," and *tekna*, "children," synonymously, but John distinguished their two meanings whenever he used them: mature sons and simply children.

⁷³³See Peterson, "Does the . . .," pp. 25-26.

⁷³⁴Similarly 17:1—19:10 expanded the announcement of Babylon's fall in 16:19.

⁷³⁵Morris, p. 248.

⁷³⁶Contrast the harlot of 17:1 (cf. 19:7; 21:2).

⁷³⁷Robert Gundry, "The New Jerusalem: People as Place, not Place for People," *Novum Testamentum* 29:3 (July 1987):256, believed that it is the church.

increasingly prominent as the book draws to a close. "The Lamb is all the glory in Immanuel's land."⁷³⁸

21:10 John entered a fresh state of prophetic ecstasy and saw a new vision (cf. 1:10; 4:1; 17:3). The angel took him to a high vantage point from which he could see the New Jerusalem (lit. city of peace) descending out of heaven from God (cf. v. 2; Ezek. 40:2). John received a fresh revelation that expanded something he had already witnessed in an earlier scene (vv. 2-8; cf. 16:19; 17:1).

"The holy city descending from God out of heaven should be understood as a 'real event' within the visionary experience. . . . The descent is an announcement in visionary terms of a future event which will usher in the eternal state. That the city comes down from God means that the eternal blessedness is not an achievement of man but a gift from God."⁷³⁹

The physical features of the city 21:11-22

21:11 This city obviously appeared extremely impressive to John. The first and most important characteristic that John noted was its radiant glow. It shone with the splendor of God Himself because He was in it (cf. Exod. 40:34; Num. 9:15-23; 1 Kings 8:11; 2 Chron. 5:14; Isa. 24:23; 60:1; Ezek. 43:5; John 12:41; Acts 26:13).

John compared the glory of the city to that of a beautiful gem. Jasper stones were very beautiful but not always clear. As mentioned earlier (cf. 4:3), this is probably a crystal clear gem with many facets of brilliance, probably what we call a diamond. This stone described God Himself earlier (4:3), so its brilliance is a further reflection of God's presence in the city.

21:12 The city's wall with 12 gate-towers was what caught John's attention next. The city evidently looked square (v. 16). Its high walls suggest its security and inviolability. Certainly its inhabitants will need no defense from attacking enemies there. The 12 gate-towers (Gr. *pylon*, cf. Luke 16:20) stood three to a side (v. 13). The gate-towers provided access into the city. In the case of this city, the many gate-towers also suggest great freedom of access.

The angelic guards also present a picture of great security (cf. Gen. 3:24; Isa. 62:6). The names were apparently on the gates, not on the angels

⁷³⁸"Immanuel's Land" by Anne Ross Cousin.

⁷³⁹Mounce, p. 378.

stationed beside them (cf. Ezek. 48:31-34).⁷⁴⁰ The fact that each gate-tower bears a name of one of Israel's tribes probably indicates that Israel will have a distinctive identity and role in this city as it had through history (cf. 7:1-8).⁷⁴¹ God will perpetuate the memory of Israel throughout eternity.

21:13 Evidently directions will exist in the new creation as they do in the old suggesting that space will exist throughout eternity as well as time (cf. 20:10). Which names will be on which gate-towers remains to be seen.⁷⁴²

21:14 Since there are foundations to the city (cf. Heb 11:10, 13-16), it will be a permanent abode for the righteous in contrast to temporary dwellings that lacked foundations. The foundations may be one on top of each other in layers, but probably each section of the wall, between the gate-towers, has its own foundation.⁷⁴³ As the walls and gates represent protection, so the foundations speak of permanence.

Evidently the church, represented by the apostles (cf. Eph. 2:20), will be in the New Jerusalem as will Israel (v. 12). However assigning the name of each apostle to a particular foundation stone is as impossible as matching the names of Israel's tribes with the gates.⁷⁴⁴ Note the distinction between Israel and the church even in the eternal state (cf. Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30). God had a role for each group and an identity separate from the other in the past and as He does in the present.⁷⁴⁵

"The combination of the twelve tribes in verse 12 and the twelve apostles is a way of saying that Israel of old and the Christian church are united in God's final scheme of things."⁷⁴⁶

That these are apostles "of the Lamb" again focuses glory on the Lamb in this city.

⁷⁴⁰Ezekiel 48:31-34 describes Jerusalem in the Millennium, not in the new earth.

⁷⁴¹Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, p. 463.

⁷⁴²The placement of the tribes around the tabernacle in the wilderness and the gates in the millennial temple do not necessarily provide this information.

⁷⁴³Wilcock, p. 208.

⁷⁴⁴Even identifying exactly which of the apostles and tribes will receive this honor is impossible now.

⁷⁴⁵Scott, pp. 433-34; Walvoord, *The Revelation . . .*, pp. 322-23; Johnson, p. 596. This distinction between the foundations and the walls harmonizes with belief that the church did not replace Israel in the plans of God.

⁷⁴⁶Morris, p. 250. Being an amillennialist, Morris did not mean that Israel and the church will be distinct throughout eternity as different segments of the people of God. He meant that this passage presents Israel and the church as all the people of God united in God's final scheme of things. However, as a dispensationalist I can accept his statement at face value.

21:15 The fact that the angel's measuring rod was gold reflects the dignity of the task of measuring this city's gate-towers and walls (cf. Ezek. 40:3).⁷⁴⁷ Only the utensils used in the holy of holies were gold in the tabernacle and temple, but even this measuring rod is gold suggesting the high value of the city.

21:16 John described the shape and then the size of the city. Its base was square, the same shape as ancient Babylon and Nineveh.⁷⁴⁸ The dimensions of this city were 12,000 stadia (approximately 1,500 miles) on each of its four sides and 1,500 miles high.⁷⁴⁹ This description could allow for either a cube⁷⁵⁰ or a pyramid shape.⁷⁵¹ The fact that the holy of holies was a cube tempts one to conclude that the New Jerusalem will also be a cube in shape, but this is speculation.

Probably we should interpret these dimensions literally. Some interpreters believe they only symbolize what the holy of holies in Israel anticipated, namely, a perfect environment in which God dwells. Others hold that they symbolize the fulfillment of all God's promises.⁷⁵²

21:17 The city wall was evidently 144 cubits (about 216 feet or 72 yards) thick (cf. Ezek. 40:5; 42:20).⁷⁵³ John explained that even though an angel was doing the measuring he was using human units of measure. Thus these measurements meant the same to John as they would have meant if something else in his day was being measured.

21:18 The walls appeared to be glistening (cf. v. 11; 4:3). The word "material" (Gr. *endomesis*) means "building in" and suggests that the material on the wall was jasper, not that the wall was solid jasper. Perhaps John meant that the walls were overlaid with this brilliant material, suggesting further the radiance of God's holy presence. The whole city appeared to shine as a mass of pure gold.⁷⁵⁴ Clear glass was the best quality glass in John's day, so when he compared the gold to clear glass he probably meant that there was no impurity in the city.⁷⁵⁵ John apparently described the New Jerusalem by using similes and metaphors to communicate its ineffable glory.

⁷⁴⁷The temple that Ezekiel described being measured in Ezek. 40—43 is the millennial temple.

⁷⁴⁸Robertson, 6:473.

⁷⁴⁹The distance from Dallas to Philadelphia or Los Angeles is about 1,500 miles. Beasley-Murray, p. 322, wrote that the reader should not translate this measurement into miles because "it represents the ordinary unit of distance (the furlong) multiplied by the number of God's people (twelve) and extended indefinitely."

⁷⁵⁰Mounce, p. 380; Beasley-Murray, p. 322; Seiss, p. 498; McGee, 5:1070-71; Ladd, p. 282.

⁷⁵¹Lilje, p. 267; William Hoste, *The Visions of John the Divine*, p. 178; Ironside, p. 357.

⁷⁵²E.g., Johnson, p. 596.

⁷⁵³An American football field is 100 yards long.

⁷⁵⁴The many limestone buildings of old Jerusalem today take on a beautiful golden color in the light of the rising or setting sun, but this is a pale shadow of what the New Jerusalem will look like.

⁷⁵⁵Mounce, p. 381.

21:19-20 The apostle further explained the foundation stones of the city (v. 14). The foundation of a building is usually completely functional and not decorative, but these stones, which were at least partially visible above grade, were adorned with gems.⁷⁵⁶ These stones were of many different colors suggesting the extreme beauty of the city. We cannot identify all of them exactly today, but they were obviously precious gems in John's day.

"Our God is a God of beauty, and He will lavish His beauty on the city He is preparing for His people."⁷⁵⁷

The Israelite high priest carried 12 gems representing each of the twelve tribes on his breastpiece (Exod. 28:17-20). Perhaps there is some symbolic connection between these 12 jewels and those, though only eight of them appear in both lists. In the new order everyone will have the privilege of access to God that was the unique privilege of the high priest in Israel.⁷⁵⁸

21:21 Evidently each gate-tower that John saw (vv. 12-13) had been carved out of one huge pearl.⁷⁵⁹

"Among the ancients, pearls were ranked highest among precious stones, because their beauty derives entirely from nature, improvement by human workmanship being an impossibility . . ."⁷⁶⁰

John further described the street or pavement of the city (probably referring to all the streets since all would be connected). These were pure gold (v. 18), as pure as transparent glass. Old Testament priests who ministered in Solomon's temple walked on a gold floor (1 Kings 6:30).

21:22 Unlike old Jerusalem, there was no temple in the new city because God Himself was there. The whole city will, therefore, be a virtual temple.⁷⁶¹ The Lamb will play the central role in this temple along with Almighty God. The presence of God with man was the symbol of the earthly tabernacle and temple, but in the New Jerusalem that presence is a reality.

This verse and verses 23-27 stress that God will bring people into intimate relationship with Himself in the New Jerusalem.⁷⁶²

⁷⁵⁶Alford, 4:742.

⁷⁵⁷Wiersbe, 2:623.

⁷⁵⁸Moffatt, 5:484, believed that jewels did not cover the foundation stones, but the foundation stones were themselves jewels.

⁷⁵⁹Swete, p. 294.

⁷⁶⁰Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, p. 473.

⁷⁶¹This is another respect in which the millennial temple contrasts with the New Jerusalem.

⁷⁶²Wilcock, p. 210.

The illumination of the city 21:23-27

21:23 Evidently there will be no sun and moon (and stars) in the new heaven because God's glory will illuminate the whole earth. The need for created light sources will end when the Creator Himself lives among His people. God illuminated the camp of Israel with His presence in the pillar of fire, and He lit the holy of holies with His presence between the cherubim. He will similarly dispel all darkness of all kinds in the new city. The Lamb is the radiance of the Father's glory (Heb. 1:3), but the Father is also the light (22:5).

"It truly will be the Jesus Christ Light and Power Company then."⁷⁶³

21:24 The city will be so bright that it provides light for the whole new creation. The identity of these nations and kings is difficult to determine. The most probable explanation seems to be that the nations are groups of believers viewed according to their old creation nationalities, which they will retain in the new creation. The kings (rulers) are probably believing kings who ruled over nations during the old creation.⁷⁶⁴ These kings will bring their glory into the city, thus increasing its glory, by simply entering it, since they are glorious individuals.

21:25 In John's day cities closed their gates to keep out enemies, but there will be no enemies in the eternal state so the gates will remain open (cf. Isa. 60:11). John said the city gates will never ever close (Gr. *ou me kleisthosin*). These kings, therefore, may enter whenever they wish. There will be no night in the New Jerusalem because God's glory illuminates all.

21:26 The gates will admit these leaders who will bring glory and honor to God from their respective groups of followers. This is a picture of worship in the new creation.

". . . these verses reflect the ancient practice of kings and nations bringing their wealth and glory to the city of the greatest king. In the heavenly city, everyone will honor the 'King of kings' (see Pss. 68:29; 72:10-11; Isa. 60)."⁷⁶⁵

21:27 Only believers will enter the city. The unsaved will in no way be able to do so (Gr. *ou me eiselthe*; cf. 22:15). Evidently any believer will be able to enter the city since the contrast is with those whose names are not in the Lamb's book of life (i.e., the lost). This verse warns the reader that the

⁷⁶³McGee, 5:1072.

⁷⁶⁴Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, pp. 476-78, summarized 10 suggested identifications.

⁷⁶⁵Wiersbe, 2:624.

only way to gain entrance into this city is to have one's name recorded in the Lamb's book of life (cf. 20:15).

The restoration of Paradise 22:1-5

Essentially what John saw next was Paradise regained (cf. 2:7; Gen. 2; Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 12:2). Having viewed the splendor of the New Jerusalem he now saw what will nourish and enrich the lives of God's people there.

"Up to this chapter, the New Jerusalem seems to be all mineral and no vegetable. Its appearance is as the dazzling display of a fabulous jewelry store; we wonder if there is no soft grass to sit upon, no green trees to enjoy, and no water to drink or food to eat. However, here are introduced the elements which add a rich softness to this city of elaborate beauty."⁷⁶⁶

22:1 "And he showed me" signals new aspects of the city that John's angel-guide proceeded to point out. The pure river seems to be symbolic of the refreshment and sustenance that God provides (cf. Jer. 2:13; 17:13; Ps. 36:9; Prov. 10:11; 13:14; 14:27; 16:22; Zech. 14:8), though it, like the city itself, is probably also a literal river (cf. Gen. 2:10, 14). We should not confuse this river with the one flowing from the Jerusalem temple during the Millennium (Ezek. 47:1, 9, 12; Zech. 14:8). John described the river he saw as bright or clear as a crystal; it was a shimmering, sparkling stream of unpolluted water.⁷⁶⁷ This river proceeded from the throne that belongs to God and the Lamb (cf. v. 3; 3:21; Ezek. 47:1; Zech. 14:8; Heb. 1:3). This throne evidently stood at the head of the main street of the city so that looking down this street the throne appeared to be in its middle.⁷⁶⁸

"This is a symbolic way of describing the reign of eternal life in the age to come [and God as its source]. The symbolism of a river of life is a common one in biblical thought [cf. Ps. 46:4; Ezek. 47:1-12; Zech. 14:8; John 4:10, 14]."⁷⁶⁹

"The point of the passage is to teach that in the eternal state God's people will live at the source of the life-giving stream, the very presence of God Himself . . ."⁷⁷⁰

⁷⁶⁶McGee, 5:1075.

⁷⁶⁷Robertson, 6:479.

⁷⁶⁸Verses 1 and 2 make better sense if we take the clause "in the middle of its street" as describing the location of the throne. In this case it completes the thought begun in verse 1. The other option is to take it as describing the location of the tree. In this case it begins the thought that continues through verse 2.

⁷⁶⁹Lsdd, p. 286.

⁷⁷⁰Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, p. 482. See Mounce, p. 386.

22:2 John also saw the tree of life.⁷⁷¹ When Adam and Eve fell, they lost their access to the tree of life in the Garden of Eden (cf. Gen. 2:9; 3:22-24). In the eternal city the residents will have access to the tree of life there.

The description of this tree's location is debatable, but perhaps John saw the river dividing and flowing on both sides of it. A tree surrounded by water is the epitome of a fruitful tree (cf. Ps. 1:3; Jer. 17:8; Ezek. 19:10). This tree was perpetually rather than seasonally in fruit; it produced a new crop of fruit each month of the year. Evidently the new creation will not have a lunar calendar, since there will be no moon (21:23), but another type of calendar will define months. Most fruit trees in the old creation bear fruit only a few months each year at most. In contrast, God's blessing of fruitfulness will mark life in the new earth. The tree of life in the Garden of Eden could perpetuate life forever (Gen. 3:22, 24). Evidently that will be the function of this tree in the new earth as well, to sustain immortality. "Healing" really means "health-giving" (Gr. *therapeian*). Since there will be no death in the new earth these leaves will evidently promote well-being.⁷⁷² They will provide healing from the conditions of the old creation as the wiping away of tears removed the sorrows of the old creation (cf. 21:4; Ezek. 47:12). The nations are groups of people in the new creation viewed according to their old creation divisions (cf. 21:24).

"It seems possible therefore to understand participation in the tree of life as a regular experience of fellowship with God, i.e., eating of this monthly fruit."⁷⁷³

22:3 There will no longer be a curse because the tree of life will heal the nations. The curse in view is probably the curse that God pronounced on the old creation at the Fall (cf. Zech. 14:11; Mal. 4:6). God will have intimate fellowship with His people because this curse has now been lifted. Evidently believers (His bond-servants in the new creation; cf. 1:1) will occupy themselves serving God and the Lamb in the new earth. The Greek word for "serve" (*latreuo*) suggests priestly service in view of its other uses in this book (cf. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). "His" and "Him" present God and the Lamb as essentially one being.

22:4 God's bond-servants will see God's face; we will enjoy personal, intimate fellowship with Him. We will be able to do this because we will be pure in heart, righteous, and holy then (cf. Ps. 11:7; 17:15; Matt. 5:8; 1 Cor.

⁷⁷¹Several commentators take the reference to the "tree" (singular) as generic. They believe that John really saw many trees (e.g., Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 484). I think it is better to interpret the reference as one tree since this is the normal meaning of the singular noun.

⁷⁷²For an amillennial study of the symbolism used in Genesis 2—3 and Revelation 21:9—22:5, as ancient cosmography used the figures of a garden, a city, and a mountain, see Ken Olles and Warren Gage, "The City of God and the Cities of Men."

⁷⁷³Dillow, p. 474.

13:12; Heb. 12:14). Adam and Eve's sin broke their fellowship with God, and they hid from Him (Gen. 3:8; cf. Exod. 33:20, 23). Our ability to view God's glory is limited now (cf. Job 19:25-27; 2 Cor. 3:18; Heb. 9:7), but then it will be unhindered (1 John 3:2). Scripture does not reveal whether we will see one, two, or three persons of the Godhead.

Moreover we will bear God's name on our foreheads. Having His name on our foreheads means that we will be His and will reflect His divine glory in our persons. Having a name on one's forehead appeared three times earlier in this book (3:12; 7:3; 14:1). In each case it was a great privilege indicating ownership and protection as well as identification.

22:5 The final point John stressed was the great glory of God that will illuminate the whole new earth (21:23-25; cf. Zech. 14:6-7). Previously he mentioned this to show how glorious the city will be, but now he did so to emphasize what delight this will result in for the city-dwellers (cf. Num. 6:22-27). He added that His bond-servants will reign with Him forever, not just in the millennial kingdom (20:4, 6). This is the fulfillment of God's desire and command that man should rule over His creation (Gen. 1:26).⁷⁷⁴ Evidently faithful believers will have more authority in the new creation than unfaithful believers, as will be true during the Millennium (cf. Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27). However, we should not think of a type of rule in which some people become the objects of oppression.

"Our faithfulness in life prepares us for higher service in heaven."⁷⁷⁵

"Who knows but what He will give to each saint a world or a solar system or a galactic system to operate. Remember that Adam was given dominion over the old creation on this earth."⁷⁷⁶

Thus the prophecy of things that shall take place after present things (1:19), which began in 4:1, closes with a picture of God's servants worshipping around His throne and ruling under His authority.

"As seen in the Book of Revelation, worship today should involve adoration of God's being, declaration of the Lamb's worthiness, a celebration of God's presence, submission to His authority, and fearing and serving Him."⁷⁷⁷

⁷⁷⁴Beckwith, p. 767; Wall, pp. 257-58.

⁷⁷⁵Wiersbe, 2:624.

⁷⁷⁶McGee, 5:1077.

⁷⁷⁷Mazie Nakhro, "The Meaning of Worship according to the Book of Revelation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:629 (January-March 2001):85.

Many commentators believe that the New Jerusalem is the place to which Jesus referred when He told His disciples that He was going to prepare a place for them (John 14:2). I think this is correct since it will be the final abode of Christians. However, I think He probably meant that His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension constituted His preparatory work rather than His special creation of the new heavens and earth.

Sometimes people speak of the new heavens and earth as the eternal state. This terminology has led some to conclude that time as we know it, which marks events in sequence, will end when God destroys the present heavens and earth. This view was popular with some pagan Greek philosophers, and Origen held it. Some non-Christian eastern religions teach this view, and some Christians hold it today. There is no indication in the text, however, that the new creation will introduce a timeless form of existence. In fact the term "forever and ever" (20:10; 21:5) implies the continuation of time without end. Furthermore the reference to months (v. 2) implies the sequence of events. The references to distances picture a creation in which there is not only time but space (cf. 21:2, 3, 8, 10, 13-17, 24-27; 22:1-2).

"*Eternity*' to Old Testament people was not timelessness or *absence* of time. They knew no such realm. It was, rather, *extension* of time—as far back and as far forward as one could imagine—'time in its wholeness' (JB), 'sense of time past and future' (NEB)."⁷⁷⁸

"We do well to return again and again to Revelation 21 and 22, for it is the end of the pilgrim path. The more distinct the vision to the pilgrim of the beauty and glory of the city to which he journeys, the less the immediate environments of his journey attract him."⁷⁷⁹

IV. THE EPILOGUE TO THE BOOK 22:6-21

In this final section of the book John reported concluding information and instructions that God gave him. He did this to comfort and caution his readers and to affirm the authority of this book.

"The concluding paragraphs of the Revelation sum up and press home on the reader's conscience the foremost practical lessons of the book."⁷⁸⁰

This section consists of verbal exchanges between an angel and John, and between Jesus and John. Three emphases mark this epilogue.⁷⁸¹ First, this prophecy is genuine (vv. 6-7, 8-9, 16, 18-19). Second, Jesus will return imminently (vv. 6-7, 10, 12, 20). Third, the unfit should beware, and the faithful should take courage (vv. 11-12, 15, 17-19). The whole epilogue is very similar to the first chapter in many ways.

⁷⁷⁸David A. Hubbard, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, pp. 106-7. See also Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation, Apocalypse and Empire*, p. 67; and Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time*.

⁷⁷⁹Newell, p. 348.

⁷⁸⁰Beasley-Murray, p. 334.

⁷⁸¹Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 493.

Origin of the prophecy: God & Jesus	1:1	22:6
Subject of the prophecy: coming events	1:1	22:6
Mediator of the prophecy: an angel	1:1	22:6, 8, 16
Writer of the prophecy: John	1:1, 4, 9	22:8
Genuineness of the prophecy: true prophecy	1:3	22:6, 7, 9, 10, 18-19
Vehicle of the prophecy: a prophet	1:1, 9-11	22:8, 9, 10
Addressees of the prophecy: bond-servants	1:1	22:6
Destination of the prophecy: churches	1:3, 11	22:16, 18
Blessing of the prophecy: for obedience	1:3	22:7, 12, 14
Warning of the prophecy: for unfaithfulness	1:7	22:11, 12, 18-19
Center of the prophecy: Christ	1:2, 5, 9	22:16, 18, 20
God of the prophecy: Alpha & Omega	1:17	22:13
Chief character of the prophecy: God	1:5, 7	22:12, 13, 16
Hope of the prophecy: soon return	1:3, 7	22:7, 10, 12, 20

A. THE TESTIMONY OF THE ANGEL 22:6-7

22:6 The angel who had been revealing the new creation to John, one of the angels who had the seven bowls (21:9), continued to speak to him.⁷⁸² He assured John that the things prophesied to happen soon (4:1—22:5), which John had just seen, were faithful and true (cf. v. 6; Dan. 8:26).⁷⁸³

"No book in the Bible has a more pointed attestation, a stronger safeguarding against tampering, or a more urgent recommendation for study and observance than does the Apocalypse, especially in its Epilogue."⁷⁸⁴

The angel proceeded to explain why these words are faithful and true. It was the Lord, the God who inspired the prophets, who had revealed what John had received. The spirits of the prophets are their own spirits (cf. 19:10). God had sent His angel to reveal these things to His bond-servant John, who was one of the prophets. Specifically, He had revealed things that must happen soon. The purpose of this verse is to stress the authenticity of this revelation and to encourage anticipation of its fulfillment.

This statement reinforces a futuristic interpretation of Revelation. The book deals with events yet future. It also indicates that God intended the reader to understand this book. It is a revelation, not an incomprehensible

⁷⁸²Swete, p. 302; Beckwith, p. 772; Robertson, 6:481; Beasley-Murray, p. 334.

⁷⁸³Alford, 4:746; Swete, p. 302; Lee, 4:837; Beckwith, p. 772; Robertson, 6:481.

⁷⁸⁴Thomas, *Revelation* 8—22, p. 495.

mystery, even though much of the revelation is symbolic and difficult to understand.

22:7 Probably the angel relayed these words of Christ (cf. vv. 12-13) to John (cf. 16:15). Jesus Christ promised to return soon (cf. vv. 12, 20; 3:11).⁷⁸⁵ The Greek word translated "quickly" (*tachy*) means "soon." The Second Coming is the great climactic event in view through most of this prophecy, but applying this word about imminence to the Rapture is certainly legitimate.⁷⁸⁶

". . . it is quite evident that He would have us live in the constant expectation of His advent being imminent."⁷⁸⁷

The book closes as it opened, with a special blessing for those who pay attention to what it teaches (1:3; cf. 16:5). Here, however, the speaker is Christ, whom the angel apparently quoted. John evidently wrote this book as his visions transpired (cf. 10:4).

It is ironical that people have neglected this book even though it contains more promises of blessing than any other book in the Bible. All of us should continue to study it.

B. THE TESTIMONY OF JOHN 22:8-11

22:8 John resumed addressing the reader, which he had not done since 1:1, 4, and 9. He affirmed the angel's words that the prophecy was genuine. He himself had heard and had seen the things that he had recorded (cf. Dan. 8:15; 12:5). He was an eyewitness of these things (cf. John 1:14; 19:35; 21:14; 1 John 1:1-3; 4:14).

John confessed that when he had heard and seen these things he reacted by worshipping the angel who revealed them to him (cf. 19:10). It was the revelation of the new creation that evidently moved John to respond this way a second time. John's strong reaction further attests the genuineness of the revelations that he had received.

22:9 This angel also rebuked John for worshipping him (cf. 19:10).⁷⁸⁸ People should worship God, not His servants. The angel presented himself as a fellow-servant of John's; they both served God. He said he also served the other prophets besides John as well as all believers who pay attention to

⁷⁸⁵Reconstructionism (dominion theology) refers this imminence to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. See Chilton, p. 575; Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell*, pp. 142-45.

⁷⁸⁶See Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 489.

⁷⁸⁷W. Lincoln, *Lectures on the Book of Revelation*, p. 241. See also Stanton's discussion of imminency in *Kept from . . .*, pp. 108-37, and Wayne A. Brindle, "Biblical Evidence for the Imminence of the Rapture," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:630 (April-June 2001):150-51.

⁷⁸⁸This may have been the same angel whom John tried to worship earlier (19:10).

what God has revealed in this book. The specific mention of the prophets as a special group of believers here heightens respect for all prophecy and this prophecy in particular.

22:10 John received instruction from the angel to leave his book open. He was not to close it because the fulfillment of the events predicted was near, and people needed to be aware of them (cf. 1:11). God had told Daniel to seal his prophecy, evidently because there was more prophecy to come (Dan. 8:26; 12:4, 9-10; cf. Rev. 10:4). As an artist covers his work when it is under construction until it is complete, so God covered His picture of the future until He finished it.

22:11 The angel gave John this warning to pass along because the time is near (v. 10). This is a strong warning not to put off becoming a believer in Jesus Christ. It presents the hopelessness of the final state of unbelievers. When Christ comes, people will not be able to change their destiny. What they are then they will remain forever. People should not expect some second chance in the future but should make the decision about worshipping God now in the light of what they have read in this book.

"It is not only true that the troubles of the last days will tend to fix the character of each individual according to the habits which he has already formed, but there will come a time when change will be impossible—when no further opportunity will be given for repentance on the one hand or for apostasy on the other."⁷⁸⁹

"All four parts of v. 11 indicate with a tone of irony the fixity of state in which the good and the evil find themselves at a time when no further opportunity for repentance remains. The lesson is, 'Change while there is time.'"⁷⁹⁰

This verse does not teach that for some people repentance and conversion are impossible (cf. v. 17). It is a guarantee of personal responsibility for one's decisions (cf. Ezek. 3:27; Matt. 11:15; Rev. 2:7; 13:9; et al.).

C. THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS AND JOHN'S RESPONSE 22:12-20

22:12 Jesus Christ repeated His promise to return soon (v. 7, cf. 1:3; 22:20).

"Nowhere is a date set, nor was there any definite promise that the consummation would occur within the lifetime of

⁷⁸⁹Swete, p. 305.

⁷⁹⁰Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 502.

the first century Christians. Nevertheless, the possibility of the Lord's advent was always present."⁷⁹¹

His words continue through verse 19. Instead of promising a blessing, as He did earlier (v. 7; 16:5), this time He promised to judge. He will reward both the good and the bad. This is a reward that He has to give. This prospect strengthens the warning in verse 11. Jesus Christ will judge all people finally on the basis of their works (cf. 20:12; Jer. 17:10; 2 Cor. 5:10-11).

"Whereas salvation is of grace, rewards are according to works."⁷⁹²

"God *gives* us His salvation, but He *pays* us for our good works."⁷⁹³

In view of Jesus Christ's soon return Christians should be diligent to lay up treasure in heaven while we have the time (Matt. 6:19-21).

22:13 Jesus Christ offered three titles for Himself that give assurance that He can and will fulfill His former promise to reward (cf. 1:4, 8, 17; 2:8; 21:6). Jesus Christ, as well as God the Father, is the Alpha and Omega (cf. 1:8; 21:6). This title stresses His eternality and sovereignty. "The first and the last" is also a title for Christ (1:17; 2:8) and the Father (Isa. 44:6; 48:12). It emphasizes that God is the cause and goal of history. "The beginning and the end" describes God in 21:6 and Christ in Hebrews 12:2. It means that He finishes what He starts.⁷⁹⁴

22:14 This final blessing in the book (cf. 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7) announces God's favor on those who cleanse themselves by turning to Christ for salvation (cf. 7:14; 21:27). The robe one wears is a figure for one's works, which others see (19:8; cf. 7:14).

People who wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb will have access to the tree of life (i.e., they will live forever in the new creation). They will also enter the New Jerusalem by its gates (i.e., they will be able to enjoy intimate fellowship with God).

22:15 The opposite of the blessings described in verse 14 is exclusion from the New Jerusalem, namely, eternity in the lake of fire (20:15; 21:8). Jesus

⁷⁹¹Tenney, p. 150.

⁷⁹²Smith, *A Revelation . . .*, p. 302. Cf. Matt. 16:27; Luke 23:41; 1 Cor. 3:8; 2 Cor. 5:10; 11:15; 2 Tim. 4:14; Heb. 2:2; Rev. 2:23; 11:18, 18:6; 20:12, 13.

⁷⁹³Zane C. Hodges, "The Doctrine of Rewards, Part 1: Rewards and Grace," *Grace Evangelical Society News* 9:5 (September-October 1994):4.

⁷⁹⁴Hughes, p. 238.

described the people who will not enter the city by the works that mark their lives of unbelief. "Dogs" is a metaphor for the morally impure (cf. Deut. 23:18; 2 Kings 8:13; Ps. 22:16, 20; Isa. 56:10; Matt. 7:6; 15:26; Mark 7:27; Phil 3:2-3). In John's day dogs were wild, aggressive scavengers.⁷⁹⁵ Their fate should warn believers not to fall into apostasy and its associated vices.⁷⁹⁶ The other types of individuals named here appear in other lists of wicked unbelievers (cf. 21:8).

22:16 The combination "I Jesus" occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. Here Jesus used it to stress His role in producing this book and so to strengthen its authority (cf. vv. 7, 12). "My angel" is the main angel who revealed this material to John (cf. v. 6). The angel gave the whole revelation ("these things") to John, but it was ultimately for all the churches, not just the seven churches of Asia Minor (cf. 1:4; chs. 2—3).

David founded old Jerusalem, but David's greatest son will establish the New Jerusalem. However, Jesus was the ancestor of David as well as His descendant, the root as well as the offspring of David. Consequently He fulfills all the prophecies concerning David's family. Jesus also called Himself the morning star prophesied to come the second time (cf. 2:28). The appearance of the morning star heralds the dawn of a new day. Similarly the Lord's second coming will herald the dawn of a new day in history. He is the brightest of all personal stars, as the morning star is the brightest physical star in the sky. He is the star that shall come forth from Jacob (Num. 24:17).

"The 'root' is buried in the ground where no one can see it, but the 'star' is in the heavens where everyone can see it."⁷⁹⁷

22:17 Jesus continued speaking to John. The "Spirit" is God's Holy Spirit, and the "bride" is probably the church, not the New Jerusalem, since this appeal is to the present bride of Christ.⁷⁹⁸ Jesus quoted both of these entities reiterating their appeal to Himself to come back to the earth (cf. 1:7). "The one who hears" is everyone who hears this book read in the churches, as was common in John's day. This includes modern readers of it, of course. These individuals, as well as the bride gathered corporately, should likewise pray for the Lord's return (cf. Matt. 6:10; Luke 11:2).

"If the Holy Spirit, the church, and the Apostle John knew that Christ could not return at any moment because of other events or a time period that had to transpire first, why did

⁷⁹⁵Robertson, 6:485; Johnson, p. 602.

⁷⁹⁶Wall, p. 266.

⁷⁹⁷Wiersbe, 2:625.

⁷⁹⁸Moffatt, p. 492.

they command Him in a way that implied that He could come at any moment?"⁷⁹⁹

Now Jesus turned the invitation around. He invited the thirsty to come to Him and take the water of life freely (cf. v. 1; 7:16; 21:6; Isa. 55:1; Matt. 5:6; John 6:35; 7:37). Unbelievers obviously need to take their first drink of this living water, which represents Christ, but believers also need to keep slaking their thirst by coming to Him again and again. The one who is thirsty is the person who senses his or her need (cf. Matt. 5:6; John 4:10). "The one who wishes" is broad enough to include every single individual. This is an unusually winsome invitation (cf. 21:6; Matt. 11:28). Notice that the water of life costs the one who comes for it nothing. It costs us nothing, but it cost Jesus Christ greatly to give Himself for us.

22:18 Jesus continued to speak. The high degree of authority of this statement, which continues in the next verse, supports this conclusion. This warning contrasts with the invitation that the Lord just extended (cf. Deut. 4:2; 7:15; 12:32; 28:27, 60; Prov. 30:5-6; Jer. 26:2). "This book" refers to the Book of Revelation. The prophecy of it summarizes the contents of the book. Those who hear it are everyone in the seven churches and all subsequent hearers (cf. 1:3). This includes copyists, translators, and teachers of it.

"He is not concerned about possible mechanical errors in transmission or mistakes of judgment in interpreting his message, but in deliberate distortions and perversions of it."⁸⁰⁰

Adding material to or deleting sections from the prophecies contained in this book will result in punishment from God. Specifically God will visit the offender with the plagues written in this book. This seems to imply that anyone who does this will either lose his or her salvation or not be a believer in the first place. Another possibility is that Jesus was using hyperbole to stress the heinousness of this sin. The best solution seems to be that the plagues written in this book are severe judgments from God. What Jesus meant was that anyone who perverts the teaching of this book will experience judgment from God that is similar to the judgments that will come upon the earth-dwellers during the Tribulation. Jesus warned of plagues, not loss of salvation. How important it is to understand and communicate God's truth accurately, especially the truths God revealed in this book (cf. Gal. 1:6-7)!⁸⁰¹

⁷⁹⁹Showers, p. 142. See also his brief history of belief in the imminent coming of Christ on pp. 142-47.

⁸⁰⁰Ladd, p. 295.

⁸⁰¹Robert Thomas, "The Spiritual Gift of Prophecy in Rev 22:18," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 32:2 (June 1989):201-16, believed this verse announced the termination of the gift of prophecy and the cessation of revelation in the church. However this seems to be going beyond what Jesus really said.

22:19 Taking away "his part" from the tree of life and the New Jerusalem does not mean he will lose his salvation either. If the person who corrupts Revelation is an unbeliever, he or she will have no part (share) in the blessings of the new creation. If he or she is a believer, the part (share) lost must be some special privilege in the eternal state. In other words, a believer who perverts the teaching of this book may lose part of his or her eternal reward. To say that a true child of God would never tamper with these Scriptures is simply naive. "Anyone" means anyone.

22:20 Evidently John now quoted Jesus' promise to come soon. Christ's promise to come soon was His response to the prayers of the Spirit, the bride, and the faithful hearers (v. 17). "He who testifies to these things" is Jesus. The things in view are the words of Jesus in verses 12-19, but beyond that everything in this book (cf. 1:2). This is the third time in this pericope that we read that Jesus Christ promised to come quickly (vv. 7, 12). How can we doubt His word?

"Nor is it here alone, but throughout the New Testament in general, that such expressions are used. Everywhere is the promised Apocalypse of the Lord Jesus represented as close at hand, liable to occur at any time. The impression thus made upon the early Christians was, that Christ might come at any day or hour, even in their own lifetime. Exactly when he would come, was nowhere told them. . . .

"Ever, as the Church moves on through time, and above all in the days in which we live, the next thing for every Christian to be looking for in this world is the coming of Christ to fulfill what is written in this Book. The Bible tells of nothing between us and that day."⁸⁰²

John added his "amen" affirming his belief that Jesus would come soon, and he voiced his personal petition that He would do so as He promised. This verse and the next are the only ones in Revelation that refer to Jesus Christ as the "Lord Jesus," though this title is common in other New Testament books. It acknowledges Jesus' deity and thus His right to judge.

D. THE FINAL BENEDICTION 22:21

This benediction wishes God's enabling grace on all who read the book.

"As in revelation, so in history: **grace** shall have the last word!"⁸⁰³

⁸⁰²Seiss, p. 523.

⁸⁰³Beasley-Murray, p. 350.

God's grace makes faith, for the unbelieving reader, and faithfulness, for the believing reader, possible (cf. 1:4). This benediction is a prayer that all its hearers and readers may respond to the revelation of this book appropriately. It is an unusual way to end an apocalypse, but it was a common way to close a first-century Christian letter (cf. 1:1).

Appendix

SYMBOLS USED IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION THAT THE BOOK ITSELF INTERPRETS

1. The seven lampstands (1:12) are seven churches (1:20).
2. The seven stars (1:16) are seven angels or messengers (1:20).
3. The morning star (2:28; 22:16), the male child (12:5), and the root and offspring of David (22:16) are Jesus Christ (19:15; 22:16).
4. The Lamb (17:14) is Lord of lords and King of kings (17:14) and Jerusalem's lamp (21:23).
5. The white horse rider (19:11) is Faithful and True (19:11), the Word of God (19:13), and King of kings and Lord of lords (19:16).
6. The city of my God (3:12), the Lamb's bride (19:7; 21:9), and the holy city (21:10) are the New Jerusalem (3:12; 21:10; cf. 21:2).
7. The seven lamps of fire (4:5) and the seven eyes (5:6) are the seven spirits of God (4:5; 5:6).
8. The incense in the golden bowls (5:8) is the prayers of the saints (5:8).
9. The fallen star (9:1) is the angel or messenger of the abyss (9:11).
10. The great city (11:8), Sodom (11:8), and Egypt (11:8) are Jerusalem (11:8).
11. The stars of heaven (12:4) are the angels or messengers of Satan (12:9).
12. The great dragon (12:9), the old serpent (12:9), and the devil (12:9) are Satan (12:9).
13. Time, times, and half a time (12:14) are 1260 days (12:6).
14. The beast out of the earth (13:11) is the false prophet (19:20).
15. The waters (17:1) are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues (17:15).
16. The woman (17:3) is Babylon the great (17:5), the great city (18:10) that reigns over the kings of the earth (17:18).
17. The seven heads (17:9) are seven mountains (17:9) which are seven kings (17:10).
18. The beast (17:11) is the eighth king (17:11).

19. The ten horns (17:12) are ten kings (17:12).
20. The fine linen (19:8) is the righteous acts of the saints (19:8).
21. The faithful souls come to life (20:4) is the first resurrection (20:5).
22. The lake of fire (20:14) is the second death (20:14).
23. The Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb (21:22) are the temple in Jerusalem (21:22).

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