

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

A Commentary

by

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Preface

No book of the New Testament is more varied of interpretation than The Revelation of Jesus Christ. It seems that no book is more susceptible to subjective evaluation than the Revelation. When symbolical elements are abundant the danger is to either assume one's favorite interpretation, or to begin wildly speculating on various possibilities. Certainly the original recipients of the book, the readers in the seven assemblies in Asia, would have had a cultural and theological construct into which they placed this book. For them the book was, if studied diligently, not problematical in interpretation, but certain, and relatively straightforward.

Thus is our problem defined. We must place ourselves in the position of the original recipients as much as possible. We must transport ourselves back in time to the first century and view the book as they viewed it. To the extent which we accomplish this task, we will be successful in understanding the message of the Apocalypse. This consideration brings us to the question of interpretation.

The Principles of Interpretation of the First Century

It must be remembered that the readers of the first century were theologically untaught and relatively unsophisticated. This is not to say that they were unintelligent, nor that they were ignorant of Scripture. Indeed, the opposite must be assumed. However, they were not required to insert the Apocalypse into a preconceived theological construct. If we assume that they were intended to understand the book, we must realize that they had an interpretational basis for doing so.

It has been well established that the basic approach to Scripture of both the New Testament authors and their readers was the normal, historical, grammatical approach. We will not debate this here. Most modern scholars give at least lip service to the concept of grammatical, historical interpretation. The question arises, "How can we apply such a method to a highly symbolical book?" Indeed, are we to assume that all Scripture is to be interpreted using this method except predictive prophecy? No less a scholar than Oswald T. Allis makes this claim.

In *Prophecy and the Church* Allis indicates that prophecy can only be understood literally when its literal meaning is clear and obvious. In order to interpret a prophecy literally, its fulfillment must have already occurred. Consequently, no unfulfilled prophecy can be understood literally. If this is true, no prophecy in the Old Testament could have been understood literally at the time of its statement, but only after it was realized. This approach almost seems designed to deny a particular theological point of view, the premillennial approach to the book. If one is biased against the premillennial approach he cannot interpret predictive prophecy "literally."

A more reasonable approach to predictive prophecy than spiritualizing or allegorizing is to apply normal principles of interpretation and to allow the process of interpretation to lead us to whatever doctrinal conclusions arise. In this way we will come to an understanding of the text that is consistent with viewpoint of the original readers. This is our stated goal.

Through such an approach it becomes evident that the Apocalypse fits in nicely to the overall framework of Old Testament predictive prophecy, and only by using a consistently "literal" or normal approach to the interpretation of Old Testament predictive prophecy can a true understanding of the prophecy of the Revelation be understood. The millennium, for instance, can only be understood as in fulfillment of the Old Testament promises to Israel as normally read. Also, the time references in the book of Revelation can be legitimately related to Daniel's prophecy as well as the Olivet Discourse. Diverse elements then seem to mesh wonderfully, with no allegorizing necessary.

The early church must have been thoroughly aware of Christ's fulfillment of messianic prophecy. Furthermore, it would have been less than competent of the apostles not to have introduced their charges to the teachings of the prophets in that regard. Already the early assemblies were circulating the gospels, wherein the Kingdom of God and Christ as King is the major theme, and thus already they understood Christ's references to His fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies, and His teachings concerning those yet

to be fulfilled (Matthew 24 and 25, for instance). This work sent from Patmos by John, then, would have been the capstone of their understanding. But only so if they used normal interpretive procedures in both the Old and New Testament prophetic teachings. Hence, we insist that to approach The Revelation without being thoroughly grounded in the kingdom teachings of the Hebrew prophets and the Gospel writers will be frustrating, at least, and misleading most certainly.

Does a normal, literal, historical, grammatical approach solve all the problems in the book? Decidedly not! We still struggle with specific statements and passages, perhaps because we are so far removed from the first century recipients, their cultural background, and their language. This does not justify, however, abandoning normal interpretive methods for the speculative or absurd. It is important to remember that the normal interpretive methods so clearly presented by the Gospels and Epistles would have held sway in John's original audience. They would have been aware of Hebrew apocalyptic writings, and would have been presented an integrated approach to the Kingdom of God as presented by Jesus of Nazareth.

The Chronology of the Apocalypse

Mounce's statement on the chronology of the Revelation is well taken,

The basic structural question is whether John intended his readers to understand the visions recorded in his work in a straightforward chronological sense or whether some form of recapitulation is involved. R. H. Charles is usually cited as the major proponent of the continuous approach. He holds that apart from the Prologue and Epilogue the book falls naturally into seven parts in which the events described in the visions are in strict chronological order. The continuous chronological approach is not accepted by the majority of contemporary writers.

Clearly, like much apocalyptic literature, the Apostle John was not concerned primarily with a strict chronological approach when he wrote The Revelation. He evidently presented it in the order the visions were given to him by the Lord Jesus Christ, whose revelation it is. The structure of the book seems to make that clear. Within a section the divine author undoubtedly maintained a reasonable chronology, but even there recapitulation occurs. And between sections recapitulation is common, even, we might say, the norm.

According to the futurist view, the only approach that is viable using a strictly historical grammatical interpretive method, The Revelation is a detailed description of events leading up to the second coming of Christ and those events which immediately succeed it into the ages after the millennial state. Specifically, chapters 4 through 19 are taken to relate to Daniel's Seventieth Week, commonly called the tribulation period. With this presupposition, the author attempts to place each section within Daniel's Seventieth Week as closely as possible. A presentation of the scope of each section has been provided which will help the student comprehend the conclusions to which the author has come.

Structure of the Commentary

The Apocalypse divides easily into three natural sections: the forward (chapter one), the letters to the seven churches (chapters two and three), and the events relating to Daniel's seventieth week and following (chapters four through twenty-two).

For easy reference, the commentary is divided by chapter and verse. Note the following outline which will help in viewing the overall structure of the book.

- I. Foreword *The things which you have seen* (Chapter 1)
 - A. The Preamble (1:1-3)
 - B. The Greeting (1:4-8)
 - C. The Vision (1:9-18)
 - D. The Outline (1:19-20)
- II. The Letters to the Seven Churches *The things which are* (Chapters 2,3)
 - A. To Ephesus (2:1-7)
 - B. To Smyrna (2:8-11)
 - C. To Pergamos (2:12-17)
 - D. To Thyatira (2:18-29)
 - E. To Sardis (3:1-6)
 - F. To Philadelphia (3:7-13)
 - G. To Laodicea (3:14-22)
- III. The Events of Daniel's 70th Week *The things that shall take place after these* (Chapters 4-22)
 - A. The Throne Room (Chapter 4)
 - B. The Sealed Scroll (Chapter 5)
 - C. The First Six Seals (Chapter 6)
 - D. The Justified Tribulation Saints (Chapter 7)
 - E. The Seventh Seal and the First Six Trumpets (Chapters 8-9)
 - F. The Angel and the Little Scroll (Chapter 10)
 - G. The Two Witnesses (Chapter 11:1-14)
 - H. The Seventh Trumpet (Chapter 11:15-18)
 - I. The Seven Individuals (Chapter 11:19-14:20)
 - J. The Seven Angels (Chapter 15)
 - K. The Seven Bowls (Chapter 16)
 - L. The Judgment of Babylon (Chapters 17-18)
 - M. The Second Coming of Christ (Chapter 19)
 - N. The Millennium and the Final Judgment (Chapter 20)
 - O. The Final Matters (Chapters 21-22)

Introduction

The Author of the Epistle

A. John the Apostle

The common view is the best view, and was held by Justin, Irenaeus, Clement, Origen, Tertullian, Hippolytus. Guthrie's remarks are of interest here:

Tertullian cited the book frequently and regarded it as by the apostle John. Similarly Clement of Alexandria accepted the apostolic authorship and cited the book as Scripture. The same goes for Origen. There is no need to cite further evidence in support, for there are few books in the New Testament with stronger early attestation.ⁱ

B. Another John

Held by Dionysius who rejected Johannine authorship because of the supposed ignorance of Greek and the many apparent Hebraisms, this view must be rejected. Most scholars today who believe in the inspiration of The Revelation also hold that John the Apostle is its author. However, Erasmus, Luther, and Zwingli questioned John's authorship because the book presents a literal thousand-year reign of Christ. These men, who were highly influenced by the Catholic error concerning the kingdom of God, evidently could not come to grips with premillennial truth. This should not be surprising, since they were but little removed from Catholicism.

Date

The Revelation was apparently written during the reign of Emperor Domitian, about 95 or 96 AD.

Walvoord in *Bible Knowledge Commentary* says, "Most evangelical scholars affirm that Revelation was written in AD 95 or 96. This is based on accounts of the early church fathers that the Apostle John had been exiled on Patmos Island during the reign of Domitian who died in AD 96. John was then allowed to return to Ephesus."

The Four Approaches to the Interpretation of Revelation

See Walvoord's "Introduction" in his book *The Revelation* for more detail:

A. The Allegorical Approach

The book chronicles a conflict between God and Satan being fulfilled during the present age.

B. The Preterist Approach

The book is a symbolic presentation of early church conflicts which are now over and resolved.

C. The Historical Approach

The book is a symbolic picture of total church history of the present age between Christ's first and second comings (Started during the middle ages. Popular among both amillennialists and postmillennialists.)

D. The Futurist Approach

This is the conservative approach to the book. It states that Chapters 4-22 are yet future from our point of view. Chapters 4-18 describe the Seventieth Week of Daniel, which is the last seven years preceding the second coming of Christ, with a particular emphasis on the last three and one half years of that period.

ⁱ Donald Guthrie. *New Testament Introduction: Hebrews to Revelation*. Inter-varsity Press, Chicago, 1966. pg. 253.

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The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Chapter One

I. Foreword: The Things which you have seen Chapter 1

A. The Preamble (1:1-3)

- 1-2 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his bond-servants, even the things which must shortly come to pass, and he sent and signified it by his angel to his bond-servant John, ² who bare witness of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, even of all things that he saw.
- 3 Blessed is the one who reads, and they who hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things that are written in it, for the season is near.¹

Verses 1-2

The word revelation is *apokalupsis*, meaning to take a covering away, therefore, to reveal or disclose. The *-sis* ending indicates a noun of action. It refers to the act of making known that which was previously unknown and unknowable. The word has come into English as Apocalypse, another name for this book.

“Of Jesus Christ” is subjective genitive indicating that Jesus Christ is doing the revealing, rather than the One about Whom the revelation was made.

The source of the book of Revelation is stated with the words “which God gave...” “God” refers to the Father. God the Father gave the content of the Revelation to God the Son, Who then acted as the agent of the transmission of the information to the Apostle John, who, through the bearing along ministry of the Holy Spirit wrote it down.

“To show” indicates the purpose of God in giving the revelation to Christ. It refers to the future distribution of the written form of the revelation.

“Bond-servants” is actually “slaves” (*douloi*) and probably refers to the victorious ones mentioned later. Are all believers considered slaves of Christ, or does the phrase refer only to those who have exhibited complete subordination to God, with a willingness to completely commit themselves and all they have to Him? This second view is held by many who do not understand the nature of the salvation package received at the point of faith. It is never correct to sub-divide Christians into spiritual “lots.” Correct understanding of Scripture is available to each believer. While some believers are more mature than others, all believers are complete in Christ.

God the Father gave the revelation to the Son concerning things which must shortly come to pass. The verb “must” indicates the necessity of the events taking place. From God’s viewpoint, the events are necessary as a fulfillment of both Old and New Testament programs. Concerning “must” Merrill Tenney says, “The word translated *must* implies logical or mathematical necessity, the inevitable result of the inherent scheme or nature of things.”

“Shortly” means *suddenly, in an unexpected way*. Walvoord correctly states, “the action will be sudden when it comes, not necessarily that it will occur immediately. Once the end-time events begin, they will occur in rapid succession (cf. Luke 18:8; Acts 12:7; 22:18; 25:4; Romans 16:20).”² Luke 18:8 uses this phrase of a sudden event rather than one that will occur soon, “I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?”

“Come to pass” is an aorist infinitive. In the aorist tense this infinitive refers to the future totality of events that are to take place, not to the idea that they have already begun to take place. Taken together *must come to pass* indicates the absolute certainty of the totality of the events of this book.

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“And he sent and signified it by His angel...” “And” coordinates the act of signifying with the God’s act of sending. This is the second verb of the relative clause referring back to the act of revelation.

“Sent” is *apostello* “to send with a message.” It tells how the signifying took place. The angel was sent with a message to John.

“Signified,” means “to show by signs.” The noun form of this word is *sema*, a sign or token. The message of the book is primarily sent through audio visual signals or signs, which John saw and heard. However, the word in the first century also carried the idea of communication with words, which are but another type of signs, those which represent thought.

“Angel” means messenger, undoubtedly a spirit being rather than a human being. Some have thought this must be Gabriel who brought messages to Daniel, Mary and Zechariah (Dan 8:16; 9:21-22; Lk 1:26-31). The angel is viewed as the conduit through which the revelation came. John will meet several angels in his vision, but this single angel seems to be the one who is responsible for giving John the over-all vision of which the book consists.

By the phrase “to his bond-servant John,” we see that John is viewed as the terminus of the revelatory process. Thus we have the process of revelation: 1) The Father is the source of the revelation; 2) the Son is the direct agent of the revelation; 3) the ministering angel is the intermediate agent of the revelation; 4) John is the terminus of the revelation; 5) John’s readers (the seven assemblies) are the terminus of the inscription process.

Verse 2 continues the initial sentence. “Who” introduces a relative clause referring to John. The verb “bare witness” is aorist active indicative of *martureo*, “...which, along with *martus* and *marturia*, is common in all the Johannine books (cf. 22:18, 20.... Epistolary aorist here, referring to this book.”³ A witness is a person who sees or hears something first hand. Therefore, John’s witnessing refers to his observation of the facts of the book, his vision, which he then he faithfully spoke out. This is reaffirmed in the words “even of all things that he saw.”

John was to bear witness, that is, to testify, of “the word of God.” “God has communicated to man. The implications of the phrase “word of God” are often overlooked because of over familiarity with the phrase. To say “the Bible is the Word of God” is to say that God has communicated to man using normal communicative techniques. The implication is clear. God’s word is designed to be understood using regular interpretive methods, rather than a *special set* of hermeneutical rules.

Numbers in Revelation

The significance of numbers in the Apocalypse is of great concern. Some, undoubtedly sincerely, have given significance to numbers that actually takes away from the message of the book.

Sometimes numbers do have symbolical significance, especially in those parts of the book that have a symbolical force. But when a number is not symbolical, but in context seems to indicate a non-symbolical truth, care must be taken not to over emphasize the symbolical concept the number might have in another situation.

The “seven churches” are a case in point. John was referring to seven actual churches, not to the course of church history as some have supposed. This is reading too much into the symbolical meaning of seven. If the word has any symbolical meaning at all, it is simply that these seven churches represent local churches in general.

However, the number seven probably does have a symbolical emphasis in the “seven spirits before the throne.” Seven here is emphasizing the perfections of a single Spirit, the Holy Spirit.

We will discuss the significance of each number as we proceed through the book.

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According to Robertson, “of Jesus Christ” is subjective genitive, meaning that the testimony is by Jesus Christ. However, the understood subject of the next verb “saw” is best understood to refer to John. That being the case, the phrase might better be understood as John’s observations about Christ, which makes the phrase “of Jesus Christ” an objective genitive.

“Even of all things that he saw” is an indefinite relative clause in apposition to “word” and “testimony.” The nature of the revelations given by Christ to John were visual. Thus John’s writing involve a strong descriptive element which is to be expected in a revelation that is based on visions and symbols as well as words.

Verse 3

Concerning “*blessed*” ATR says,

The Greek word here (*makarios*, blessed) is an adjective that means “happy” which in English etymology goes back to hap, chance, good-luck as seen in our words haply, hapless, happily, happiness. “Blessedness is, of course, an infinitely higher and better thing than mere happiness” (Weymouth). English has thus ennobled “blessed” to a higher rank than “happy.” ...The Greek word is as old as Homer and Pindar and was used of the Greek gods and also of men, but largely of outward prosperity. Then it is applied to the dead who died in the Lord as in Rev. 14:13. Already in the Old Testament the Septuagint uses it of moral quality.... “If you know these things, happy are you if you do them” (John 13:17). “Happy are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29). And Paul applies this adjective to God, “according to the gospel of the glory of the happy God” (I Tim. 1:11. Cf. also Tit. 2:13).⁴

This is the first of seven “blessings” or pronouncements of happiness announced in the book: 1:3, 14:13, 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; 22:14.

“The one who reads” must refer to the one who performed the public reading in the assembly. Since it appears that John sent out a single copy to each assembly, this is not surprising. Indeed, the public reading of Scripture was necessary since copying was laborious and time consuming. The reader is contrasted with the hearer, but both are said to be “happy.”

“They who hear” is a *plural* participle, which implies that the book was to be read aloud.⁵ The idea is that a single person reads, and several people hear. This refers to the regular reading of Scripture in the New Testament assembly (See Robertson’s statement above).

The word *prophecy* means to receive revealed information and speak it out. It should not be limited to the predictive elements of the book. God’s dealings with the seven churches, while containing predictive elements, are not limited to prediction. Nevertheless, non-predictive elements are prophecy. The examination of the character of each church, for instance, is prophetic though not predictive.

Note the governing article “The ones who hear and keep,” that is, the same individuals who hear also keep the things written. Most commentators relate “keep” to obedience.⁶ However, the word probably means “to guard” that is, to keep from changing the message. Technically, there are very few elements “to obey” in the Apocalypse.

“Are written” indicating the idea that they *stand written*⁷ and are therefore authoritative. As part of the introduction to the book which was to be distributed, the words carry the idea of the ultimate form the revelation was to take. John received the vision, but it is the reading and hearing of the written

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presentation that produces happiness in the believer. The written form of the word of God carries a permanence that implies authority beyond the oral presentation.

“For the season (time) is near” must refer to the final period in God’s program with Israel and the Gentile nations.

The word “time” refers to a period of time, that is, the time of the end (Dan. 8:17; 11:35, 40; 12:4, 9). The end time, as a time period, is mentioned in Revelation 11:18 and 12:12. In 12:14 the word “time” means a year (cf. Dan. 7:25); and the phrase “time, times, and half a time” means one year (“time”) plus two years (“times”) plus six months (“half a time”), totaling three and one-half years—the length of the time of “the end”.⁸

However, ATR, being amillennial, takes this time to be “the time of crisis.”

B. The Greeting (1:4-8)

- 4-6 **John to the seven assemblies that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from him⁹ who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before his throne,⁵ and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us, and loosed us from our sins by his blood,⁶ and he made us to be a kingdom, to be priests to his God and Father, to him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever, amen.**
- 7 **Behold, he comes with the clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn over him. Even so, amen.**
- 8 **I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty One.**

Verses 4-6

The author, John, is specifically identified. Here begins the epistolary salutation to the seven assemblies. At this point he presents a general message to all seven assemblies. Later he will address each one individually.

These seven churches were in proconsular Asia, not the Asia of modern times. Each of these churches was located in the south western section what is today Asia Minor.

Some have taken the number seven to be representative of completeness, and therefore see these seven churches as representing the whole church. This is not likely, given the nature of the book. See the discussion below concerning the significance of the seven churches.

The phrase “grace and peace” is evocative of Paul’s salutations. However, the form was not unusual as an introduction to letters. Grace and peace both carry a significance to believers that would not be considered by the pagan world of John’s day.

Of course, by grace John is not referring to saving grace, but to the grace by which his readers were to live their daily lives. And peace would not have evoked the concept of peace with God, which is assured in salvation, but physical peace, including peace among the brethren, the character of God expressed in the daily lives of the believer.

John says that the grace and peace has three sources, the Father, the Holy Spirit, and the Son (verse 5).

The First Person is represented by the words “from Him who is and who was and who is to come,” an unusual construction found in various forms five times in the Apocalypse: 1:4; 1:8; 4:8;p 11:17; 16:5. Interestingly, the translators of the KJV rendered according to the critical text, leaving out the “of God,” which is presented in the majority text. If “of God,” is retained, it undoubtedly refers to the first person (see verse 5 where the Son is specifically identified as a separate source of grace and

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peace). The “Him who is” is a participle best translated “the one who is existing” and indicates that God the Father continues His existence, even though not visible on the earth.

The statement “who was” is better understood as “the one who was existing,” as the verb is imperfect tense showing continual existence in past time. It accurately represents a situation prior to the “who is” statement. That is, the one who is now existing in heaven is the same as the one who was previously existing in heaven.

In what sense is God the Father the One “Who is to come?” Does this not confuse the persons of the Trinity? Four possible answers present themselves:

1. The “coming” here refers to the visions of John’s Apocalypse, not to His coming to earth;
2. God the Father is included in the New Jerusalem when it comes to earth (21:22);
3. God the Father is so closely associated with the second coming of Christ that He is viewed as participating in it;
4. The entire phrase “who is, who was, and who is coming” is honorific and refers simply to God’s eternal nature. This is clearly the best understanding of the statement.

Walvoord agrees with the fourth view, “The eternal God, the source of all grace and peace, is introduced as the One ‘which is, and which was, and which is to come.... The concept of past, present, and future corresponds to the threefold chronological division of the book itself.’”¹⁰

TO WHAT DOES THE PHRASE “FROM THE SEVEN SPIRITS WHO ARE BEFORE HIS THRONE” REFER?

The two common interpretations are:

1. That these are seven spirits, probably angels, which have a special place of privilege before the throne. This view is held by Hocking.¹¹
2. That the phrase is a symbolical representation of the Holy Spirit, indicated by the number of perfection, seven.

In the Revelation, angels are not referred to as spirits, though this designation does occur elsewhere. Nor would it be appropriate to indicate spirit beings other than God to be the source of grace and peace as indicated here. All in all, it seems best to hold that the seven spirits are a symbolical representation of the Holy Spirit in His perfection.

Many commentators relate the seven spirits to seven ministries of the Spirit of the Lord in Isaiah 11:2, which reads:

And the Spirit of Yahweh shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Yahweh.¹²

According to Walvoord, “Those who favor the seven spirits as referring to the Holy Spirit find justification in Isaiah 11.”¹³ This is also the view of Tenney, who comments, “The seven Spirits may represent the seven-fold ministry of the Holy Spirit described in Isaiah 11:2.... The eleventh chapter of Isaiah refers to the advent of the Messiah to establish His kingdom and restore His authority over the earth.”¹⁴ The view is shared by Talbot, LaHaye, Scott, Newell, Gaebelien and Epp.

However, not everyone who equates the seven spirits in Revelation with the Holy Spirit actually use Isaiah 11 (i.e. Seiss, Ironside, who relates the number seven to power, McGee, who relates the number to the seven-branch lampstand.)

Two arguments have been advanced that seem to refute the equation of the seven spirits as referring to the ministries of Isaiah 11:2.

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First, as Hocking points out, the reference in Isaiah 11:2 does not actually list seven ministries of the Spirit:

If the first statement, “the Spirit of the Lord,” counts as one characteristic, then there are seven items mentioned, though interestingly, they are grouped into three categories in the text, noted by the repetition of the words “the Spirit of.” More likely, this text lists six characteristics, not seven.¹⁵

Indeed, Isaiah 11:2 consists of a statement (“The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him”), followed by three statements which stand in apposition to the term Spirit. Two descriptive constructions follow the word Spirit in each of these statements. The statements are given below as they stand in the Hebrew text:

Statement 1: The Spirit of wisdom and understanding,

Statement 2: The Spirit of counsel and might,

Statement 3: The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Yahweh.

Second, since the Book of Revelation was written to Gentile rather than Jewish assemblies,¹⁶ it is unlikely that such a relationship would have occurred to the original readers. While undoubtedly steeped in the cultural understanding of the number seven, it is a stretch to believe that they would have automatically thought of Isaiah 11:2, especially since the number seven does not actually occur there.

It is the view of this writer that the best interpretation is that the seven spirits refer to the perfection of the Holy Spirit without relating each of the seven spirits to a ministry characteristic as listed in Isaiah 11:2.

“Who are before His throne” shows the position of the Spirits. If this is the Holy Spirit, which seems likely, it is showing one of the economic relationships¹⁷ within the Trinity. With reference to the government of God over the creation, it appears that God the Father stands as the ruler, and the other two Persons subordinate themselves to Him. This is not impossible, and does not imply any essential inferiority. Rather, it reflects an agreement between the Trinitarian Persons for the purpose of getting work done within the creation.

The throne here does not refer to the Davidic throne, but God the Father’s place of ruling in heaven. It, then, is the throne of governmental authority over the entire creation, that is, the universal Kingdom of God.

Verse 5 continues the sentence with the coordinate conjunction *and*. The third source of the grace and truth is specifically stated to be the Lord Jesus Christ. He is described in three significant ways:

1. *The faithful witness*. “Witness” is used in the active sense of one who testifies. The Apocalypse is a revelation given by Jesus Christ through an angel to John. It is therefore Christ’s faithful testimony because of His perfect character.
2. *The firstborn from the dead*. Here is an obvious reference to the resurrection of Christ (Colossians 1:18). Firstborn is a technical word that refers to one who has primacy, or priority over others. Not only is the Lord firstborn in time, but He is the one who opens the way for others to be resurrected.
3. *The ruler over the kings of the earth*. This statement looks forward to Christ’s coming as king, which takes place in the 19th chapter of this book. At that time He will establish supremacy over the other kings, who will be allowed to continue in a subordinate role.

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The benediction *To him who loves us, and loosed us from our sins by his blood*, which begins in this verse would naturally have been more consistent with verse 6, where it continues. Like so many benedictions in Scripture, this one expresses facts about God. In this case, it is not the Father, but the Son who is the subject of the benediction. Christ's love is presented, and the fact of His redemptive work, both of which are basic to the next statements of the benediction found in verse six.

Verse 6 again uses the conjunction and to continue the sentence. The word "priests" stands in apposition to the word "kingdom." Believers today are a kingdom that consists of priests. This is not a reference to the future kingdom of God on earth, but on an individual kingship that members of the body of Christ have because of their priesthood.

A priest stands before God on behalf of men. Hence, Christians are priests "to his God and Father," that is, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is the relationship between persons of the Trinity that is being emphasized in this phrase. In a unique way, The First Person is Father to the Second Person. This is the result of the decree work, in which the First Person declared to the Second Person, "You are my son," (Psalm 2) thus establishing a new relationship between them with reference to the creation.

The benediction ends with the words "to him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever, amen." This is an obvious reference to Christ's future kingship, which will bring him ultimate glory and dominion of an unending nature.

The phrase, "for ever and ever," which occurs some 13 times in Revelation, refers not to eternity, but to the unending ages associated with the physical creation. As we shall see, the future state after the millennial period is not "eternity future" as it is often called. Rather it is the unending succession of ages, or time periods which the Lord Jesus himself placed in order (Hebrews 1:2).

Verse 7

Much attention has been paid to this verse, as it represents the actual second coming of Christ. Thus the purpose for the writing of the book of Revelation is presented to the seven assemblies. The Lord was turning their attention from their own situations to the far future, and it was necessary to introduce this concept of the second coming to them directly before entering into a detailed discussion of the events leading up to it, which discussion begins in Chapter Four.

The discussion revolves around three statements which we will discuss in turn.

1. "He comes with clouds." This is the futuristic use of the present tense verb, which is quite common in Greek, as it is also in English. Clouds are best taken here to refer to literal clouds in the sky, not with "clouds of attendants," as some have it.

There is no reason to refer this event to the rapture, as some do, as there is no indication that he actually comes to earth at that event, but rather remains above the earth, and is therefore not visible to the inhabitants remaining behind.

2. "Every eye will see Him, and they who pierced Him." This statement has been particularly troublesome. How will it be possible for every person on earth to see the Lord when He returns? Dr. Walvoord suggests that the actual coming which culminates in Jerusalem will take a period of 24 hours. In response to the question as to how every person on earth will see Christ at his coming he says:

The answer seems to be found in 19:11-16. The coming of Christ, unlike the Rapture, will not be an instantaneous event but will be a gigantic procession of holy angels and saints from heaven to earth. There is no reason why this should not take twenty-four hours with its

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termination on the Mount of Olives. In that period the earth will revolve, and regardless of what direction Christ comes from, people will be able to see His coming from their position on the earth.¹⁸

This ingenious answer, however, seems quite awkward, and one wonders if a better solution might present itself. Some have thought that this event will be televised, and will have a world-wide audience. While this is certainly possible in one sense today, it was not possible when John wrote the book, and the original readers could have not understood such a reference. Normal interpretive procedure precludes such a view.

“Every eye” may not refer mankind as a whole who will be living at the time of Christ coming, but to those Jews and Gentiles occupying the geographical location of the second coming at the end of Daniel’s Seventieth Week. It seems unlikely that the word “every” refers to all mankind living at the time of the second coming. If it does, then the obvious answer to how this is done is not to be found in some speculation about the coming itself, but in the supernatural ability of God to make everyone see it. How He does this we are not told, but if He does it, it is because He has decided to do so and has provided the supernatural mechanism for it to happen.

However, it is possible, and more likely, that the word “every” has a local rather than universal application, and this is not inconsistent with the way the word is used elsewhere in Scripture. The Greek word πᾶς (*pas*) is generally used in narrative passages in the same limited sense in which we use the word “every” today. The context in which the word is used shows the limitations inherent in any given context.¹⁹

The second coming will be to the city of Jerusalem, specifically to the Mount of Olives. This would be consistent with the statement “and they who pierced Him” referring more specifically to Israel than the world at large. Every eye, then, would refer to both Jews and Gentiles who happened to be where they could see the Lord at His coming, but “they who pierced Him” is best applied literally only to Israel. One argument in favor of this view is that the second coming of Christ is an Israelite event. While all men will be related to it in some way, the remnant of believing Israel will be specifically and particularly blessed by Christ at this time. He is returning as the King of Israel.

It should be noted, however, that some expositors refer the word “pierced” to the Gentile soldier who is said to have pierced Christ with a spear. In answer to this view, Walter Scott says,

...yet one class is singled out from the mass of mankind then in open revolt against God His Anointed...namely, “they which pierced him.” The Gentile spear which pierced the Savior’s side is a fact alone recorded by “the disciple whom Jesus loved (John 19. 33-37). The weak and vacillating representative of Rome in her imperial greatness sullied her vaunted reputation for inflexible justice by basely ordering his august Prisoner whom he thrice declared innocent to be scourged and crucified. But the Jews behaved even worse by clamouring aloud for His death, the death of their Messiah, and provoking the unhappy governor to pronounce the fatal sentence. Their children, who have inherited their guilt, and who refuse the shed blood of Christ as God’s answer to their sin, shall see Him Whom they pierced, while Zechariah 12. 10 shows how grace will use it. The special class referred to as those “who pierced Him” are the Jews. (Walter Scott, *Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pgs. 29, 30.)

The above position is not to imply that individual Jews are to be held accountable for the death of Christ by Christians or others. To use the truth of the national guilt of Israel for anti-semitism is an

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abomination before God, and should not be named among believers. The Jews are, and will continue to be, God's chosen people for His *earthly* program, and should be honored as such.

3. "All the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him." The common translation of this verse leaves no doubt as to the intention of the *translators*, although it may obscure the intention of the original writer. However, a better understanding is that the word "tribes" refers to the twelve tribes, and the "earth" is a local rather global reference, to be translated *land*. The preposition "over" may be translated "because of."

Thus, the twelve tribes of Israel will mourn because of Him whom they pierced. Of the thirty-nine times the word *tribe* occurs in the New Testament, only in Rev 5:9 is there a clear instance of the word being used more broadly than of Israel.

Verse 8

"Alpha" and "Omega" are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. God is declaring that He is the beginning and the end. This is probably a reference to His act of creation, of which He is the cause, though some relate it to God's eternal nature. However, it appears that the Lord is saying that creation began with Him, and the climax of the creation program is found in Him. Truly, only an eternal being could make such a statement, but that does not mean that a phrase that emphasizes the first and last letters are emphasizing eternal nature.

The repetitious "Lord God" (κύριος ὁ θεός) is a phrase that emphasizes God's sovereignty over His creation. In the Old Testament, the phrase "LORD God" is often a translation of the Hebrew *Yahweh Elohim*. *Yahweh* is the proper name that God has chosen for Himself. However, it is doubtful, though certainly possible, that the seven assemblies in Asia would have been aware of this distinction at particular time of John's writing. If they did their minds would naturally go back to the Old Testament presentation of God of Himself. But such an understanding is less likely than that they simply would have understood the dual wording was to emphasize God's power and sovereignty.

The Lord Jesus refers to Himself with the threefold relative statement, "who is and who was and who is to come." This has been particularly difficult for some, especially, "who is to come," who refer it to God the Father, as a similar phrase does earlier. However, it seems clear that the sentence is referring not to the Father, but to the Lord Jesus Christ. His coming to the earth is the climactic event of the book, and it is appropriate that it would be mentioned at the end of the book's salutation.

Also, the expression "the Almighty One" fits just as well with the Son as it does with the Father. And given that the Son will be establishing His sovereignty on the earth, it is appropriate that He would describe Himself thus.

C. The Vision (1:9-18)

- 9 I John, your brother and partaker with you in tribulation and kingdom and endurance which are in Jesus, was in the isle that is called Patmos, because of the word of God and because of the testimony of Jesus.
- 10-11 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet ¹¹ saying, What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven assemblies: to Ephesus, and to Smyrna, and to Pergamos, and to Thyatira, and to Sardis, and to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.
- 12-13 And I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the middle of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle.
- 14-15 And his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow, and his eyes were as a flame of fire, ¹⁵ and his feet like burnished brass, like in a furnace, and his voice as the voice of many waters.

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- 16 **And he had in his right hand seven stars, and out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword, and his countenance was as the sun shines in his strength.**
- 17-18 **And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as one dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not, I am the first and the last,¹⁸ and the Living one, and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forever and ever, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.**

Verse 9

Though John has referred to himself twice before, this time he refers to himself as “I John.” In this case, he probably does so because he’s relating himself to his readers in a close way. He would have known many of them personally, as he had evidently spent many years ministering in Asia, where these assemblies existed.

John associates himself with his readers first as “brother,” then as “partaker with you in tribulation and kingdom and endurance which are in Jesus.” Spiritual brotherhood is the basis for his further partaking with them. He mentions three areas: a) in tribulation, by which he means the troubles of life through which they all were going through because of their Christian stance, b) in kingdom, by which he is referring to their future inheritance, which they will share in Christ, and c) endurance, a reference to their not forsaking their faith because of the trials of life.

The “isle called Patmos” is a small island in the Aegean Sea southwest of Ephesus and between Asia Minor and Greece. According to ISBE:

In Roman times Patmos was one of the many places to which Rome banished her exiles. In 95 AD, according to a tradition preserved by Irenaeus, Eusebius, Jerome and others, John was exiled here - in the 14th year of the reign of Domitian - whence he returned to Ephesus under Nerva (96 AD).²⁰

John tells us that he was on Patmos “because of the word of God and because of the testimony of Jesus.” Because he was faithful to the Word and to his testimony, he was exiled during the time of the Domitian persecutions. This persecution will also be referenced in chapter two, as several of the cities in Asia suffered from it.

Verses 10-11

“I was in the spirit” is *en pneumati* (ἐν πνεύματι), which refers to the condition of receiving revelation through the human spirit. Though the word “spirit” is usually capitalized as though it refers to the Holy Spirit, this is unfortunate. See Revelation 4:2 where the human spirit must be the meaning:

Immediately I was in the spirit, and behold, there was a throne set in heaven, and one sitting upon the throne....

With this Dr. Walvoord agrees:

John’s statement in verse 10 that he was in the spirit refers to his experience of being carried beyond normal sense into a state where God could reveal supernaturally the contents of the book.²¹

John was given a vision by the angel. Within this vision he will see and hear things that are not part of the current natural world.

“On the Lord’s Day” is an unusual statement, because the word “Lord’s” is not the normal Greek construction for a possessive. Rather it is an adjective expressing the kind of day rather than whose day it is. The phrase *en te kuriake hemera* (ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ), since *kuriake* is an adjective, is better translated “on the lordly day,” meaning “the day having to do with the Lord.” But this

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translation is awkward, as we have no such construction in English, so we retain the translation “the Lord’s day.”

But what, specifically, does this mean, and why does John *not* use the common expression showing possession? Because of the nature of the Greek statement, this day has been interpreted in three different ways:

1. *The phrase is taken to mean the first day of the week, Sunday.* In modern times it is common to refer to Sunday as the Lord’s day. However, the phrase “the Lord’s day” referring to Sunday is never used in the New Testament. The New Testament term for that day is “the first day of the week,” not “the Lord’s day.” See, for instance, Matt. 28:1, where we read “Now late on the sabbath day, as it began to dawn toward the first *day* of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the tomb.”

Other passages where this construction is found are Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1, 29; Acts 20:7; and 1 Corinthians 16:2.

Those who hold this view, such as Newell, use several arguments to maintain it. The first argument Newell uses *against* this being the future day of the Lord, that the word *kuriokos* is used of the Lord’s supper in 1 Corinthians 11:20, holds no water. The assumption that he seems to be making is that the Lord’s supper was eaten on the first day of the week exclusively. But we know that is not necessarily true. That the early assemblies did eat it on the first day is true, but that does not mean that it was eaten *exclusively* on the first day. Indeed, the early part of the book of Acts indicates that the early assemblies broke bread *daily*. Furthermore, the statement in 1 Corinthians is indicating the nature of the supper, not to whom the supper belongs, and not when it is to be eaten.²²

Newell’s other two arguments against the “Lordly day” being the Old Testament day of the Lord are much stronger. His second argument is that it is too early in the book of Revelation to refer to “the great and terrible day of the Lord.” This seems well-founded, as the section referring to that day starts in chapter four, not chapter one.

His third argument is “the church age is directly addressed in the letters to the seven churches in 1:19: ‘the things that are.’” While we would not use the term “church age” of the present evil age, his argument is otherwise sound. See the comments on 1:19 for further information.

2. *The more common modern view presents this day as the prophetic day of the Lord of the Old Testament.* This view does seem to fit the context much better, as the major theme of the book is indeed the future day of the Lord as predicted in the Old Testament. The day of the Lord view makes John transported, in his mind, not physically, to the far future, and to be looking backward to his own time to write to the seven assemblies in Asia. Dr. Walvoord holds this view:

“It is rather a reference to the day of the Lord of the Old Testament, an extended period of time in which God deals in judgment and sovereign rule over the earth. The adjectival form can be explained on the ground that in the Old Testament there was no adjectival form for ‘Lord,’ and therefore the noun had to be used. The New Testament term is therefore the equivalent to the Old Testament expression “the day of the Lord.”²³

The first argument against the future “day of the Lord” approach is that it does not adequately take into account the fact that John received revelation that was related to the seven assemblies in chapters 2 and 3. However, it is because he is in the Spirit on the “Lordly” day, he is to write to these assemblies. Nothing in the context indicates that John is looking backward from the future day of the

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Lord. Newell is correct when he states that it is too early in the book of Revelation for this phrase to refer to the future day of the Lord.

A second problem is that Dr. Walvoord's claim that the adjectival form found in Revelation 1:10 is equivalent to the Old Testament expression "the day of the Lord" is arbitrary. He gives no support either from Scripture or from contemporary Old Testament or New Testament sources for this statement.

Another problem is found in verse 9, which specifically states that John was on the Island of Patmos at the time. While his being on Patmos does not preclude the idea that he is transported within his vision into the future at this time, it does seem to indicate that John is aware of his surroundings while "in the Spirit."

Finally, this does not appear to be a one-time thing. Evidently, he ceased to be "in the Spirit" and had to re-enter that state later, as 4:2 indicates.

3. *It seems best to take "in the Spirit on the Lord's day" to mean that John entered a visionary state on a specific day, the day of his receiving the revelation to the churches.* The "Lordly day," then, could be the actual day when he received this revelation, the day when the Lord revealed to John what needed to be written. The word "lordly" would indicate John's view of the day on which he received the revelation. It was, from his perspective, a day characterized by interaction with the Lord, that is, lordly.

This seems, then, to be the best view because John's vision of the future does not begin until chapter four. To place him in the far future Day of the Lord, looking backward to the historical churches in Asia, seems awkward at best. Contextually, it is better to see "the Lordly day" as a day on the Island of Patmos during which John encountered the Lord Jesus Christ.

This approach has the added benefit of taking the word "day" in its most normal sense. Only in passages where a word cannot be construed in its usual sense should we seek another explanation. Here we are under no such constraint. All in all, the normal, everyday use of the word "day" is to be preferred here.

The "voice" that John heard in his vision came directly from Jesus Christ from the throne room in heaven (verses 12 and 13), thus lending authority to the command. He says that the voice was "behind me," indicating that he did not see its source, that it was "great," meaning loud. How loud? It was "as of a trumpet," an instrument with which John's readers would be familiar.

The Textus Receptus includes in verse 11 the phrase "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," but it is rejected by the critical text and even the majority text of the New King James Version.²⁴ Interestingly, the *translators* of the NKJV decided to keep it. The statement "I am the First and the Last" does occur in verse 17 without controversy. And the "I am the Alpha and the Omega" does occur in 22:13, again without controversy.

John was instructed by the voice, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven assemblies." The number seven does seem significant, as more than seven churches were in Asia at the time of writing. What possibilities exist for the significance of the number?

1. Some expositors believe that the number seven means that the churches collectively represent the body of Christ.
2. Others hold that the number seven relates the churches to the chronological breakdown of the present age. That is, seven indicates that the assemblies represent the future history of the

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body of Christ. See note on 2:1 below, where I discuss the symbolism of the seven golden lampstands

3. Finally, some hold that the seven assemblies are representative of individual assemblies throughout history. In other words, the letters to these churches are to be applied using the same principles as applying material from the other epistles to assemblies of the New Testament.

There is no significant contextual reason to treat the epistles to the seven churches differently than that accorded to New Testament epistles in general, and the third option seems clearly the best. Seven, then, simply indicates that the assemblies are representative of individual churches in a similar way that the letters to the assemblies to which Paul wrote were written not only for their benefit, but for the on-going benefit of believers in local assemblies until the Lord comes for His own.

It is enough at this point to realize that these were real assemblies with real problems. The primary purpose for sending this book to them was to help them overcome their problems through prophetic revelation. The overall effect of presenting a detailed analysis of future events in the rest of the book, when correctly understood, would have had a cleansing affect on these believers.

John is instructed to send the book, “to Ephesus, and to Smyrna, and to Pergamos, and to Thyatira, and to Sardis, and to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.” Regarding the order of listing, Walvoord states,

Each of these churches was an autonomous local church and the order of mention is geographical in a half-moon circle beginning at Ephesus on the coast, proceeding north to Smyrna and Pergamos, then swinging east and south to Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.²⁵

John probably traveled that route when he made his apostolic visits to those places. We will discuss each of these cities and assemblies in chapter two.

Verse 12-13

There is no specific statement in the verse 12 why the voice was originally behind him, which caused the natural reaction of turning. The text states that he turned “to see the voice,” an obvious figure of speech, metonymy showing effect for cause, which indicates that he turned to see who was speaking. However, some have made much of the fact that John turned.

Walter Scott, for instance, makes the unsubstantiated statement,

The seer on turning round to see the voice of the speaker necessarily turned round to the east, the scene of immediate interest.²⁶

He makes the assumption that John turned toward the east because John is on the island of Patmos, and the churches of Asia were to the east of him. While that is possible, it is not stated in the text, and may not be the purpose for the expression. Maybe Jesus was just trying to get John’s attention, and this was the way He chose to do so. This minor issue illustrates the problem that some have with the book. That is, they attempt to make every phrase relevant, even to the point of making false assumptions. Here it is relatively unimportant, but, as we shall see, in some parts of Revelation such a procedure interferes with the message of the book.

At any rate, here we have a vision of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is pictured as being in the middle of the seven individual lampstands, which are not to be confused with the seven-branched lampstand in the tabernacle and later the temple, as some assume. As we will see, the seven lampstands represent the seven churches in Asia, not anything in the Hebrew Scriptures.

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In verse 13, the Lord is said to be “like a son of man.” The phrase “son of man” has been thought by most commentators to refer to Christ’s humanity, which began at the incarnation. This, for instance, is Walvoord’s view.²⁷ Seiss and Scott also express this (although Seiss sees something more than simply Christ’s humanity in the phrase). However, see John 3:13:

No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, *that is*, the Son of Man who is in heaven.

Before Christ became incarnate, He was already “son of man.” It appears that Christ was designated “son of man” before the incarnation. And Christ constantly refers to Himself as son of man in all His relationships. It was the regular term He used of Himself in prophetic passages. Thus, the phrase is probably an allusion to Daniel 7:13-14, where the Ancient of Days refers to the Father, and “One like to the son of man” refers to the Messiah. The seven assemblies would have had access to the Greek Old Testament, and, if they were biblically literate, could have understood the reference, as well as the concept that Christ was son of man before He came to earth.

Rather than saying the phrase “son of man” refers directly to Christ’s humanity, it is probably better to say more specifically that it is a reference to His being a *representative of humanity* in prophetic, messianic²⁸ relationships. Thus the title becomes one of *position* rather than one of *application* of humanity to Christ. The most we can say of the phrase apart from its messianic focus is that it could emphasize Christ as being representative of man within the Trinity, but this seems tenuous at best.

Several passages relate the son of man directly to Christ’s messianic program. See for instance Matthew 10:23; 24:27ff; Mark 8:38; Luke 12:40; 18:8. Indeed, every passage in the gospels where the phrase *son of man* occurs is messianic in the sense that the Lord was during His earthly ministry offering Himself to Israel as their messiah.

In the vision, the Lord is clothed with “a garment down to the foot.” Only people of high importance were “clothed with a garment down to the foot” in the culture of the 1st century. The normal daily garb was a short tunic, which the Lord probably wore during His sojourn on earth, modern depictions notwithstanding.

Likewise the “golden girdle” around His chest speaks of high dignity and position. This is not the lowly carpenter of His earthly ministry. This is Christ in prophetic fulfillment of His perfect righteous humanity, exalted in His relationship to mankind as He appears after His ascension.

Some believe that the Lord is wearing a priest’s garment, but that is unlikely. That idea is taken from the clothing of the high priest in the Old Testament, where a long garment and a belt are mentioned. But Scripture is clear that Christ is not a Levitical priest, but a priest of a different order, and it would be singularly inappropriate for Him to appear in a garment that reminded one of the Levitical high priest. And when we read of the Levitical high priest, there is much more detail, and a different approach to his description. We are told nothing of the garment that Christ wore, except that it is long. It seems highly unlikely that John would have thought of Christ as priest in this context, wearing these clothes.

Verse 14-15

The Lord Jesus is described in a series of *similes* in verses 14 and 15. He does not actually look like this today. These visual comparisons are to emphasize certain non-physical *qualities* of the Lord.

The *whiteness* of the Lord is expressed with two similes. His head and hair were white “as white wool, white as snow.” Throughout Scripture white represents purity, as it undoubtedly does here. Here it is so striking that it must be described in both ways. Christ personifies ultimate purity.

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Judgment may be represented in the figure of speech, “his eyes were as a flame of fire,” another simile. Fire sometimes represents judgment. It is more likely, however, that such a reference is to the Lord’s being the all-seeing, all-knowing second person of the Trinity, given that His eyes are the topic, and the comparison to fire may mean that everything is visible, or light, to Him. To make His flaming eyes indicative of judgment seems redundant.

Christ’s feet (verse 15) are described to be “like burnished brass” in verse 15. Brass, or bronze, is another regular symbol for judgment or punishment in Scripture; however, it probably does not mean that here, given that it’s the Lord’s feet in view, perhaps indicating His mobility, or omnipresence. Some have pointed out that the bronze altar in the temple was the place of sacrifice for sin, and that it symbolized the need for sin to be judged. Some have indicated that this emphasis is especially keen in the statement “like in a furnace.”

Another problem with this view is that this word for brass, or bronze, is not the normal word for such. In fact, the word (χαλκολιβάνω) is extremely rare, and probably does not refer to brass at all. Rather, it seems to have been a mixture of several different precious metals that were capable of being highly polished.²⁹ Also note that the Lord’s feet are not of this material, but are *likened to it*, and they are not in a furnace, but were glowing as though they were, a reference to their inherent brilliance. All in all, the purpose for the description is to emphasize the Lord’s feet because of their brilliance. And the most likely reason for that is to symbolize Christ’s activity, rather than His judgment. The Lord is active among His local assemblies. While this may include chastisement, it cannot be limited to it. Throughout the letters to the seven assemblies, the Lord not only is presented as one who punishes, but as one who favors the churches.

“Many waters” refers to large amounts of running water or the crashing of waves. Anyone who has been to a waterfall, or even to the beach during a storm surge, understands this reference. The sound of all that water tends to drown out (pun intended) other sounds.

Verse 16

The seven stars represent the seven angels of the seven churches (see comments on vs. 20 below).

The judgment/punishment motif is carried on by the vision of the sword. The two-edged sword was a slashing sword, particularly fierce in battle. Similar imagery occurs in Rev. 19:15, “And out of his mouth proceeds a sharp sword, in order that with it he should smite the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, and he treads the wine press of the anger of the wrath of God, the Almighty.” See comments on the two-edged sword in 2:12.

The statement “his countenance was as the sun shines in his strength” is another comparative figure, a simile. The word “countenance” is sometimes taken to refer to one’s face. However, the Greek word carries the idea of one’s outward appearance, and, while it includes it, is not limited to the face. The comparison is probably to the whole of the Lord’s appearance, not just his face. He shone like the sun.

“Strength” is power (δύναμις). It probably refers to the time of day when the sunlight is strongest.

All-in-all, this is a picture of Christ’s majesty as He presents himself ready to return at the beginning of the millennial state. He presents Himself to John, who represents Him to the seven assemblies, so that those believers can realize that the situations through which they were going at the time were not the culmination of things, and were, from a human perspective, rather insignificant.

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Verses 17-18

John's reaction was to fall "at his feet as one dead." We use the idiom "faint dead away" today, which is what happened to John. This reminds one of Paul's response. He fell to the ground in a similar way when he saw Christ in His glory (Acts 9:4).

But Jesus laid his right hand on John, the hand of acceptance, and tells John to fear not. As dead to his surroundings as John may have been, he was not dead to the right hand and voice of the glorified Lord.

The basis for relieving John's fear is found in the statement "I am the first and the last." Most commentators take this as a reference to Christ's eternal nature. Rather, it probably refers to the fact that He is the *cause* of all that exists, and therefore controls it.³⁰

Christ calls himself "the Living one," and He illustrates this fact by stating, "I was dead, and behold, I am alive forever and ever." The resurrection of Christ illustrates a specific doctrinal truth. The fact that Christ was dead, but is now alive, indicates His mastery over death itself. He specifically identifies the nature of that truth by stating, "I have the keys of death and of Hades." One who has a key to a thing controls that thing. Christ controls death; He controls Hades, the place of the dead.

The phrase "forever and ever" indicates duration rather than something being eternal. It is clear that the creation never ends, that the programs of creation continue forever in time. They are not eternal, for that word implies a state apart from time, not unending existence during time.

D. The Outline (1:19-20)

19-20 Write therefore the things which you saw, and the things which are, and the things which shall come to pass afterward; ²⁰ the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

Verses 19-20

Verse 19 provides Christ's general approach to the writing of the book of Revelation. The command is "write" for it was in the form of Scripture that this book is preserved.

Dr. McGee's comments are well worth repeating here,

The book of Revelation is *not* a difficult book. The liberal theologian has tried to make it a difficult book, and the amillennialist considers it a symbolic and hard-to-understand book. Even some of our premillennialists are trying to demonstrate that it is weird and wild.

Actually, it is the most orderly book in the Bible. And there is no reason to misunderstand it. No other book of the Bible is as orderly as the book of Revelation.... It divides itself. John puts down the instructions given to him by Christ: Write the things which thou has seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter" –past, present, and future. Then we will find that the book further divides itself in series of sevens, and each division is as orderly as it possibly can be.³¹

Then later, on the same page, Dr. McGee writes:

To those who claim that it is all symbolic and beyond our understanding, I say that the book of Revelation is to be taken literally. And when a symbol is used, it will be so stated. Also it will be symbolic of reality, and the reality will be more real than the symbol for the simple reason that John uses symbols to describe reality.

Verse 19 provides a simple outline of the things which John saw and was to write:

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“The things which you saw” refers to the events of chapter one of Revelation.

“The things which are” refers to the truths of chapters two and three, the letters to the seven assemblies. These assemblies existed in John’s day, and the situations and truths given to those assemblies describe in detail the recipients of the book which John is to write.

“The things which shall come to pass afterward” refers to the rest of the book beginning in chapter four. The word “afterward” particularly identifies these chapters as being future from the point of view of the seven assemblies.

But we must ask, afterward in what sense? Immediately afterward? This view is held by amillennarians and postmillennarians. They are driven to this approach because of their rejection of the normal, literal interpretation of the doctrines of predictive prophecy in the Old Testament and the Gospels.

But without anti-premillennial bias, and accepting the literalness of the messianic and kingdom prophecies of previous biblical writers, it is not necessary to place chapters 4-21 into the present evil age. Acceptance that the kingdom of God is yet future, and will be literally realized on the old earth for a thousand years, and on the new earth forever after, allows one to interpret those chapters in a normal fashion.

Furthermore, using comparative analysis with Old Testament, particularly in Daniel, and the Gospels, particularly in Matthew 24-25, one can get a rather complete picture of future events, events that relate to Israel and the Gentiles, but not to the body of Christ.

As is often the case, the symbolism of a thing can be found explained in the context. So in verse 20 we find the mystery of the seven stars and the seven golden lampstands. The word *mystery* does not refer to something difficult to understand, but something that is being made clear. What do these stars and lampstands represent. The Lord tells us.

Who are the seven angels?

While the seven churches in Asia are universally understood to be the actual assemblies in proconsular Asia, such universal understanding of the “angels of the seven churches” has not been forthcoming. These “angels” have produced much comment. Three³² views are commonly held:

1. They are spirit beings. Contrary to popular thought, the primary meaning of the Greek word *angelos* is not “spirit being.” Actually, the primary meaning, which had been in use for hundreds of years at the time of John’s writing, was simply a human messenger. If the word means spirit beings here, then the context must clearly present that truth.
2. They are responsible human representatives sent from the churches to John on Patmos to deliver his messages back to the 7 churches. This interpretation is more in line with the actual, literal meaning of the word *angelos*. It is likely that the churches in Asia would have thought of this meaning primarily. Furthermore, the letters to the seven churches had to travel from Patmos to the various cities, and the regular way of doing that was through human messengers.
3. They are the pastors (or bishops, in the hierarchical sense of the word) of each of the 7 churches. The view that they are the pastors of the churches, is *untenable* because no evidence exists in Scripture of the modern idea of the pastorate. Churches in biblical times were led by a plurality of elders, which is amply demonstrated by a study of the New Testament. The word “pastor” when used of human ministry, was limited to a gift relating the individual Christian to the body of Christ, pastor-teacher, mentioned in Ephesians 4:11. The

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word never referred to a position of leadership in a local assembly. The words “elder,” “overseer” (*bishop* in the KJV), and “deacon,” were used exclusively for such positions.

Dr. Walvoord, being very careful with his terminology, holds the “pastor” view. He says,

It is possible that these messengers had come actually to the Isle of Patmos, but it is more probable that they refer to the leaders in these churches....³³

He does not say, however, *why* he thinks that it is more probable that these are local church leaders. In fact, Dr. Walvoord’s assumption is that each local assembly has a single leader, and though he does not use the word “pastor,” that is the view that he is promoting.

Biblically the view that each early assembly had one man, “the pastor,” who ran the organization cannot be sustained. The the word pastor is never used in the New Testament in that sense.³⁴ Rather, the organizational words that refer to the leadership of the local church are overseer, often mistranslated bishop, and elder. And they are always viewed as a plurality within a local assembly. The idea that these words are simply another way of expressing “pastor” is fallacious in that it flies in the face of normal interpretive procedure.

Of the remaining 2 views, view 2 has more to offer it than view 1:

1. As previously stated, the word ἄγγελος (*angelos*) means “messenger”³⁵ and the normal use of the word in Greek was of human messengers, and it only refers to spirit beings when the context directly demands it.

Note, for instance, Matthew 11:10, “For this is he of whom it is written: Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.” This is the Lord Jesus speaking of John the Baptist. The word “messenger” is the Greek word *angelos*. See also Mark. 1:2, a parallel passage where, again, the word messenger is the Greek word *angelos*. See also Luke 7:24, 27; 9:52.

- 2 In order to hold that these messengers were spirit beings, one must postulate that each church had a representative spirit being who somehow was to deliver John’s message to the individual assembly. The easier assumption is that the word angel refers to human messengers, because that was the normal meaning of the word. It was common practice in the days of the N.T. to deliver information by messenger (a human angel) as the concept of a postal service was not in place in the 1st century. So we conclude that it is likely (though by no means proven) that the seven churches had sent representatives to Patmos to deliver the correspondence which John received. These men were, in essence, mailmen.

What is the significance of the 7 churches?

1. While all agree that seven literal churches in Asia existed, not everyone is in agreement as to the purpose for the listing of these specific seven churches. It is evident that each letter is to a historical local assembly. Like Paul’s letters, these seven letters have a legitimate historical occasion for their writing. They are to be interpreted and applied primarily in that light.
2. However, it is also evident that, they are to be applied beyond the historical settings. Like Paul’s letters, each letter can be applied to the local assemblies of today when *similar* problems arise as those in Asia. The fact that there are seven local assemblies does cause one to think that the number seven was chosen for symbolic reasons. But the body of Christ, the so-called church universal, cannot be represented by seven individual local assemblies. This is to confuse two distinct doctrines, that of the local assembly, and that of the universal assembly. Rather, the seven churches are best seen to

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represent *all local assemblies* throughout the present evil age, with each local assembly at any given time responsible to study and correctly apply the truths from each of the seven assemblies in Asia.

3. The view that each church represents a period in church history (see chart) is an abnormal approach based on the assumption that this section of Revelation *must be predictive*. This unwarranted assumption has caused many otherwise careful expositors to force the message to each of the churches to correspond to certain specific dates. Furthermore, it confuses the local church with the church which is Christ's body, a confusion which nowhere occurs in Scripture. I call this the "church history prediction" view because it purports to indicate that the future history of the church, from John's historical perspective, is being outlined in a general predictive way.

The accompanying chart represents the "church history prediction" view presented by J. Dwight Pentecost in *Things to Come*.³⁶ Other writers present outlines which attempt to show a parallel to the course of church history for the last 2,000 years, with considerable differences to Dr. Pentecost's.

Name of the Church	Meaning of the Name	Approximate Dates
Ephesus	Desired	Pentecost to 100 A.D.
Smyrna	Myrrh	Nero to 300 A.D.
Pergamos	Thoroughly Married	300 to 800 A.D.
Thyatira	Continual sacrifice	800 to 1517
Sardis	Those escaping	Reformation
Philadelphia	Brotherly love	The Last Days
Laodicea	People ruling	Last Days

As noted above, others have come up with schemes that seem to fit just as well as Dr. Pentecost's. William Milligan makes a valid point when he says:

If we examine the tables of such a period drawn up by different inquirers, we shall find them so utterly divergent as to prove fatal to the principle upon which they are constructed. No one has been able to prepare a chronological scheme making even an approach to general acceptance. The history of the church cannot be portioned off into seven successive periods marked by characteristics to which those noted in the seven epistles correspond.³⁷

4. The best view of the seven assemblies in Asia is the simplest. It states that the seven assemblies represent *not the successive periods of church history*, but the entire course of the existence of local assemblies. In other words, each assembly in Asia can be viewed as representative of various local assemblies during any given time during the present evil age.

Dr. John F. Walvoord, once a proponent of "church history prediction" view, has backed away from it. He seems to have gone through a series of changes. Originally he appeared to hold, with almost no reservation, the "church history prediction" view. However, he seems to have changed his approach. Note the following statements from his article "The Book of Revelation" in the *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, published in 1983, where he is somewhat reserved in his comments on this issue:

There are some remarkable similarities in comparing these letters to the seven churches to the movement of church history since the beginning of the apostolic church. For instance, Ephesus seems to characterize the apostolic church as a whole, and Smyrna seems to depict the church in its early persecutions. However, the Scriptures do not expressly authorize this

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interpretation, and it should be applied only where it fits naturally. After all, these churches all existed simultaneously in the first century. (Walvoord, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, electronic edition)

Yet *earlier* Dr. Walvoord was stronger in his view. In his book *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, which was published in 1966, he says,

Much additional light, however, is given by a study of the messages to the seven churches, and the general trend indicated confirms other Scripture, that instead of progressive improvement and a trend toward righteousness and peace in the church age, it may be expected that the age will end in failure as symbolized in the church of Laodicea.

Later in the same paragraph he states,

Simultaneous with this *development* in the church *as a whole* there will be fulfillment of the divine plan of God in calling out a true church designed to be a holy bride for the Son of God and a promised translation from the earth before the final tragic scenes of the tribulation are enacted.³⁸

In this last statement, Dr. Walvoord seems to be referring to the assembly in Philadelphia, which is held by some who take the prophetic view to be the “saved” church which will be removed from the earth at the rapture, as opposed to the “unsaved” church which will be “left behind.”

Dr. Walvoord seems to have softened his position on this issue between 1966 and 1983. All in all, however, the “church history prediction” approach cannot be sustained, even in the slightest degree. Some claim that if you do not see this symbolism, you are giving way to the historical interpretation of the book, but such is not the case. Even Walvoord recognized this truth as early as 1966:

The prophetic interpretation of the messages to the seven churches...should not be pressed beyond bounds, as it is a deduction from the context, not from the explicit statement of the passage.... It is not necessary to hold, as some have, that without the second and third chapters of the book of Revelation the church would be left without instruction regarding its progress in the present age. Other passages such as I Timothy 4 and II Peter 2-3 give information on this subject.³⁹

However, by the time he wrote his final work on Bible prophecy, entitled *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*, Dr. Walvoord seems to have abandoned the “church history prediction” view altogether. This work was published in 1990. Walvoord recognizes that the seven churches represent individual churches throughout the entire period, and thus he states,

John was instructed, “Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now, and what will take place later” (v. 19). Simplistic as this statement is, it provides an inspired outline of the Book of Revelation, referring first to what was, that is, the experience of John seeing Jesus in His glory in chapter 1; “what is now,” the messages to the seven churches which refer to the present age as the seven churches represent churches in this present age; and then “what will take place later,” referring to that which is future.⁴⁰

Walvoord states that the seven churches represent *churches*, not *the church*, in this present age. Those who are familiar with the debate will recognize the importance of Dr. Walvoord’s wording. Nowhere in this final presentation, that I have been able to discern, does he promote the traditional “church history prediction” view. In fact, he states on page 526 of the *Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*,

These churches were specially selected for the purpose of this revelation as there were other churches of Asia not mentioned. They were in some sort of geographical relationship but

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were selected to represent the spiritual condition of *various local churches*.⁴¹ Accordingly, the messages were, first of all, to each of the churches as churches. Each message, however, is also addressed to individuals, and individual promises are given to those who hear. It is also true that throughout the history of the church and every generation similar churches would emerge which could profit by heeding the exhortation given to these seven churches. Some hold that these churches also, in general, represent the history of the church—the idea that the church in Ephesus represents the apostolic church, the others the progress of the church through the centuries, and the church at Laodicea as the final church at the time of Christ’s coming. There is, however, no scriptural verification for this type of interpretation.

So, by 1990, Dr. Walvoord appears to have abandoned altogether the “church history prediction” view.

Let me summarize my view of this issue:

1. The letters to the seven churches are to be interpreted normally, historically, and grammatically, including consideration of all figures of speech and symbols.
2. The letters are to be applied in the *normal* fashion and only after accurate interpretation has been performed. Those elements that are *exclusively local* and *historical* cannot be applied to believers, local churches, or conditions at other times. Those elements that are *general*, and deal with spiritual concepts that are still on-going, may be applied. In other words, only those parts of the letters where the current situation is the same as the historical situation about which John was writing are eligible for application.⁴²
3. There is no predictive element concerning the scope of church history, but there may be prediction concerning those local assemblies within the letters. As such, those predictions cannot be brought forward, nor applied to the church as divisions of church history. Similarly, those specific evil circumstances that Christ presents as local issues are not to be taken as principles by which application can be made later, *even if later conditions are similar*. To treat any literature in such a way is unacceptable, but to treat Scripture in that way is *dangerous*.
4. The fact that there are seven assemblies addressed may indicate that the seven assemblies represent all local assemblies throughout the present evil age. At any given time, *some* elements that were true of the assemblies in Asia *may be true* of *some* later assembly or assemblies. However, the assemblies do not refer to the church, the body of Christ, which they must be made to do if the “church history prediction” interpretation is held. Such an approach compromises the distinction between the church, the body of Christ and the church, the local assembly.
5. The normal principles of application should be used. When a person, or local assembly, which happens to be in the same relationship to God as the original individuals or assemblies, then the modern individual or assembly may apply the material so addressed. This is the identical principle which the careful student of Scripture should use when applying any material from New Testament epistles, whether written by Paul, Peter, John, etc.

Endnotes

- ¹ The translation of the Apocalypse is by G. H. Shinn. Other quotes, unless specifically stated, are from the New King James Version.
- ² John F. Walvoord. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. (E-sword, Electronic edition.) On the verse. Hereafter, this commentary will be abbreviated *BKC*.
- ³ Archibald T. Robertson. *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. (E-sword, Electronic Edition.) On the verse.
- ⁴ Robertson. *Word Pictures*.
- ⁵ Walvoord, *BKC* agrees with this view.
- ⁶ See Walvoord. *BKC*, on the verse.
- ⁷ Marvin R. Vincent. *Vincent's Word Studies*, (E-sword, Electronic Edition.) On the verse.
- ⁸ Walvoord. *BKC*. on the verse.
- ⁹ The majority text reads "from God" rather than "from Him."
- ¹⁰ Walvoord. *BKC*, on the verse.
- ¹¹ David Hocking. *The Coming World Leader: Understanding the Book of Revelation*. (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press), 1981.
- ¹² Translation author's.
- ¹³ John F. Walvoord. *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*. (Chicago, Moody Press), 1966.
- ¹⁴ Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation*. (Grand Rapids. Wm. B. Eerdmann's Publishing Company.) 1957.
- ¹⁵ Hocking, *World Leader*.
- ¹⁶ While there may have been dispersion Israelites in Asia who had become Christians by the time of John's writing and who assembled with Gentiles, it seems likely that they were a decided minority.
- ¹⁷ By economic relationships we mean the relationships of the persons, including one being subordinate to another, while maintaining their essential equality. Such subordination is by temporary agreement between the persons, and in no way affects Their eternal divine relationships.
- ¹⁸ John F. Walvoord. *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*. (Wheaton, Ill. Victor Books), 1990, pg. 524.
- ¹⁹ See Matthew 1:17, for instance, where the word "all" clearly does not mean all without restriction. We know that there are more than fourteen generations from Abraham to David. The author clearly means "all in the list that I have provided," not all in the absolute sense. This is typical of how this word was used at the time. For further evidence of this use see Matthew 3:5; 4:23 (where the KJV translators translated the word "all manner" even though the word "manner" was not in the Greek; this is a regular use of the word, meaning *all kinds of*). While universality may be represented by the Greek word, it is not required, and often there is a contextual limitation for the meaning of the word. Such appears to be the case here.
- ²⁰ James Orr, Ed. *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. (E-sword, Electronic edition.) "Patmos." Hereafter abbreviated *ISBE*.
- ²¹ Walvoord, **Revelation**, pg. 42.
- ²² William R. Newell. *The Book of the Revelation*. (Chicago. Moody Press.) 1935. We will use Newell's approach as the prime example for the Sunday view.
- ²³ Walvoord, *Revelation*, page 42.
- ²⁴ Zane C. Hodges & Arthur L. Farstad, Eds. *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*. (Nashville. Thomas Nelson Publishers.) 1982
- ²⁵ Walvoord, *Revelation*.
- ²⁶ Walter Scott. *Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ*. (London: Pickering and Inglis LTD.) n.d. Pg. 42.
- ²⁷ Walvoord, *Revelation*, pg. 44.

Endnotes

- ²⁸ Walvoord alludes to this, but does not develop it. Seiss waxes magnificently on the son of man idea, but seems to relate it primarily to aspects of Christ's humanity, especially as judge, never mentioning His messiahship.
- ²⁹ See Walvoord's comments on this verse in the *BKC*.
- ³⁰ One must realize that these stylized statements had a specific cultural component at the time of speaking. We are attempting to recreate the meaning understood at that time from limited resources, and may be misunderstanding their meaning.
- ³¹ J. Vernon McGee. *Revelation, Vol 1*. (Pasadena. Thru the Bible Books.) 1979. Pg. 20.
- ³² In fact, there are a few minor views that we will ignore. One rather inventive explanation is that the seven stars refer to the seven stars on Emperor Domitian's coins!
- ³³ Walvoord, *Revelation*, pg. 45.
- ³⁴ The word ποιμήν (shepherd) is used some 18 times in the Greek New Testament, and is used of human spiritual ministry only once, in Ephesians 4:11, where it is listed as a spiritual gift. Spiritual gifts accrue to the body of Christ, not to the local assembly, and cannot be made into local church governmental positions. Every other time the word "pastor" occurs in the New Testament, it refers either to literal shepherds in their fields, or to the Lord Jesus Christ, "the Great Shepherd" (Hebrews 13:20) and the "Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (1 Peter 2:25).
- ³⁵ As does the Hebrew word מַלְאָךְ (*malach*), which is translated ἄγγελος in the LXX, and by "angel" in modern English versions.
- ³⁶ Others who hold to the prophetic interpretation of the seven letters include Lehman Strauss (*Revelation*), David Jeremiah, (*Escape the Coming Night*), Walter Scott (*Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ*), Theodore Epp (*Practical Studies in Revelation*), and J. Vernon McGee, (*Revelation, Volume One*).
- ³⁷ William Milligan, *Discussions on the Apocalypse*. 1883. pg. 269.
- ³⁸ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pg. 53. I have italicized two words to show that Dr. Walvoord earlier held that these seven churches showed a development of the church through time. It is interesting that even as early as 1966 Walvoord does not provide a chart of how the church developed, as Pentecost, and others have done.
- ³⁹ Walvoord, *Revelation*, page 52.
- ⁴⁰ Walvoord, *Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*, pg. 542.
- ⁴¹ Emphasis added.
- ⁴² A warning is necessary here. Because of the desire to apply some element of a letter to future situations, some have not applied correct interpretive procedures. This is careless at best. Normal interpretation often causes the honest expositor to reevaluate how he has applied the text. *Unless the interpretation supports the application, no application can be made*. Truly, there is only one correct interpretation, and one correct application of any given statement in the Bible.

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Chapter Two

II. The Letters to the Churches: The Things Which Are (Chapters 2,3)

SCOPE: THE TIME PERIOD OF CHAPTERS TWO AND THREE IS HISTORICAL. IT REFERS TO THE SITUATIONS OF JOHN'S DAY.

A. To Ephesus (2:1-7)

- 1 To the angel of the assembly in Ephesus write: These things says the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks in the middle of the seven golden lampstands: ² I know your works, and your toil and endurance, and that you cannot put up with evil men, and tested the ones who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and found them false, ³ and you have endurance and persevered for my name's sake, and have not grown weary.
- 4 But I have this against you, that you left your first love.
- 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the first works, or else I come to you, and will move your lampstand out of its place, unless you repent.
- 6 But this you have, that you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.
- 7 The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies. To the one who is victorious, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.

Earlier John addressed the seven assemblies collectively (1:4). Here he is instructed by Christ to address each assembly individually. The needs of the individual churches were specific to their circumstance, and what was meaningful to one assembly may not have had any application to another.

1. A Description of Christ (2:1)

Verse 1

“To the angel of the assembly in Ephesus write” indicates the procedure of deliverance for each of the letters. Some have speculated that the individual assemblies received only their letter, plus the rest of the book of Revelation. No need exists for this view. For all the letters to be included in each presentation seems more likely.

To each of the churches John is told to describe Christ in a different manner. He is presented in a meaningful way to the individual churches turn. The (stars) messengers are in His right hand. Then, as now, the right hand symbolized a position of honor. As Christ is in the position of honor and authority at the right hand of the Father, so also the messengers represent the authoritative statements of God to the Ephesian assembly. Christ's walking “in the middle” of the lampstands can be taken also to refer to authority over the local assemblies. He is seen among them and actively walking.

Why is Ephesus mentioned first? Probably because of its prominence. It was a major sea port, and the capital of the Roman province of Asia. ISBE says,

With an artificial harbor accessible to the largest ships, and rivaling the harbor at Miletus, standing at the entrance of the valley which reaches far into the interior of Asia Minor, and connected by highways with the chief cities of the province, Ephesus was the most easily accessible city in Asia, both by land and sea. Its location, therefore, favored its religious, political and commercial development, and presented a most advantageous field for the missionary labors of Paul.

Another reason Ephesus was mentioned first may be that the city was a hotbed of paganism, with its chief goddess being Artemis. Actually two goddesses in Asia Minor were named Artemis. The one, a goddess worshiped in Greek culture whose counterpart in Rome was Diana, was the virgin goddess

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of the hunt. The other was Artemis of the Ephesians, a many-breasted goddess of fertility. Probably the original “statue” was a meteorite that resembled a woman with many breasts (see Acts 19:35).

Why lampstands as a symbol for local assemblies? The most obvious connection is that they are to give forth light. How far we can take the symbolism of light is open to debate, especially since it’s not the light that symbolizes the churches, but the stand that holds the oil lamp. Some have suggested that to represent the assemblies by light itself would be inappropriate, inasmuch as Jesus Himself is the “light” in John’s vocabulary. This may be, which would mean that the symbolism of the lampstand is that the churches are to hold up Christ as the source of spiritual enlightenment.

The symbolism of the churches explains why the lampstands are golden, rather than bronze, or brass. Gold, being the most precious metal then, as now, perfectly represents the *ideal quality* of the local assemblies and value that God places on them, rather than what may have been actually occurring in the assemblies.

2. A Commendation (2:2, 3, 6)

Verses 2, 3, 6

The assembly in Ephesus was noted for its good works. John uses the word “toil” meaning strong labor, and “endurance” meaning that they did not try to get out from under the work load. They were not shirkers. John uses the word “endurance” twice in this sentence. The first time, in verse 2, he’s speaking of their *endurance of labor*. In verse three he uses the word in association with their watchfulness in not enduring evil men.

The Ephesians did not put up with evil men. “Evil” here is *kakos*, not *poneros*, and refers not to a malignant evil that reaches out to effect others, but to those who are internally corrupt, and therefore produce corrupt things. Paul, when he called the Ephesian elders together in Acts 20:29, 30 warned them against dangers both from people within their assembly and without their assembly. Evidently, they took Paul’s lesson to heart.

This corruption consisted of these men claiming to be apostles, but were not. Such still goes on today. But the Ephesians, unlike some today, tested these men. “Tested” is from *peiradzo*, and here it refers to the attempt to find weakness in the object of testing. Those who say they are apostles are the object of testing, and the result of the testing is that they have been found liars. The problem of people posing as apostles was evidently widespread in the early church.

What was their standard of test? The apostles not only received direct revelation from God, but were able to perform various miracles to validate that revelation. Early in the book of Acts these were public acts. But the later miracles in the churches were not public exhibitions, but were performed quietly, sometimes in private (see Acts 9:40). So if a man called himself an apostle, but could not perform such miracles, he was found to be lacking.

Today’s fakers also sometimes claim to do the miraculous. But they are slight-of-hand artists, stage magicians, who are deceptive in their practices. There are no apostles today, folks. No one today is able to perform the acts that the true apostles performed.

In addition, there was a special spiritual gift that some in local assemblies had called “discerning of spirits (1 Corinthians 12:10).” It appears that such people could, by supernatural revelation, determine whether an individual was speaking from the Holy Spirit, or a demonic spirit. This gift is no longer necessary, in that the careful student of Scripture will realize that the time of apostles has past, and the revelation of the New Testament is completed. Today, the study of Scripture is sufficient to determine true or false doctrine, including the claims of false apostles.

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Verse 6 which also contains a commendation to the assembly in Ephesus (q. v.).

3. *A Condemnation (2:4)*

Verse 4

Some thirty years after Paul had commended the Ephesians for their love for God and the saints, John rebukes them for having left it. In the next sentence, John says “you have fallen.” The tense of fallen is perfect, and indicates not only that they fell, but that they were still in the condition of having fallen. They were making no move to bring themselves back to where they were.

In Ephesians 1:15, 16, Paul writes of the love that they have for all the saints. Is this their “first love?” It is usually taken to be so. Some take the word “love” to be emotional ardor (Walvoord and others). However, the Greek word seems always to carry the idea of a determined sacrificial attitude by which an individual desires the best for the object of his love. It appears that the Ephesians were no longer willing to sacrificially spend themselves and their worldly goods in service for Christ and one another. It was not that they had lost their emotional intensity, but that they became complacent in their sacrificial ministry. They had allowed their collective mind to wander away from that which was their primary duty. This is confirmed by the requirement given in verse 5.

4. *A Correction (2:5-6)*

Verse 5

The correction is three-fold, using three *singular* imperative verbs, undoubtedly for the purpose of calling the entire *singular* assembly to action. Of course, the assembly was made up of individuals, and each individual would have needed to perform each of the required tasks. Nevertheless, the problem was assembly wide, and needed to be dealt with on that basis.

First, the assembly was to remember something. The assembly at Ephesus had fallen from its former attitude of sacrificial love, which they had forgotten. They had let their first love slip their collective mind.

Second, the assembly was to repent. Repent is the second command, a word that carried no special “religious” overtones in the day in which John wrote it.¹ It means that they needed to return to their previous thinking, to change their mind, and therefore to change their attitude.

Third, the assembly was to do the first works. This statement confirms the interpretation that it is sacrificial love that is the emphasis. The believers were to do the same works they had done when they retained their first love. This probably refers to the labor and toil that they did for others in the assembly. It was not that the Ephesians weren’t doing good works already. They were (verse 2)! But the works were not out of an attitude of sacrifice. They were willing to work hard, as long as they weren’t required to give anything up. The context of verse 2 seems to indicate that they were doctrinally sound, and doing good works in maintaining that soundness. But they were not serving the Lord as the should.

There was great danger if the Ephesian assembly did not change its mind and do its first works of sacrificial love. The Lord would remove their lampstand from its place, an evident reference to the assembly coming to an end.

The Ephesian church no longer exists, as Ephesus is now a deserted ruin. Is it possible for God to do the same today? Perhaps, but the condition of the “church” today is so debilitated, one wonders whether most “members” of local churches are believers at all! The emphasis has moved away from the spiritual to the physical and worldly, so that it’s clear that organizations that calls themselves

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churches today actually do not fit the biblical definition of a local assembly. Many so-called churches will get bigger and bigger, yet, since they were not truly lampstands to begin with, they cannot be removed as a lampstand.

Verse 6

Verse six seems to be parenthetical, and continues the commendation previously given in verses 2 and 3.

Both God and the Ephesians hated the Nicolaitans. They are mentioned only twice in the New Testament, here in 2:6, and again in 2:15, where Jesus speaks of the “doctrine of the Nicolaitans.” They were evidently a sect, or cult, that had infected some of the assemblies in Asia. They’d made no headway in Ephesus, but they evidently had been more successful in Pergamos.

Who are the Nicolaitans?

1. The name means “conquer the people” which probably indicates the negative influence held by this dangerous sect. Therefore, it is held by some that they promoted the distinction between clergy and laity. “This view considers the Nicolaitans as the forerunners of the clerical hierarchy superimposed upon the laity and robbing them of spiritual freedom” (Walvoord, *Revelation*, pg 58).
2. An early view (taken by Irenaeus and Hippolytus) sees the Nicolaitans as followers of Nicolaus of Antioch, who was one of the seven “deacons” (Acts 6:5). He was evidently a Jewish proselyte, who later became a Christian. The view speculates that he apostatized (Robertson, *Word Pictures*). According to Tertullian such a sect existed in the second century. However, it is of uncertain origin.
3. Some think that the term *Nicolaitan* is a Greek form of Balaam (Numbers 22), which makes the reference allegorical (the *New Bible Dictionary*, “Nicolaus”). Balaam attempted to corrupt Israel. So the Nicolaitans would be identified with groups Peter, Jude, and John attacked (2 Pet. 2:15, Jude 11, Rev. 2:6, 15; 2:20-23), for their advocating of pagan sexual practices in the church. However, this view is tenuous at best, since the Nicolaitans seem to be distinguished from those who teach the doctrine of Balaam in Revelation 2:14-15 (q.v.).
4. Another view is that the Nicolaitans were early *gnostics*.² However, the term *gnostic* was not applied to any view until the second century. An early form of pre-gnosticism plagued the church going back to earliest times. It seems to have come out of the Greek mystery religions. Indeed, part of the purpose of Paul’s epistle to the Colossians seems to be to counter a pre-gnostic error.
5. To identify the Nicolaitans specifically is now impossible. We only know that they were teaching doctrine contrary to God’s word. John and his readers knew who they were, and the Ephesian assembly took a stand against them. Evidently they had a stronger hold in Pergamos (vs. 15). It was at the time, and still is, the responsibility of local assemblies to keep themselves pure in doctrine. Not only does the leadership have this responsibility, the assembly at large is responsible to be able to recognize cultic doctrine.

5. A Challenge (2:7)

Verse 7

The metaphorical exhortation “he who has an ear, let him hear” can be paraphrased as “he who has spiritual insight, let him understand on a spiritual level.” It is clear that those who, in the first century, heard this book read, needed to take it to heart, and to understand its import in order for them to receive the spiritual blessing promised.

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The saying was evidently common saying. John does add the fact that the thing to be understood by the assemblies has its source in the Spirit. The written word, the book itself, is undoubtedly what John means when he says that *the Spirit says* these things. It was the bearing along ministry of the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 1:19-21) that enabled John to write accurately what he experienced, and it was this written form which the seven assemblies in Asia received.

Who is the one who is victorious, the so-called “overcomer?”

The one who is victorious can only refer to the believer, never to the unbeliever. With this Hocking agrees (*World Leader*, pg. 48). Some have attempted to limit the term to “spiritual” believers, as though the victory here were victory in the Christian life. However, the eschatological nature of the Apocalypse makes this impossible. Victory in Scripture is not simply spiritual victory of the individual Christian. It must be taken to refer to *all* true Christians, whether they are being spiritually victorious or not.

Walvoord apparently holds this view (*Revelation*, pg. 59). He specifically says that “the message [is not] to a special group of Christians distinguished by their spirituality and power in contrast to genuine Christians who lack these qualities; it is rather a general description of that which is normal, to be expected among those who are true followers of the Lord.”

This view is confirmed Revelation by 2:11, “The one who is victorious shall not be hurt of the second death.” This is true of all believers, not a special group singled out because of their faithfulness.

What are the “tree of life” and the “Paradise of God?”

‘Paradise’ is a loan-word from ancient Iranian...and means a garden with a wall. (*The New Bible Dictionary*)

Jesus used the word *paradise* on the cross (Luke 23:43) as an apparent synonym for “Abraham’s bosom,” the part of the place of the dead reserved for the righteous. Paul, on the other hand, used the term referring to the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2-4). However, the use in Revelation 2 seems to be an eschatological reference. Together with “the Tree of Life” the allusion seems to go back to Genesis 2:9, where the LXX translates the Hebrew “garden” with this word.

The New Jerusalem is viewed having the tree of life available for its inhabitants as stated in Revelation 22:2, 14 (q.v.). Probably, then, the reference to the “paradise of God” in Revelation 2:7 is to the New Jerusalem. This would restore man in the future eternal state to a similar state he had in his unfallen position, with access to the tree of life, a tree similar to the one in the garden.

B. To Smyrna (2:8-11)

- 8-9 And to the angel of the assembly in Smyrna write: These things says the first and the last, who was dead, and lived again, 9 I know your and tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich) and the blasphemy of the ones who say they are Jews, and they are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.
- 10 Fear not the things which you are about to suffer.
Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, in order that you may be tried, and you shall have tribulation ten days. Be faithful to death, and I will give you the crown of life.
- 11 The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious shall not be hurt of the second death.

1. Description of Christ (2:8)

Verse 8

Smyrna (the name means myrrh), which still exists with its modern name Izmir, was about thirty-five miles north of Ephesus. It was known for its sophistication and beauty. The city had close ties to

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Rome and it became the first ancient city to build a temple to honor the Roman Emperor Cult. In 23 BC Smyrna built a temple to the emperor Tiberius. Later it boasted a large Jewish population that was openly hostile to Christianity. Walvoord states,

Smyrna is mentioned only here in Scripture, but from other literature³ it is evident that this city was noted for its wickedness and opposition to the Christian gospel in the first century. (*Revelation*, pg. 59)

Christ characterizes Himself as “the First and the Last.” He does not use the term “beginning and end” (but see 22:13 where the phrase is used) perpetual control over the creation. “The First and the Last” may well be a way of saying “I am the infinite One, the One outside of Whom nothing exists, the One without boundaries or limits of any kind.” The phrase The First and the Last corresponds with Alpha and Omega.

“Who was dead and lived again” is specifically relevant to the assembly in Smyrna, which underwent considerable persecution. The Lord, therefore, emphasizes His resurrection to these troubled believers.

The assembly in Smyrna was the home of Polycarp, who Tertullian (born 160 AD) says was a disciple of John, which is very possible, and that he was bishop of Smyrna as appointed by John, which seems theologically suspect. He may have been one of the elders of the church there, but it is unlikely that John would have violated the common practice of the early church, which had no single pastor or bishop. In about 166 Polycarp was killed by a Jewish mob (evidently with some Gentile help). Because of his refusal to acknowledge the Roman Cult, specifically to acknowledge Caesar as God, he was burned to death.

2. *Commendation (9:a)*

Verse 9a

The Lord knows four specific items about the church at Smyrna: their works, their tribulation, poverty and, in the next verse, the blasphemy of a particular group. That the Lord knows (*oida*) the first two elements are undoubtedly mentioned as a comforting element.

The word “works” (*ergon* if accepted, the critical text deletes it⁴), is the normal word for performing a task. Sometimes it refers to the act of working, and at others to the work or deed accomplished. It is the latter that is in view here. The Lord knew what they had done, how well they had performed as believers.

“Tribulation” (*thlipsis*) is sometimes translated affliction, and is probably a reference to the persecution under which the church was going. It refers to external turmoil, rather than internal lack of peace. While this same word was used by Jesus to refer to “great tribulation” during the period of Daniel’s Seventieth Week, it does not carry that meaning here. The church (as represented by the twenty-four elders in the Revelation) is found in heaven during the Seventieth Week of Daniel. Here, rather, it refers to the tribulations of daily living in the world. It is clear that the assembly undergoing persecution, and that it was not yet over.

The word poverty (*ptochos*) indicates an extreme condition whereby survival is day to day. It could be translated “destitute.” The word is contrasted with *penes*, the normal word for poverty, which indicates the need to work for daily wages. It is used of Christ in 2 Corinthians 8:9 and previously of the poverty of the church in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8:2). Whether this poverty in Smyrna is the result of persecution is not stated, though possible.

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“But you are rich” is a contrast between the extreme physical poverty of the believers and their spiritual wealth. God counts riches based on a different criteria than the world. The very trouble through which the Smyrna church was going was riches from God’s viewpoint.

3. *Condemnation (2:9b)*

Verse 9b

The fourth element of the Lord’s knowledge is expressed in this verse. It is not a condemnation of the assembly but something outside the assembly.

The noun “blasphemy” (*blasphemia*) only occurs 18 or 19 times in the New Testament (there is a textual problem in Mark 2:7, where the critical text has the verbal form). It means *to speak against*, and was used in the sense of both making false claims and of *slandering* others. The specific nature of the blasphemy here is in making a claim that they are Jews, which was untrue. The condemnation appears to be against elements outside the church at Smyrna.

What is a “synagogue of Satan?”

Those who “say they are Jews and they are not” are identified as the Synagogue of Satan. This phrase probably refers to Israelites who have not only rejected Christ, but have actively persecuted believers. Verse 10 associates a future persecution of the church in Smyrna with these blasphemers. They are therefore “Jews outwardly, but not inwardly” (Romans 2:28-29). Some have thought that Hellenistic Jews may have been actually drawn into the pagan practices of the Gentile world (Tarn and Griffith, *Hellenistic Civilization*). Certainly by the time of Polycarp’s martyrdom in 166, the Jews in Smyrna had shown themselves to be true Romans. By rejecting the message of Christ they have placed themselves in Satan’s camp. The devil is called Satan here, as the word is his name proper, meaning *adversary*.

The view of some, that these are gentiles pretending to be Jews cannot be sustained. For Gentiles to pretend to be Jews in the first century is beyond belief. There is no historical evidence that this was ever done at that time. And this is not referring to gentile proselytes or God-fearers. Those individuals associated themselves with Jewish synagogues, to be sure. But when Paul went into those synagogues, the true believers among those erstwhile gentiles followed him out.

Based on this interpretation, some sincere, but misguided, individuals have attempted to refer this to the modern messianic movement. While it is true that many in that movement are not in any sense ethnic Jews, but are ethnic Gentiles, they do not otherwise fit the historical circumstances of the group in this passage.

The use of the word synagogue is significant. It refers to a *building* or *room* in a larger structure where these people were meeting. They were not part of the Christian assembly in Smyrna. There is no reason to make the word synagogue metaphorical or symbolical somehow. This was a local synagogue of unbelieving Jews who had rejected the claims that Christ made. Furthermore they were committing blasphemy.

Now, *blasphemy* is not what most people think it is. Today the word is associated with cursing, or using the words God or Christ in an oath. But the basic meaning is “to slander.”⁵ The word sometimes means to make an accusation, as it is used in Jude 9, but often it is a false accusation, a slander, that is meant, and this seems to be the meaning here. It is probable that the Jews in the local synagogue in Smyrna were making false accusations against the Christians which was designed to bring about persecution. The prediction in vs. 10 seems to indicate that they were somewhat successful.

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A popular, but decidedly strange, view of this verse is that it teaches that the church has displaced the nation Israel as God's people. Somehow, according to this view, all the Old Testament promises to Israel are transferred in some spiritual manner to the church. But this is not the claim here. No statement is made concerning the national identity of Israel in this passage as some (Mounce, pg. 118) seem to claim. The problem is strictly a Jewish one. The local Jewish synagogue is singled out here and in the passage dealing with the church in Philadelphia. No claim is being made that the problem is anything other than a local one. See comments on 3:9 below for a further discussion of the "synagogue of Satan."

4. Correction (2:10)

Verse 10

Christ predicts a serious persecution upon the assembly in Smyrna. The near context is the blasphemy of those associated with the synagogue of Satan, whose slanders are probably the cause of the persecution.

The seriousness of the persecution should not be a cause for fear (*phobeo*) which was evidently infecting the assembly. The devil manipulates the circumstances with the result that some will be thrown into prison. Satan had previously hindered Paul through a similar manipulation (1 Thessalonians 2:18).

Are the ten days to be taken as literal or symbolic? Both views have been presented with variations. Some have seen the number 10 as representative of 10 Roman persecutions of the Church (W. A. Spurgeon). Others have held the 10 days to refer to the 10 years of persecution under Diocletian. Some commentators (Swete, Scott, Alford, for instance) take the 10 days to be a round number symbolic reference to a short period of time. Finally, the literal view of 10 actual days is held by many. This last is best, as it undoubtedly is what the 1st century believers would have understood, and is undoubtedly what happened.

What is the crown of life?

The word "crown" has the article and is therefore to be distinguished as a specific crown (*stephanos*, the victor's crown, as opposed to *diadema*, the kingly crown) from other crowns. Certainly then, this crown is given as a reward.

The phrase "of life" is a *genitive of apposition*, indicating a crown that *consists of life*. If so, what kind of life? Some have thought that it refers to eternal life (Hocking, Walvoord), but eternal life is available to all believers who still live, not just those "faithful unto death." It more likely refers to the resurrection, as eternal life is already the present possession of the believer in the current age. This view would be consistent with being faithful unto death.

If the believers in Smyrna were faithful unto death, that is, they were willing to die, then they would receive the crown of life. There is an implied condition in this statement, but it is not a condition of limitation, but of encouragement. In other words, while all believers, not a limited few, will receive this crown of future resurrection life, those who were undergoing persecution unto death at the time of John's writings would also receive it. The encouragement is to faithfulness, and not to fear death through persecution, since physical death is not the ultimate end of physical life.

5. Challenge (2:11)

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Verse 11

This verse seems to confirm that the phrase “one who is victorious” refers to all believers, since the victorious one will not be hurt of (by) the second death. The second death is mentioned in Revelation 20:6,14, and 21:8, referring to the final judgment of *unbelievers*. This judgment takes place after the final resurrection. The Biblical writers present a series of resurrections, and the final resurrection alone is for unbelievers. It is they who will be cast into the lake of fire, and participate in the second death (Revelation 21:8).

The verb translated “hurt” (*adikeo*) has the basic meaning of suffering wrong doing. The second death will do the victorious believer no harm. Since Christian believers do not participate in the second resurrection, the second death cannot harm them. This is also true of Old Testament and tribulation saints (Revelation 20:6).

C. To Pergamos (2:12-17)

- 12-13 **And to the angel of the assembly in Pergamos write: These things says the one who has the sharp two-edged sword, ¹³ I know where you dwell, even where Satan’s throne is, and you hold fast my name, and did not deny my faith, even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.**
- 14 **But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication.**
- 15 **So have you also some who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans in like manner.**
- 16 **Repent therefore, or else I come to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of my mouth.**
- 17 **The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, to him will I give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knows but the one who receives it.**

1. Description of Christ [judgment] (2:12)

Verses 12

Pergamos was a city of Mysia, a district of proconsular Asia. It was built on somewhat elevated ground (Pergamos means “height, elevation”) and still exists today as Bergama.

The sharp two-edged sword (ῥομφαία δίστομος) is mentioned first in 1:16, and then twice here. The Greek word refers to the Thracian long sword with a large blade. *ISBE* (the article on “Armor”) says that the ancients actually classified it as a spear rather than a sword.

The most natural way to understand the symbolism of the Thracian sword is to apply it to violent judgment, and the other three uses of the word confirm that impression (Revelation 6:19; 19:15; 19:21). Verse 2:16 (q.v.) seems to indicate that it is a sword of physical violence.

Some expositors make the sword symbolize the word of God in this location.⁶ This may be for two reasons: First, the sword is coming out of the Lord’s mouth in 1:16, and this is thought to represent oral expression. However, the Lord produces violence by the word of His mouth. It must be remembered that the Lord Jesus does not need a physical sword to put people to death.

The second reason the sword is thought to symbolize the word of God is perhaps because of the confusion with Hebrews 4:12, where the word of God is compared to a two-edged sword. But the Epistle to the Hebrews’ sword is a different kind of instrument. The word there is μάχαιραν (*machairan*) the shorter sword. The fact that the sword is said to have two edges cannot be driven to an extreme. Such swords were commonly used as simple slashing weapons.

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2. Commendation (2:13)

Verse 13

What are we to make of “Satan’s throne?” Pergamos was a center of pagan worship. It was the seat of the “emperor cult” of the 1st century, as well as the home to many pagan temples. Some have interpreted “Satan’s throne” as the temple of Esculapius (*Asklepios*), the god of healing whose idol was in the form of a serpent. Others have referred it to the temple of Zeus which stood in Pergamos.

Alford’s view that Satan’s throne or seat is a general reference to the paganism of the city is undoubtedly best, lacking further information from the period.⁷ Nothing beyond the biblical statement is known of the martyr Antipas.

Satan was ruling there at the time, a reference to the strong Satanic influences in the area. Fausset says,

The Nicephorium, or thank-offering grove for victory over Antiochus, had an assemblage of temples of idols, Zeus, Athene, Apollo, Aesculapius, Dionysus, Aphrodite. Aesculapius the healing god (Tacitus, Ann. 3:63) was the prominent Pergamean idol... (*Fausset’s Bible Dictionary*, “Pergamos”)

Satan undoubtedly uses the influence of false worship to control unbelievers, and even, sometimes believers. Such would be consistent with his opposition to God’s truth. He is, after all, a consummate liar. The believer today must be alert, lest he fall into one of the various religious movements that call themselves Christian. Not only are the “Christian” cults to be avoided, but the falsity of denominationalism must be exposed. For Scripture knows nothing of such things, and to force individuals into a denominational mold is not of God. Undoubtedly many sincere believers have fallen into the denominational trap (as has the current writer); nevertheless, the maturing believer will recognize the danger and gently, yet boldly exhort true believers into the path of local, independent assemblies, overseen by a plurality of elders, and emphasizing the program of grace living by the believer.

3. Condemnation (2:14-15)

Verses 14-15

Two distinct condemnations are leveled against the church. The first is that individuals hold to the doctrine of Balaam, and the second is that some hold to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans (vs. 15).

The “doctrine (διδασχῆ, *didache*) of Balaam” is specifically identified. It refers to the events of Numbers 22-25 (q.v.) where Balaam attempted to corrupt the Israelites through intermarriage with the women of Midian. Numbers 31:15-18 contains Moses’ rebuke of the children of Israel for “saving alive” (not killing) the Midianite women:

And Moses said to them: Have you kept all the women alive? ¹⁶ Look, these women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD. ¹⁷ Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known a man intimately. ¹⁸ But keep alive for yourselves all the young girls who have not known a man intimately.

Evidently, some in the Pergamos church were allowing intermarriage with unbelievers. According to Walvoord,

Apparently there were some in the Pergamos church who held that Christians had liberty in this matter. Christ’s absolute condemnation of the Doctrine of Balaam as it related to the church at Pergamos is a clear testimony to the fact that Christians must at all costs remain

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pure and separate from defilement with the world and its religion and moral standards. (*Revelation*, pg. 68).

Young believers need to be encouraged to marry only believers. Furthermore, wisdom indicates that believers should consider whether their intended spouse is growing in the Lord. For sincerity of faith is just as important in a relationship as the fact of salvation.

The “doctrine of Balaam” is not to be confused with two other problems associated with that prophet:

1. The “way of Balaam” (2 Pet 2:15) refers to selling one’s prophetic gift,
2. The “error of Balaam” (Jude 11) which was his assumption that God would curse the Israelites.

For a discussion of the Nicolaitans see notes on verse 6 above.

4. *Correction (2:16)*

Verse 16

The verb “repent” is again in the singular (see vs. 5 above), but is aorist imperative rather than present imperative as before. The aorist presents a sense of urgency to the need for their repentance. The time is short.

“Come to you quickly” is evidently not a reference to an actual physical coming, but referring to the Lord’s providential work. He certainly cannot be referring either to the rapture or the second coming as some have erroneously believed. The best way to understand this phrase is by comparing it to what a parent sometimes says to a child, “I’d better not have to come in there!” A misbehaving child, thinking he is out of the sight of his parent, gets the picture very quickly.

The Lord will come quickly, meaning suddenly, without further warning. Again we see the idea of urgency presented. Chastisement will come without further warning. Hurry up and repent! A change of mind is necessary before a change of actions can be legitimate. A legalistic, grudging change of activity is not what God desires. Without the correct attitude, such activity change is nothing but self-righteousness.

The sword is seen to be the agent of punishment here, not a statement of the “word of God,” as some believe. Who will the Lord punish? Perhaps the whole assembly, although it may refer to those who are holding to the doctrine of Baalam.

We do not know the outcome of this warning. Nothing is said about removing the lampstand, the assembly, as was foretold of the Ephesians. Perhaps the ones holding the doctrine of Baalam in Pergamos did repent and did deal with the problem. Easton says that there was still some two thousand professing Christians there as of 1897. (I’ve been unable to find anything more recent, and I do not know what definition of “Christian” Easton was assuming.)

5. *Challenge (2:17)*

Verse 17

Again, we must hold that the one who is victorious is a reference to all believers, not just to a select few. The provision of “hidden manna” appears to be a promise for the future.

“Hidden manna” (τοῦ μάννα τοῦ κεκρυμμένου), a reference to the manna of the wilderness wanderings, here seems to be referring to spiritual blessing, perhaps to doctrinal sustenance as opposed to the false doctrine within the local assembly at that time. It was hidden in the sense that it

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was not immediately available for consumption. Those who hold to false teaching are not able to enjoy the benefits of true doctrine in the area of their error. Such truth is truly hidden to them.

The giving of a white stone (ψῆφον λευκήν) certainly must have had cultural significance. The word “stone” here (ψῆφον) refers to a small stone, perhaps a stone worn smooth from being in a river or stream. Such stones were used for a variety of reasons, including the casting of lots. The Emperor sometimes used a white stone to bestow favor during the games.

However, the context here is one of chastisement, of being found guilty for holding to, and therefore practicing, false doctrine. Therefore, the giving of a “white stone” probably refers to the legal practice of showing acquittal of a charge by casting a white stone rather than a black one. This would be of special significance for a church against whom such serious charges have been brought.

To what does the “new name” refer? Since the only one who knows the name is “the one who receives it” it is impossible to be certain. A. T. Robertson says,

The white stone with one’s name on it was used to admit one to entertainments and also as an amulet or charm (ATR, *Word Pictures*).

Admittance to future benefit may be the significance of the presentation of the inscribed white stone, but it is impossible to say for certain. At any rate, it’s obvious that the act of giving the inscribed stone is a favorable one, and however it was to be fulfilled to those believers, they at that time would have understood its significance. Concerning application to later times, it is impossible to say beyond the general fact of its being an act of blessing of some type.

D. To Thyatira (2:18-29)

- 18-19 **And to the angel of the assembly in Thyatira write: These things says the Son of God, who has his eyes like a flame of fire, and his feet are like burnished brass, ¹⁹ I know your works, and your love and faith and ministry and endurance, and that your last works are more than the first.**
- 20 **But I have this against you, that you allow the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and seduces my bond-servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols.**
- 21 **And I gave her time in order that she should repent, and she desires not to repent of her fornication.**
- 22 **Behold, I cast her into a bed, and the ones who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works.**
- 23 **And I will kill her children with death, and all the assemblies shall know that I am the one who searches the reins and hearts, and I will give to each one of you according to your works.**
- 24 **But to you I say, to the rest that are in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, who know not the deep things of Satan, as they say, I cast upon you no other burden.**
- 25 **Nevertheless that which you have, hold fast till I come.**
- 26-28 **And the one who is victorious, and the one who keeps my works to the end, to him will I give authority over the nations, ²⁷ and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to shivers, as I also have received of my Father, ²⁸ and I will give him the morning star.**
- 29 **The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**

1. *Description of Christ (2:18)*

Verse 18

Thyatira was about forty miles southeast of Pergamos. It appears to have been a center for trade, as there were many guilds and merchants there, but was of no great political significance (Vincent). It’s chief god was Apollo. The city’s only claim to fame is that Lydia, a seller of purple, was from there. She was the first person to become a believer when Paul went to Europe (Acts 16:14).

The two-fold description of Christ seems to indicate His all-knowing activity.

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Brass or burnished bronze (Gk. χαλκολίβανον) is used only here and in 1:15 in Scripture. The word has caused problems for interpreters. It probably refers not to the brass of today, which is a mixture of copper and zinc, but to some combination of precious metals, perhaps including gold or silver, as well as copper. Its use here is not to indicate value, but its brilliance, as it is used in a parallel structure with Christ's eyes like flaming fire. See the comments on 1:15 above.

2. Commendation (2:19)

Verse 19

The Greek structure is of note here. The Lord says that He knows five things concerning the believers in Thyatira. Each word has the article (*the*), with the word "your" occurring only twice, right after the verb *know* and at the end of the list. By using such a structure, Jesus is emphasizing each word independently rather than collectively. The assembly in Thyatira had much to commend it, and each element is identified by the Lord for His approval.

We have dealt with each of these words elsewhere, and will not do so here, except to make one point about the word *faith*. It is most likely that the Lord is using the word in the sense of "faithfulness" rather than in the sense of belief. This use is common, as the Greek had no regular word for faithfulness, and the word *faith* was often used in this descriptive way.

"Your last works are more than the first" seems to indicate a spiritually growing assembly of believers. They were more mature in their works as time went on. This assembly was not stagnant, but it did have some serious problems.

3. Condemnation (2:20-23)

Verse 20

Jezebel, who claimed to be a prophetess, was a false teacher in the assembly of Thyatira. Her real name is not known,⁸ but she is analogous to the Jezebel of Elijah's time, who brought idolatrous practices into Israel through her weak husband, Ahab, and withstood God's prophet. She was a promoter of the worship of the Canaanite Ba'al, whose worship was characterized by ritualized prostitution and idolatry. The parallel is striking. Walvoord correctly notes,

Her name "Jezebel" suggests that she was corrupting the Thyatira church much like Ahab's wife Jezebel corrupted Israel (1 Kings 16:31-33). (*Bible Knowledge Commentary*)

Some (Alford) have speculated that this New Testament "Jezebel" may have even been the wife of the messenger to the church at Thyatira (there is even a textual variant that reads "your wife Jezebel," which was probably added to support the idea). But this view is predicated on the assumption that the angel is the "pastor" of the church. The text contains no indication of such a view.

That there was an actual woman in Thyatira who was causing the church harm is clear. The assembly there may have originally gathered in the house of Lydia, the woman who sold purple (Acts 16:14ff). Walvoord says,

It is possible that there was actually a woman leader in the church at Thyatira and that her dominant position may have been derived from the fact that Lydia, another woman, had brought them the message in the first place. (Walvoord, *Revelation*)

Walvoord is speculating, but it may be that Lydia's prominence did have something to do with this woman's ability to mislead the assembly. However, it is clear from Scripture that there were women prophets (the daughters of Philip mentioned in Acts 21:9, for instance) who ministered in the early body of Christ, and it was not necessary for Lydia to have been the primary influence here.

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In any case, this Jezebel claimed the gift of prophecy but encouraged the believers to continue in 1) pagan sexual practices and 2) worshiping of idols by continuing to eat at pagan altars. (While eating such food sacrificed to idols was not condemned in and of itself in the New Testament, when that practice acknowledged the reality of the false god it was soundly condemned, as here.) These two practices were associated in the first century with visiting pagan temples, and the idea goes beyond simple immoral practices. Jezebel seems to have been encouraging a dualism, a compartmentalized Christianity, which allowed pagan worship practices as being consistent with Christian virtues. The danger to the believers is extreme.

Verse 21

In His mercy God did not immediately bring chastisement upon Jezebel, though she did not desire to repent. The statement in the original is literally, “And I gave her time in order that she might repent, but she does not desire to repent of her immorality.”

Repenting of immorality does not speak to the legalistic ending of immorality, but of recognizing and changing one’s view of the act. Once one legitimately changes her mind, the actual meaning of repent, then one ceases to teach such practices. Indeed, the word repent indicates a change of mind and her refusal to do so implies a false doctrinal basis for her continued actions. And it was not that she simply did not repent. The idea is that she, at the time of writing (present tense), did not *desire* to repent, indicating a willfulness on her part to continue her false teaching. Hers was a considered refusal to change her mind and therefore a desire to continue in her false doctrinal practices.

Verse 22

The word translated *I cast* is translated *I will cast* in some versions. The verb is βαλλω (*ballo*) and is actually in the present tense “I cast” in the original. It is a *futuristic present* emphasizing the immediacy of the event.

The word bed is κλίνη (*kline*), and often refers to a bed on which the sick lie (Matt 9:2; 6). This is not the “bed of immorality” (Hocking, et. al.) which would be another Greek word (κοίτη, *koite*), a word often used of sexual immorality. Physical illness is undoubtedly in view here. Because of her carnality, God is casting her into a sick bed. While not all illness is due to unrighteous living, it is one way that God uses to bring believers back into the fold. This woman may have been a Christian who was experiencing an extreme case of carnality. There were some in Corinth who had been physically ill because of their fleshly activities (1 Corinthians 11:30). Some had even died.

While Jezebel will be cast into a sickbed, her followers will have great tribulation, but will still have a time to repent. The word tribulation does not refer to the future Seventieth Week of Daniel, but to a condition during the physical life of Jezebel’s followers. It was given in order to encourage them to change their mind and embrace truth. Evidently, Jezebel herself was past that opportunity, and the next step of physical illness was applied.

That God is going to such great lengths to produce a change of mind argues for these being wayward sheep who He desired to return to the fold.

Verse 23

Jezebel’s children are not to be confused with the group who “committed adultery with her” of the previous verse. Those were one’s who had time to repent. These children will be killed. The children probably refer to her “spiritual” children rather than to the off-spring of her adulterous activity as such a punishment seems unlikely for young children who happen to have the misfortune of having

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her as a mother. They are better identified with those who had embraced her pagan teaching and were themselves promulgating it, that is, of second generation Jezebels.

This punishment to death is an example to all local assemblies so that each one shall know that the Lord gives to each one according to its works. He searches the depths of man's mentality and emotions to determine the precise nature of such punishment.

God searches the "reins and hearts." "Reins" is *nephrous*, lit. "kidneys," and is used only here in the New Testament. Many are translating the word "minds" but that seems doubtful. According to Walvoord, the word "is a reference to the fact that Christ searches the innermost being of the individual." (*Revelation*, pg. 75.) However, it's meaning metaphorically is not clear. It may refer to emotionally driven attitudes, similarly to the way the word bowels (*splagchnon*) is used. The lower internal organs seem to be the metaphorical seat of the emotions, as the heart is seat of the mind. We will assume the emotional meaning of *nephrous* for this discussion.

God's dealing with believers is not based solely on their activities but also on their attitudes. That believers in general are in mind is confirmed by the last statement in the verse.

The word "hearts" (*kardia*) also refers to the inner part of the believer, but with a stronger emphasis on the thinking ability than the word *nephrous*.

God will give corrective punishment to "each one of you," which does not refer to the assembly at large but to each individual. There is no indication that this assembly is generally apostatizing, but that God is watchful for works of individuals that are inconsistent with living the grace-based Christian life.

4. Correction (2:24-25)

Verse 24

There were some believers in the church of Thyatira who did not have, that is, were not participating in, the evil doctrine of Jezebel. They did not know (*ginosko*) the deep things of Satan because they were not experiencing them. They had the spiritual insight to recognize the problem and counter it with their spiritual abilities. They had applied the solution to Satanic attack, and were being victorious in this area.

The "deep things of Satan" refers to the content of pagan doctrine as embodied in the doctrine of Jezebel. Satanic involvement is not surprising, given that Satan tempts believers to reject truth for falsehood. It seems to make little difference what falsehood, as long as it takes the believer away from dependence on God and His word. It is not so much that Satan is attempting to control the actions of Christians as it is that he's attempting to control their mental views in spiritual matters. His theory seems to be that if he can cause a believer to believe a lie, any lie, he can control that individual mentally, even while that person devolves into carnality. Such does not always seem to be the case, however, as the flesh seems more powerful than Satan in its ability to control the individual.

The "they" of the phrase "as they say" must refer to those who profess these false Satanic doctrines. It's doubtful they themselves would have identified them as Satanic, which seems to be the Lord's evaluation of them. Rather, they are calling them "deep things" that is, things to be followed because of their spiritual depth. Even today, we maintain the idea of studying "in depth" as opposed to a shallow approach. Studying in depth is thought to be a good thing, so it's not surprising that the advocates of the false doctrines introduced by "Jezebel" would claim that their teaching dealt with deep things. It is the false claims of various cults that their teachings reach beyond the depths of the shallow, literal meaning of Scripture.

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The predicate of this sentence is found in the phrase “I cast upon you no other burden.” It probably means that they had their spiritual hands full, and the Lord was going to put nothing more on them. The next statement indicates the burden that He did cast upon them.

Verse 25

“Nevertheless” shows that God still had a burden or weight that He had placed on the Thyatirans. The weight was simply to hold fast till I come. The temptation to follow along, to get involved with Satanic depths must have been strong. But they were not to budge from their position. They were to hold fast (*krateo*, to use their strength) in resisting this pressure.

“Till I come” must be a reference to Christ’s physical coming for the church. It does not refer to the second coming, which will not be to relieve burdens, but to His coming “in the air” for the church (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17). True Christians throughout the present age have faithfully waited with expectation for the coming of the Lord. It is the maturing Christian’s ultimate perspective, the “blessed hope,” the coming of Christ to resurrect and snatch away His church.

5. Challenge (2:26-29)

Verse 26

Again, the one who is victorious is the genuine believer. Further, verses 26-29 views the Christian in relationship to the future kingdom of God on the earth. The context is millennial, as the quote from Psalm 2:9 in verse 27 indicates. The “nations” are the Gentiles who are deemed worthy of entering the millennial state after the Seventieth Week of Daniel has been completed (Matt 25:31-46).

“And the one who keeps my works to the end” is almost universally interpreted, almost unthinkingly, to mean *the one who performs the works that I (Christ) commands to the end of his life*. It is presented to mean, as Walvoord states, “Christ promises believers who are faithful that they will join Him in His millennial rule” (*Bible Knowledge Commentary*). In another place he states, “The overcoming Christians are promised places of authority. They will share the rule of Christ over the nations of the world” (*Revelation*, page 77). It seems that Dr. Walvoord holds that the ones who are victorious, the overcomers, are the faithful believers. In this he appears inconsistent, as he otherwise stated that the overcomers are all believers.

If the victorious ones are a group of believers rather than the entire body of Christ a theological problem of primary importance comes into play. It makes this sentence identify two different sets of Christians. If only those believers who live the Christian life successfully to the end gain the benefit of rule in the kingdom, what happens to the other Christians? This, in turn, has led to the view of the *partial rapture theory*, since many pretribulational commentators hold that the *victorious one* is the post-rapture Christian.

The partial rapture theory is unsustainable from Scripture, as it violates the basic grace teaching of the Apostle Paul, especially in the area of positional sanctification.

Several questions come to mind:

1. Are the *victorious ones* and the ones who “keep my works to the end” the same group, or two different groups?
2. If they are two distinct groups, and if the *victorious ones* consists of all believers, then is the second group a special group of Christians within the first group and yet somehow separate from it, or is it a separate group altogether?

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3. But if they are the same group, does this verse then identify the *victorious ones* as a limited group of Christians who will rule during the kingdom program (vs. 27)? (Walvoord seems to hold this view.)
4. As a direct consequence of a positive answer to question 3 above, we must ask, Will only those who are victorious in the Christian life be raptured (the partial rapture theory) or will all Christians be raptured?
5. Does the phrase “my works” refer to the works Christ commands the Christian to perform, which is virtually universally assumed, or does it refer to the works that Christ himself performed?
6. Does the phrase “to the end” mean the end of the Christian life, or is some other end in view?

The answers to the first four questions lie, at least partly, in how one answers questions 5 and 6. The meaning of “my works” is almost universally assumed to refer to the works that Christ requires of the Christian. The verb “keeps” is one of the key elements in this interpretation, because it is assumed to mean “perform.” The phrase “to the end” is assumed to mean to the end of one’s human life on earth.

The phrase “my works” (τὰ ἔργα μου) may mean what it says. It seems to be used in contrast to the phrase “your works” (σου τὰ ἔργα) in verse 19 and the phrase “her works” (τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς) in verse 22. The most normal understanding of these statements is that three different sets of works are involved. To hold that “my works” refer to the works required of the believer is to equate that phrase with “your works” in verse 19. To use two distinct phrases in the same context to mean identically the same thing, that is, the works of the Christian believer, seems most unlikely, and certainly the Thyatiran Christians would not have come to that conclusion. “My works” must refer to the works of Christ Himself, rather than to what He commands the believer to perform.

Furthermore, the primary meaning of the word “keeps” is not “perform,” or “do,” but “*to watch over, guard, keep, preserve*” (*Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, George Abbott-Smith, pg. 445). Only figuratively does the word mean “to keep a command” as it does in Matthew 19:17, “So He said to him, ‘Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.’”

Even in this verse the word “*keep*” carries the primary meaning of “*observe*.” Matthew 19:17 teaches that the disciples must know what the commandments are, and to hold to them. The normal result of such would be that they perform them. This meaning is confirmed in Matthew 23:3, “Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do” (NKJV). Here the word “keep” is translated “observe” and is contrasted with “do” (ποιέω). In that statement the two words are clearly not used interchangeably. The word that is parallel to “observe” is “say.” Jesus is telling them that the Pharisees say and do not perform, but they were to learn and to perform. If one observes (keeps) and does the teachings of the Pharisees, then one learns and performs that teaching. This means that “keep” is the equivalent of “learn” or “hold” in the sense of learning and holding to a doctrine.

We understand the word “keeps” in verse 26 to mean *to guard, or preserve*, which is its primary meaning. It does not mean, “do” or “perform” in that statement. In what sense, then, does the believer keep Christ’s works? The best understanding is the positional one. All Christians keep them, in that all Christians are accorded their benefit, no matter what their practice. From God’s positional perspective, all believers are completely mature. He does not dole out the rapture to only those who perform His grace requirements, because He sees them completed in the works of Christ.

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3:21, 22

If our understanding is correct, this provides the answers to the other questions that we asked. The two designations refer to the same group, all Christians. All Christians are victorious, all Christians keep Christ's works, all Christians will be resurrected or raptured. The "end" then does not refer to the end of the Christian's life on earth, whether it be by death or the rapture, but to the end of the positional program, that is, to the end of the God's program culminating in the resurrection of the previous dead and the rapture of those still alive (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Verse 27

"He shall rule them" is the verb *poimanei* which refers to shepherding. The figure is one of a shepherd using an iron staff (rod of iron) rather than the simple wooden crook. In the future Kingdom of God on the earth believers from the body of Christ will have authority similar to that of Christ, in that they will not only shepherd, but will execute justice on the Gentile nations.

The allusion is to Psalm 2, a messianic Psalm of great detail. When Christ is the king, He will delegate authority to Christians to carry out His policies, as He has received authority from the Father. They will have the authority of to apply the Lord's rod of iron, a metaphor for enforcing Christ's requirements. They will have the authority to go so far as to break the Gentiles like a potter breaks his vessel, even to the point of total destruction. This statement shows that the believer of today will indeed inherit the kingdom of God. But he will not do so as a member of Israel will, nor as the Gentiles will. Rather, he will hold a position of governmental authority. He will rule with Christ. But the church is not the only group of humans that will rule with Christ. Tribulation saints, those who will be executed by beheading, who will not have received the mark of the beast, will rule and reign with Christ for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4).

Verses 28-29

The morning star is best understood as a reference to Christ. Some think it refers to Christ at His second coming to judge and establish His kingdom, though this is a doubtful interpretation. His second coming is viewed more as lightning than as the early appearance of the morning star (Venus), which signals the coming of the daylight.

Since the symbol is one of expected coming and the first sign of relief from the night some believe it refers to the future position of the saints in the kingdom (Hocking). While this interpretation has some merit, it is highly problematical, and does not seem to be confirmed by the normal symbolical nature of a star appearing.

While many commentators believe it's a reference to Christ at His second coming, many pretribulation raptureists believe it probably refers to the coming of Christ for the church before the tribulation, which seems to me to be a better view, given the context of the church and the fact that the next prophetic event in the life of the church is the coming of Christ in the air before the Seventieth Week of Daniel.

From the church's perspective, the next prophetic event will be the resurrection and rapture of the church, and this act will lead ultimately to the inheritance of the kingdom of God. The morning star is an excellent symbol of this event, since it presages the dawn, not for the world, nor for Israel, but for the body of Christ.

Again we have the exhortation to pay attention!

Endnotes

- ¹ The words “repent” and “repentance” have almost an exclusively religious meaning today. The words do not mean “to changes one’s activity from ungodly to godly.” Indeed, the words have nothing to do with changing one’s activity. The original Greek word “repent” meant a change of mind. Any good Greek lexicon will verify this fact. The Scriptures invariably teach that before a change of activity can occur a change of mind is needed. Unfortunately, today the idea of repentance has taken on an evangelistic meaning far from its original use, and is often used to browbeat unbelievers into changing their sinful ways. Nothing could be farther from the biblical emphasis.
- ² Hocking suggests this view, though he is careful to say that the true identity is unknown for certain.
- ³ Unfortunately, Dr. Walvoord does not provide a source for his statement about “other literature,” so we have no way to determine if his claim is valid.
- ⁴ The majority text overwhelmingly accepts the word “works” here, and there is no legitimate reason to exclude it.
- ⁵ Thayer lists the first meaning of *blasphemia* as “slander, detraction, speech injurious to another's good name.” Likewise, DBAG says concerning the verbal form of the word, “in relation to humans slander, revile, defame.” And the noun form they define as “defaming, denigrating, demeaning.”
- ⁶ Another view, that this is the “sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God” from Ephesians 6:17 is easily refutable. Here the sword belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ, not the Holy Spirit, and here, unlike in Ephesians 6, the object is not for the believer to use the sword in order to overcome Satanic attack, but for Christ to use it in judgment.
- ⁷ Walvoord’s view that the concept of “pontifex maximus” comes from Pergamos cannot be confirmed by independent sources. He gives no direct source for his view, though he may have gotten it from the historically discredited Alexander Hislop, who wrote *The Two Babylons*.
- ⁸ It is unlikely that Jezebel was the actual name of a woman in the city of Thyatira, though not impossible. To anyone familiar with the Hebrew Bible, the name has a definite negative connotation that cannot be overlooked. It is possible, of course, for those ignorant of the Bible to have named their daughter Jezebel. However, the name is Semitic in origin, and it’s hard to understand why any gentile would even know the name apart from being influenced by the Hebrew Bible. The original Jezebel, who married King Ahab, was from Sidon (of Tyre and Sidon fame), King Ethba’al’s daughter. She was, according to 1 Kings 16:31, a worshiper of Ba’al, as was her father, whose name means “with or near Ba’al.” Strangely, her name means “chaste.”

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Chapter Three

Chapter Three continues the discussion of the seven churches in Asia whom the writer John is addressing.

E. To Sardis (3:1-6)

- 1 **And to the angel of the assembly in Sardis write: These things says the one who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars. I know your works, that you have a name that you are living, and you are dead.**
- 2 **Be watchful, and establish the things that remain, which were about to die, for I have found no works of yours completed before my God.**
- 3 **Remember therefore how you have received and heard, and keep it, and repent. If therefore you shall not watch, I will come as a thief, and you shall not know what hour I will come upon you.**
- 4 **But you have a few names in Sardis that did not defile their garments, and they shall walk with me in white, because they are worthy.**
- 5 **The one who is victorious shall thus be arrayed in white garments, and I will *certainly* not blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.**
- 6 **The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies.**

1. *Description of Christ (3:1a)*

Verse 1a

Sardis was a busy city at one time. Walvoord states,

The important commercial city of Sardis was located about 30 miles southeast of Thyatira, on an important trade route that ran east and west through the kingdom of Lydia. Important industries included jewelry, dye, and textiles, which had made the city wealthy. From a religious standpoint it was a center of pagan worship and site of a temple of Artemis, which ruins still remain (Walvoord, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*).

Unger's Bible Dictionary reports:

This important city was...located on important commercial routes running E and W through the rich kingdom of Lydia, of which it was the capital. It was also made wealthy by textile manufacturing and jewelry making. Here are said to have been minted the first coins under the opulent Croesus. Cyrus the Great overcame the city in 546 B.C. Antiochus the Great did the same in 218 B.C. Wealthy Sardis citizens took up with mystery cults, notably with that of Cybele. (Unger, Merrill, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*. "Sardis," pg. 1129.)

Sardis, then, was a center for the worship of the "mother goddess," Cybele, and fragments of that ancient temple still exist, probably the oldest temple ruins in existence. The temple itself was built only some three hundred years after Solomon's. Cybelean worship was of a particularly foul and debased kind. Orgies and all kinds of debauchery are associated with the cult.

Sardis was a city overtaken by idolatry. Evidently the assembly there had been soiled by the practices of the city. Even believers were caught up in the carnality, although there was a remnant that had not become soiled, that is, they had not defiled their garments (vs. 4).

The description which the Lord uses of Himself seems to emphasize His relationship to the seven assemblies and the Holy Spirit. He has the seven Spirits of God, that is, the Holy Spirit in the sense that they are under His control. The Spirit is best viewed as the agent of Christ here, in a subordinate personal relationship to the Son. He is the one who does the Son's bidding with relation to the stars, that is, the messengers of the seven assemblies, who are also under Christ's control.

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2. Commendation (none)

Like Laodicea, this church gets no commendation. The situation in Sardis was beyond any such encouragement. G. Campbell Morgan's words are of interest here:

In the other churches, evil had not been the habit, but rather the exception, and therefore it was possible first to commend. Here the case is reversed, and no word of commendation is addressed to the church as a church."¹

3. Condemnation (3:1b-2)

Verses 1b-2

The Lord knows (οἶδᾶ) the works of the assembly at Sardis, and His conclusion was that Sardis was living in name only. *Living* here refers to having a spiritual connection with the Lord in the Christian walk, not to salvation. The Sardisian assembly had a reputation for being spiritually lively, perhaps because of their activities, but it was false. They were at the least hypocritical, pretending that they were working in the Lord's name, and therefore claiming to have a spiritual relationship with Him.

Many modern churches seem to fit this category well. They put on a good show, but in reality they were dead. Again, "dead" is not a term relating to salvation but to the collective spiritual connection of the assembly to the Lord and His program in their activity. It may have been an assembly of mixed believers and unbelievers. Or it simply may have been a believing assembly characterized by high levels of activity and low levels of spirituality. At any rate, they were not connected to the Lord in their work as they ought to be.

In verse 2 Christ views the assembly as being incomplete in its works. Their spiritual chores were left undone and were about to die. Some believe that this dying is in the relationship between believers within the assembly. Perhaps they were not supporting one another spiritually as they should have done.

"Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain" is an exhortation to the unfaithful believers who perhaps had become tainted by the city. They need to *repent* (μετανοέω - change their minds, vs. 3; see also the footnote on 2:5) concerning the nature of their activities. Verse 4 makes clear that there was still a "faithful remnant" in the church.

To be watchful, one needs to be alert. The lack of spiritual alertness indicates a sense of spiritual lethargy in the assembly. They simply were not paying attention to the Lord and His program the way they should. What spiritual vitality that remained, was about to (μέλλω) die. This assembly was moving toward the end of its usefulness to the Lord.

Therefore, they were to strengthen the things which remain, referring to what little spiritual alertness and ability was left. The word translated *strengthen* means to cause something to become firm and stable. The assembly in Sardis was in great danger.

4. Correction (3:3,4)

Verses 3-4

This correction indicates that Sardis is *not* in total unbelief. There were still some in the assembly who were true believers, but who had lost their way spiritually. At one time they had "received and heard" the truth of the Lord. They had not rejected the message of Christ, and at one time at least, had obeyed (heard) it.

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“Keep it” means to guard or preserve what they had received and heard; they were not to go any further in the direction away from the Lord and His spiritual program than they had already gone.

“Repent” again refers to changing their mind concerning the direction they are taking.

The warning is quite serious. If they do not heed severe punishment will be their lot. Christ will come, not in the rapture or in His second coming, but as a parent comes to chasten a child. This coming is undoubtedly providential rather than supernatural or personal, and will result in their chastisement. It will happen unexpectedly “like a thief.” While the same terminology is used of the second coming of Christ and the Day of the Lord, it is not referring to that event here, but of the suddenness of the chastisement that will come upon the assembly if they do not repent.

Dr. Walvoord correctly states,

If they refuse to heed the exhortation, Christ promises that He will come upon them as a thief, meaning that He will come upon them unexpectedly with devastating suddenness and bring judgment upon them.... The same symbolism is used at the second coming of the Lord, but here the figure is not related to that event. The judgment upon the church at Sardis, however, is going to be just as unexpected, sudden, and irrevocable as that which is related to the second coming.

The actual form of this chastisement is not stated, though it is explained in more detail in verse 5. However, they will not know the hour, that is, the specific time, of His coming in punishment. Nothing is more unsettling than knowing that something bad is coming, but not knowing when.

Verse 4 indicates that some were remaining pure. They were not substituting activity for spirituality, a confusion which exists abundantly in the modern so-called evangelical church.

But only a few did not defile their garments, a figurative way of saying that they did not enter into the unrighteousness that the majority had embraced. These few were to “walk with me (Christ) in white,” the color being the symbol of purity and righteousness. Again this is a figure, and does not refer to literally white clothing. Nor does “in white” refer to the “white garments” in the next verse, which are yet future, but to the daily walk of the believer with Christ.

The cause of this walking in white is stated to be that they are worthy.

5. *Challenge (3:5-6)*

Verses 5-6

Again the one who is victorious refers to all believers who will be resurrected or raptured when the body of Christ is taken up. To the true believer who is raised, Christ promises a wondrous future. There is no reason not to take these white garments as literal. The resurrected believer will wear white. White indicates *worth* or *value* from God’s perspective. One must be careful not to indicate that only those believers who have been successful in the Christian life will be thus arrayed. All true believers, regardless of how well they lived the life, will be robed in white.

“Be arrayed” is in the future tense middle voice (probably in the reflexive sense that they will array themselves after the rapture). Believers during the tribulation will be deemed worthy of entering into the millennial state as rulers (See 2:27 above, note. This is not the same undefiled white garments that the worthy wear in 3:4. There they are still in their natural state. Here they are viewed in the resurrected state.)

Christ will confess one’s name before the Father. “Confess” is ὁμολογέω, the basic meaning of which is “to agree, to say the same thing as someone else.” From there it developed the meaning “to

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declare” as to confess a truth. To confess one’s name appears to mean to accurately express a person’s good character or reputation, a common use for the word *name*. All Christian believers in their resurrection state will share the character of Christ. He will confess, or declare that fact, to the Father.

Christ will not blot the resurrected Christian’s name from the book of life. The book of life appears to be distinct from the Lamb’s book of life mentioned in chapter 13:8; 17:8 & 21:27, but is the same as the book of life mentioned in chapter 20:12, 15; 22:19. Some think, however, that it is the same book viewed two different ways. While that is a possibility, it is unlikely. We know that there are books (plural) that are to be opened at the judgment of the white throne in Revelation 20:12. The book of life has works written in it, and the unbeliever is judged according to those works. This does not appear to be the case for the Lamb’s book of life. Note the chart on the following page.

F. To Philadelphia (3:7-13)

- 7 **And to the angel of the assembly in Philadelphia write: These things says the one who is holy, the one who is true, the one who has the key of David, the one who opens and none shall shut, and who shuts and none opens.**
- 8 **I know your works. Behold, I have set before you a door opened, which none can shut, because you have a little power, and kept my word, and did not deny my name.**
- 9 **Behold, I cause those from the synagogue of Satan, the ones who say they are Jews, and they are not, but lie—behold, I will make them, in order that they should come and bow before your feet, and they might know that I have loved you.**
- 10 **Because you kept the word of my endurance, I also will keep you from the hour of trial, that hour which is to come upon the one whole world, to try the ones who dwell upon the earth.**
- 11 **I come quickly. Hold fast that which you have, in order that no one take your crown.**
- 12 **The one who is victorious, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out from there no more, and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which descends out of heaven from my God, and my own new name.**
- 13 **The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies.**

1. Description of Christ (3:7)

Verse 7

Most Americans know that the word Philadelphia means *brotherly love*. The city in Asia was in the province of Lydia, on the Cogdamus River, about 150 miles from Sardis. This was not an ancient city in John’s day, as it was founded in 189 B.C. on the road to the interior of what is now called Asia minor. It was a wine growing region of renown, being in an area formed by volcanic soil.

Christ is first described as “the one who is holy.” In this case, the word holy (ἅγιος), which literally means *separate from*, is used in to show the worthiness of the Lord. He is completely separate from anything that would make Him less than worthy to hold the key of David. He will fulfill His responsibility because He is the Holy One, the One separated from anything unlike God.

Likewise, the descriptive statement “the one who is true” shows that the Lord is reliable and will not violate His responsibility as the holder of the key. He will perform His function reliably, and will not be false in the discharge of His responsibility.

The key of David has been a problem for commentators, though it seems clear from the historical context. This statement is taken from Isaiah 22:22. The Isaiah passage concerns Eliakim son of Hilkiyah. Note the wording from Isaiah:

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And the key of the house of David I will lay upon his shoulder, so he shall open, and none shall shut, and he shall shut, and none shall open.

This man, Eliakim, had the key to the treasure house of the king. The description of Christ in Revelation is a literary allusion to an individual who is in control of wealth. Thus does the Lord encourage the assembly at Philadelphia who were remaining faithful even under persecution of the “synagogue of Satan.” Several views have been propounded concerning the nature of the “key of David.”

1. Some have thought that having the “key of David” is a reference to the authority to admit individuals into the New Jerusalem (Mounce).² This is quite strange, since the New Jerusalem will not be mentioned until the end of the book. There is no reason the believers in Philadelphia would have jumped forward that far in their thinking nor associated the “house of David” with the New Jerusalem.
2. Others see it as relating to the millennial period (Lehman Strauss). This is almost as strange as the previous one. Why would the believers in Philadelphia understand “the key of the house of David” to refer to entering the millennial period? The house of David in the original passage in Isaiah 22 referred to the treasure house of David. There is no direct analogy between the millennium and David’s ancient store house. The argument seems to be that the millennium will provide the believer today with treasure, but such an assumption cannot be sustained from normal interpretive principles.
3. Others see it as relating to the millennial period (Lehman Strauss). This is almost as strange as the previous one. Why would the believers in Philadelphia understand “the key of the house of David” to refer to entering the millennial period? The house of David in the original passage in Isaiah 22 referred to the treasure house of David. There is no direct analogy between the millennium and David’s ancient store house. The argument seems to be that the millennium will provide the believer today with treasure, but such an assumption cannot be sustained from normal interpretive principles.
4. Yet others see it as referring to the universal kingdom over which Christ is reigning today (J. Vernon McGee). Dr. McGee recognized the problem that other interpretations introduce, so he rejected them. Unfortunately, in doing so, he assumed an almost as problematic interpretation as the ones he rejected. The universal kingdom is not Davidic in any sense, and it is difficult to see how the “house of David” could refer to it. Again, there is no reason for the believers in Philadelphia to cast their mind to the universal kingdom, which is not referred to in the context, nor in any place in the book of Revelation.

The problems that the Philadelphians were undergoing would be solved by none of the above. The answer must be found in the immediately following context. The purpose to the statement “the one who opens and none shall shut, and who shuts and none opens” originally told the Israelites who was in charge of the treasure house. Eliakim son of Hilkiah had control and responsibility over that location, and the reference by John fits the metaphor of control better than any other. Therefore, it is best to keep our understanding of Jesus’ use of this phrase to the idea of control and authority. In other words, He is in sovereign control of the situations in which the Philadelphians find themselves, and the activities that He performs cannot be undone by anyone. This is, as we shall see, consistent with the continuance of the phraseology in verse 8 below.

Therefore, the representation of the Lord here is designed to give confidence to the believers in Philadelphia, as they are about to enter into a time of distress. They had “little power, but Christ holds

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the key to each of the situations to come. He desires for them to be sure and certain of His responsible control in the various situations that they are about to encounter, and that the statements He makes about their temporary duration will be believed and that those statements, therefore, will determine the attitude of the Philadelphians undergoing the trial.

2. *Commendation (3:8-10)*

Verse 8

The significance of verse 8 cannot be over-stated. “I know your works” relates the works of the Philadelphians to Christ’s omniscience. The Lord promises them reward, protection and even victory over their spiritual enemies (vs. 9).

The “open door” has been generally interpreted to refer to:

1. An opportunity for evangelism (Walvoord), or,
2. Missionary opportunity (Ironsides, Larkin, Talbot, Robertson, et. al.). This view seems often associated with the idea that Philadelphia represents the period of church history during which there was an outbreak of missionary activity.

However, do these views fit the context well? The fact is, verse 8 is referring back to Christ’s description as the one who opens and the one who shuts. The same Greek words are used for “a door opened” and “none can shut.”

Christ has, in His sovereignty, opened a specific metaphorical door, and the reason for the provision of the open door is stated “because you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.” Thus it appears that the “door opened which no one can shut” is Christ’s control over the time of trial coming their way, which control is because they have been faithful. It does not seem to refer to an opportunity for ministry at all.

I take the ὅτι, which is translated as “for” in the NKJV, as “because” rather than “that” which would require the clause “Behold, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it” to be parenthetical (see Robertson, *Word Pictures*, where this view is presented). The ὅτι clause would, according to that view, *identify the works* that Christ knows, rather than *the reason for the open door*. But the clause is better understood as presenting the *cause* for setting before the Philadelphians an open door, rather than what Christ knows. To speculate a parenthesis here has no basis other than theological. It is required neither logically nor grammatically.

What is the open door then? Is it (1) a guarantee to enter into the millennial kingdom (Hocking)? Or is it (2) a door to the eternal kingdom (Mounce)? No great doctrinal objection can be made to the first view. Certainly various relationships in the millennial period could be construed as being rewards for faithfulness in service. However, the second view is difficult. All believers, even those who have not remained faithful, will enter the so-called eternal state³ without distinction. To make such an entrance contingent on remaining faithful carries the implication that entering the post-millennial state is based on works.

However, again we must affirm that the context is not about entering into the kingdom, either the millennial or the so-called “eternal kingdom.” The open door that is set before the Philadelphians is best viewed as a door out of their predicament, the problem set before them.

Contextually, then, a third view of the “open door” seems preferable. Verse nine (q. v.) shows that the Philadelphian believers will have victory over “the synagogue of Satan.” Surely, this must

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constitute the sovereign activity and control of the Lord which will result in the Jews who are not really Jews coming to bow before them. See comments on verse 9 below.

Furthermore, verse ten (q. v.) promises the Philadelphian church deliverance from persecution and from the future time known as “Jacob’s trouble.” Is it not probable that the rewards mentioned will be those bestowed as the result of faithful service during the “judgment seat of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Cor. 3:12-15)? Is this not part of Christ’s sovereign control over the destiny of the Philadelphian believers?

The phrase “a little strength” should be interpreted as a mild condemnation. The force of the statement is better seen if the indefinite article “a” is excluded since it is not available in the Greek. Dr. Walvoord’s statement is significant here:

It is obviously short of a full commendation, but it is evident that the thrust of the passage is that Christ recognizes in the Philadelphian church at least a significant degree of spiritual power which comes from God. . . .

The idea seems to be that since the Philadelphians have only a little power, Christ must exert His control over the opening and shutting of the door. He must exercise His power in the circumstances.

How are we to understand “and have kept My word?” It is contrasted with “and have not denied My name.” It probably does not mean “*you have performed my commandments.*” Rather it seems to indicate that the Philadelphian church guarded the word of God and obeyed its truth. As a result the believers “have not denied My name,” meaning that they have espoused the truth concerning the person of Christ. “My name” means more than the personal designation “Jesus.” It includes His reputation, the truth concerning His character, and His program of salvation and Christian living.

Verse 9

For a discussion of the synagogue of Satan see the comments on 2:9 above. It is mentioned again here in 3:9 with the same force. Again we affirm the historical character of this synagogue. It was a literal building in a literal city, and has nothing to do with the modern movements of a messianic nature by some “Christians” who are often gentiles rather than Jews (or any other genetically false Jews, for that matter).

The idea of Jews bowing at the feet of Christians has been thought by some to be a reversal of the truth taught in Isaiah 45:14 and 60:14 that the Gentiles will do homage to Israel during the future earthly kingdom. Here, a Gentile assembly will receive the homage of the unbelieving Israelite. The argument, then, is that this cannot be a reference to the future millennial reign, in which the opposite will be true. Rather, they say, it may be a reference to the future judgment of the local synagogue in Philadelphia, or it may have an eschatological fulfillment in the judgment after the thousand years.

In fact, no contradiction exists between this statement and those in Isaiah. The Gentiles mentioned in the Old Testament refer to those who are part of God’s prophetic program for the nations. The term Gentile, when referring to the body of Christ, is strictly an ethnic reference, and has no prophetic significance, per se. Indeed, the body of Christ is a mixed group of both ethnic Jews as well as ethnic Gentiles. Revelation 3:9 is referring to a totally different event than Isaiah 45 or Isaiah 60.

It is important to remember that the assembly in Philadelphia does not represent the body of Christ as a whole. However, or whenever, this predicted event took place, it took place only with reference to that local assembly *at that time*. There is no legitimate reason to apply the statement beyond it. It is strictly a local affair, referring to an event long past. It refers to some event when the assembly in

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Philadelphia, that then existed, was victorious over their enemies, the non-believing Israelites in their local synagogue.

Because God loves the believers in Philadelphia, unbelieving Israelites were to be caused to bow before them. The love of God, specifically applied, often subjugates one group of humans to another, whom He loves. This is another example that God's love is not monolithic. He loves different groups of people with different results at different times.

Verse 10

The cause for keeping the believer from the coming *hour of trial* is because they “kept the word of my endurance.” This is a difficult phrase (which virtually all commentators ignore) and is best examined word-by-word. “Kept” is used in its primary meaning of *preserving*. “The word” means, as it often does, *the communication*. “Of my endurance” is an objective genitive telling what the communication is about. Here the Lord is referring to what He endured, not what the readers endured. The best understanding of this is to refer it to His human suffering on the cross. Taken all together, the phrase means that the Christians in Philadelphia have preserved the communication concerning the work of Christ on the cross. In other words, their existence as believers preserves the truth that Christ suffered on the cross. Thus the statement can be use of all true believers, but *only* of true believers.

The “hour of trial” must be a reference to the future time of Jacob's trouble (Jeremiah 30:7). The fact that it comes upon the whole world indicates not a local problem, but one which encompasses all of humanity. The word “world” here is not *cosmos*, but *oikomenos*, referring to the *inhabited earth*. The emphasis is on the people who will undergo the trial. The word “whole” is *holos* rather than *pas*, which is usually translated “all,” and could be construed to have a more limited meaning. John does not say “all the inhabited earth” but “the whole inhabited earth,” a very broad concept indeed.

Walvoord's statement in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* is of interest here:

This is an explicit promise that the Philadelphia church will not endure the hour of trial which is unfolded, beginning in Revelation 6. Christ was saying that the Philadelphia church would not enter the future time of trouble; He could not have stated it more explicitly. If Christ had meant to say that they would be preserved *through* a time of trouble, or would be *taken out* from within the Tribulation, a different verb and a different preposition would have been required.

Though scholars have attempted to avoid this conclusion in order to affirm posttribulationism, the combination of the verb “keep” with the preposition “from” (*ek*) is in sharp contrast to the meaning of keeping the church “through” (*dia*), a preposition which is not used here. The expression “the hour of trial” (a time period) makes it clear that they would be kept *out of* that period. It is difficult to see how Christ could have made this promise to this local church if it were God's intention for the entire church to go through the Tribulation that will come on the entire world. Even though the church at Philadelphia would go to glory via death long before the time of trouble would come, if the church here is taken to be typical of the body of Christ standing true to the faith, the promise seems to go beyond the Philadelphia church to all those who are believers in Christ (cf. Walvoord, *Revelation*, pp. 86-8). (Walvoord, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*)

Up until the end of the above statement Dr. Walvoord is sound in his interpretation. But he seems to promote the view that the local assembly in Philadelphia is representative (he uses the word

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“typical”) of the body of Christ. However, the idea that the word “trial” refers to the coming Seventieth Week of Daniel does not presuppose that the church at Philadelphia stands for the church, the body of Christ, of the last days. Throughout the New Testament epistles the coming of Christ for His body is seen as possible at any moment. Consequently, the teaching of the New Testament is for all local churches during all periods to live a life that expects the return of Christ for His own.

3. *Condemnation (none)*

No condemnation is given for this church. It is viewed as consistently living the Christian life as prescribed by the Lord.

4. *Correction (3:11)*

Verse 11

The rapture! Nothing else can fit this statement, for certainly the 2nd coming of Christ to establish His kingdom cannot be said to be sudden with reference to the church, which is clearly the meaning of quickly in this context. It is related directly to the truth of verse 10. Walvoord has it right when he states,

In this passage the rapture of the church⁴ is in view. The coming of Christ to establish a kingdom on earth is a later event following the predicted time of tribulation which is unfolded in the book of Revelation itself. By contrast, the coming of Christ for His church is portrayed here as elsewhere in the book as an event which is not separated from us by any series of events, but is one of constant expectation in the daily walk of the believer in this age. (*Revelation*, pgs. 87, 88.)

The encouragement to “hold fast” indicates the need to remain faithful for future rewards that consist of the *stephanos* crown. This crown, in the form of a wreath, was given as a prize for the Roman games, as well as other contests. The word does not refer to *the rapture* as some partial rapturists think. Whatever the crown here is, it is possible for it to be “taken” in some sense. The crown is not salvation; it is not the post resurrection state. It is probably a temporal reward provided during the life of the believer.

5. *Challenge (3:12-13)*

Verses 12-13

Verse 12 addresses once again the future state of the victorious believer. All believers will become a *pillar in the temple of God the Father*. This is not limited to a few Christians, but to all who have been saved by faith in Christ’s work on the cross.

In his earlier work, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Walvoord seemed to think that being a pillar was a reward for service. But later in his *Bible Knowledge Commentary* statements, he holds to the sounder view that all believers, regardless of victory in the Christian life, will be a pillar in God’s temple. He states:

Everyone who is an over comer will become a pillar in the temple of...God. This is of course symbolic of the permanent place in heaven for believers, referred to here as the temple of God. The entire New Jerusalem will be the ultimate temple (21:22). In contrast to earthly temples and earthly pillars which fall, believers will continue forever in the temple. Christ specified that He was referring to the city of My God, that is, the New Jerusalem (cf. 21:2). He repeated His promise: I will also write on him My new name (cf. 2:17; 14:1;

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19:12). Because believers have identified with Christ by faith, He will identify Himself with them (Walvoord, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*).

Unfortunately, Walvoord goes beyond Scripture when he identifies the New Jerusalem as the temple. In fact, the verse to which he refers, Revelation 21:22, says that there will be no temple in the New Jerusalem because God Himself is the temple:

And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple.

Walvoord is correct when he says that this is symbolic of the permanent place *in heaven* for believers. The ultimate destiny of the believer today is a heavenly one, and the time will come when they will be permanently associated with heaven. The believer will “go out from there no more.”

Why then the statement in verse 12, “and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem?” Note that two “names” will be written upon the believer who is permanently in heaven. The word “name” is used metaphorically here to refer to the characteristics of the one or thing named. The believer will be associated with the character of God Himself. Furthermore, he will be associated with the city of God, the New Jerusalem. This truth will be presented in detail when we discuss the New Jerusalem when it is predicted later in the book.

G. To Laodicea (3:14-22)

- 14 **And to the angel of the assembly in Laodicea write: These things says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the Beginning of the creation of God.**
- 15 **I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I would you were cold or hot.**
- 16 **So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.**
- 17-18 **Because you say, I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing, and know not that you are the wretched one and miserable and poor and blind and naked, ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, in order that you may become rich, and buy white garments, in order that you may clothe yourself, and the shame of your nakedness be not made manifest, and buy eye salve to anoint your eyes, in order that you may see.**
- 19 **As many as I love, I reprove and discipline. Be zealous therefore, and repent.**
- 20 **Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with me.**
- 21 **The one who is victorious, I will give to him to sit with me in my throne, as I also was victorious, and sat down with my Father in his throne.**
- 22 **The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies.**

Note: Laodicea (λαοδίκεια) had gained prominence and wealth through the wool trade. The city was founded on the ruins of older cities by Antiochus II in the middle of the third century B.C. He named it after his wife, Laodice. It was approximately forty miles from Philadelphia on the road to Colossae, and was a very important commercial center, since many roads converged there.

It was at a very important cross-road: the main road across Asia Minor ran W to the ports of Miletus and Ephesus about 160 km away and E by an easy incline on to the central plateau and thence towards Syria; and another road ran N to Pergamos and S to the coast at Attalia.

This strategic position made Laodicea an extremely prosperous commercial centre, especially under Roman rule. When destroyed by a disastrous earthquake in AD 60 (Tacitus, *Ann.* 14. 27) it could afford to dispense with aid from Nero. It was an important centre of banking and exchange (*cf.* Cicero, *ad Fam.* 3. 5. 4, *etc.*). Its distinctive products included garments of glossy black wool (Strabo, *Geog.* 12. 8. 16 [578]), and it was a medical centre noted for ophthalmology. The site had one disadvantage: being determined by the road-

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system, it lacked a sufficient and permanent supply of good water. Water was piped to the city from hot springs some distance S, and probably arrived lukewarm. The deposits still encrusting the remains testify to its warmth. (*The New Bible Dictionary*, Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1962).

According to Vincent, many of its inhabitants were Jews (Marvin Vincent, *Vincent's Word Studies*).

1. *Description of Christ (3:14)*

Verse 14

The emphasis in this description of Christ is His veracity. Christ is represented as One who sees things as they actually are, and represents them as such. The word witness is used here in its normal sense of someone who testifies of the truth, as a witness in a court does today. The word “amen” is of Hebrew origin and means *truth*, or *truly*. Christ calls Himself “faithful,” meaning that He is believable, and “the true witness,” meaning that His statements, the things of which He testifies, can be relied upon to accurately represent things as they actually are. The Laodiceans needed to hear this, as the Lord is about to lay on them the strongest condemnation possible.

Thayer correctly states that the Greek word translated *beginning* refers to “that by which anything begins to be, the origin, active cause.” (Thayer’s *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* in the article ἀρχή.) The Lord Jesus Christ, then, is the active cause of creation. He is the creator. It is in this sense that the word *beginning* is regularly used of Christ, when He is called by Himself and others “the beginning.” Because of the faithlessness of the Laodicean believers, this is a particularly important statement. The Lord is reminding the ones who are glorying in their riches (vs. 17) that He is the one who created all things. Their puny riches mean nothing at all in the realm of the spiritual values of the Lord.

2. *Commendation (none)*

Like Sardis before it, the assembly in Laodicea occasions no commendation by the Lord.

3. *Condemnation (3:15-18)*

Verse 15

The strongest condemnation of any of the churches is directed toward the church in Laodicea. The reference to neither being *hot nor cold* brings to mind that the city received its water from a warm water spring and the liquid reached the city lukewarm. The Laodiceans were mired in spiritual lethargy. It seems that they didn’t really care about their spiritual condition, one way or the other. Perhaps they believed they were fine, not realizing their lack of zeal in spiritual matters.

The Lord would rather they be either hot or cold, than lukewarm (see verse 16). The word hot (*zestos*) is from the verb *zeo*, meaning to boil. The word cold (*psuchros*) is from *psucho*, meaning to grow cold. At least, if they were cold, they would be passionate about something. But they had lost their zealous passion for anything. Their lethargy was so deeply ingrained, there was very little left to deal with.

Verse 16

The vividness of the expression in verse 16 is explosive. The word lukewarm is *chlarios*, an old adjective from *chlio*, meaning to liquefy, or to melt. This is the only place in the New Testament where the word is found. Christ compares the Laodicean’s spiritual condition to water that is not fit to drink, but only to spit out. Antipathy is indicated by this word picture. They were not openly hostile

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to the things of the Lord, nor were they in any way excited about spiritual things. They were indifferent.

Because of their condition of being lukewarm, some have thought the this assembly was populated mainly by unbelievers. But that was not the case. Verses 19-21 below shows that the issue is not unbelief at all. Their need was spiritual renewal, not initial faith.

Verse 17

The claim of the Laodicean's physical wealth is contrasted with their spiritual reality. The problem is *not only that they are spiritually* wretched, it is that they do not know it! The Greek says, "and know not that your yourself are the wretched one." The word "you" is in the emphatic position. They thought that they had need of nothing. They were unaware of their spiritual need and therefore were unable to proceed spiritually. The Lord uses five adjectives to express the conditions that they did not know about themselves. Each of these conditions is the direct result of their lukewarm attitude.

They were wretched. The word is *talaiporos*, from the verb *tlaō*, to endure, and *poros*, a callus. They were spiritually unresponsive, as a callus causes skin to become.

They were miserable. The Greek is *eleeinos*, meaning to be pitied, pitiable.

They were poor. The word is *ptochos*, not merely poor, but poverty stricken. They were in the absolutely worst condition possible, spiritually speaking, because they had nothing of spiritual value in their lives.

They were blind. The word is *tuphlos*, normally referring to physical blindness. Physical blindness is regularly used metaphorically in Scripture, and other writings of the day, to refer to the lack of ability to understand something. This goes to the heart of the problem. The Laodiceans were unable to understand their own condition.

They were naked. The word is *gumnos*, the normal word for being naked. Interestingly, it has come into English as part of the word gymnasium, because the Greek athletes competed in the Olympic games without clothes. The Laodiceans were spiritual naked, and didn't know it. No condition is more pitiable or dangerous than that of those who are unable to see, even to the point of not seeing their own spiritual nakedness. Such a condition shows individuals as they actually are. The Laodiceans didn't know that others were correctly evaluating their spiritual condition. They could be seen as being spiritually lethargic.

Verse 18

In a series of metaphors, the Lord Jesus Christ encourages the Laodiceans to return to the Lord in order to end their abject state presented in verse 17. In an allusion to their mercantilism the Lord counsels (*sumbouleuo*) them to buy "gold refined by fire," meaning gold that is particularly valuable because of its purity. The symbolical nature of this gold is found in that they were to "buy from me," that is, from the Lord Jesus Christ. The gold, then, refers to the repudiation of their physical riches, and a realization of the availability of their spiritual wealth. Thus their spiritual poverty is contrasted with that which they need, the "refined gold" that they may become rich spiritually.

The Laodiceans needed to buy with the Lord's gold "white garments" signifying the need for spiritual purity and righteous behavior. To buy such garments was for the purpose that their previously mentioned nakedness not be continually manifest, a shameful condition. The contrast is a potent one. Laodicea was famous for its garments made of *black wool*.

To overcome the previously mentioned spiritual blindness, the Laodiceans needed to buy eye salve, which represents the spiritual remedy for overcoming that blindness (see verse 19 for the specifics of

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that remedy). According to Walvoord, “A medical school was located in Laodicea at the temple of Asclepius, which offered a special salve to heal common eye troubles of the Middle East. What they needed was not this medicine but spiritual sight.”

This is not simply a picture of those who will not see. It is a picture of those who are unable to see and comprehend spiritual truth. The condition is so very serious that it requires a spiritual eye salve to overcome. The solution to their spiritual condition is found in the next verse.

4. *Correction (3:19-20)*

Verse 19

Verse 19 expresses the remedy for the wretched, naked, blind condition of the Laodiceans. It is an allusion to Proverbs 3:12, found also in Hebrews 12:6. Christ loves them and will reprove and discipline them. There is hope for the believers in Laodicea!

Christ loves (*phileo, to have affection for*) them as a parent does for his children, and therefore reproves and disciplines them. “Reprove” is *elegcho*, bringing evidence to prove something wrong, and therefore convince them of the wrongness of their condition. “Discipline” is from *paidia*, child training, which also carries the idea of spiritual growth.

The solution to the condition of the Laodiceans is simple! “Be zealous” is the direct change the Laodiceans need. By exchanging their lukewarm lethargy for zeal, they will be able to overcome the wretched condition. Stand up and be counted! Get excited about the Lord and spiritual things! Their lukewarm attitudes need to change, and they need to repent, that is, change their mind about their current spiritual condition.

Verse 20

Christ is presented as outside the assembly at Laodicea, knocking on the door of the building in which the assembly met. His fellowship could be with any individual believer, if he would open the door to the place of assembly. But there appears to be no response. The condition is third class.

The popular idea that this verse represents the door as the unbeliever’s heart, and the Lord attempting to enter “the heart of man” through salvation cannot be sustained. *This is not a passage presenting the evangelism of the unbeliever.* The Lord will dine with the believer. To dine with someone was a cultural symbol of fellowship or spiritual sharing. The assembly at Laodicea was full of lukewarm believers, not lost unbelievers. The solution is simple. Get excited about the Lord. Let Him into the assembly, and fellowship will be restored.

Some have thought the meal here is the future “marriage feast,” but the idea is unwarranted. The picture is a current one referring to the situation *at that time* in Laodicea, where Christ is excluded from the fellowship of believers, probably because of carnality. When Christ brings the church to heaven, there will be no invitation to dine with Him. There will be no need, as the saint will be at that time in a post resurrection position and enjoying the benefits of the heavenly relationship. In no sense can Christ be seen as outside seeking to enter the marriage feast.

5. *Challenge (3:21-22)*

Verse 21

Again Christ addresses the victorious one. Like the previous reference, the victorious one does not picture a class of Christian, but all believers who will enter into the future relationship in glory, even the carnal believer in Laodicea. Unlike verse 20, verse 21 indicates a future relationship that awaits

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the coming of Christ for the believer. All Christians will be granted the authority to rule and reign with Christ.

Dr. Walvoord implies otherwise in his statement concerning verse 20, “To those who respond, Christ promises to give the right to sit with Him on His throne and share His victory” (*Bible Knowledge Commentary*). But all the true believers in Laodicea, not simply those who respond to the Lord’s knocking, will reign with Christ. To state otherwise, is to make the victorious one a special class of believer, a view which Dr. Walvoord rejects! But his statement indicates the ease with which an individual can fall into unguarded language, and *imply something that he does not believe*. Note the future tense of the verb *will give* which is consistent with the post resurrection condition being pictured.

To sit on Christ’s throne (a metaphorical throne, here, rather than an actual chair) means having governing authority. Christ’s throne which the Christian will share refers to His future millennial reign, rather than the throne on which He currently sits as sovereign King of the universe, a position which He shares with the Father.

Christ’s current throne cannot be shared by the believer, as it was the result of His personal victory in His death and resurrection. Throughout the letters to the churches, the future state of the victorious one is addressed. But here victory is also defined. Victory is that condition of coming out of the physical life, death, resurrection cycle to a particular circumstance. Just as Christ was victorious over the element of death through His resurrection, so also will the Christian share in that victory through the pretribulational resurrection and rapture of the believer. Subsequent to that event, the Christian will share Christ’s throne as Christ, in His post resurrection state, already shares the throne of His Father.

The Father’s throne which Christ shares is the throne of sovereignty over the entire creation, and is *not* the Davidic throne of the future kingdom. However, the future millennial reign includes the idea of subordinate rule. The church believer will have the authority of Christ in ruling over that aspect of the Kingdom of God that is given to him.

Verse 22

For the final time the refrain has sounded. That there were those in Laodicea who were believers, and who had the spiritual ability to hear and respond is clear from the context. Yet the seriousness of the condition is so put forward as to indicate that at least some believers did not have “an ear.” These believers were beyond hope, and evidently the corporate assembly was not able to respond. But some individuals in the church could and probably did “dine with the Lord.”

Endnotes

- ¹ G. Campbell Morgan, *The Letters of Our Lord*.
- ² Mounce's view is rather typical of those who do not take enough cognizance of the original readers.
- ³ The term "eternal state" is used variously by theologians. It is an unfortunate designation which is not found in Scripture. What most premillennial scholars mean by the phrase is the time immediately following the thousand years. However, that time seems not to be a state of eternal existence, but a state of on-going ages (the ages to come in Ephesians 2:6). Note the plural word "ages." Such a phraseology must refer to a successive periods of time, not to entering into some time of eternal duration. The phrase "eternal state" seems to make the word eternal to refer to continuing in time, which does not seem to be its meaning when referring to spiritual truth. The word eternal refers to a state outside of, or apart from, time.
- ⁴ The phrase "rapture of the church" is technically inaccurate. Individual believers are raptured, not because they belong to the church, the body of Christ, per se, but because of their salvation. While there is a relation between the two, they are distinct, and salvation is the basis for the resurrection/rapture of the believer at the end of this age. Another way to say the same thing is to state that the doctrine of the resurrection/rapture belongs to the theology of Soteriology (Salvation), and not to the theology of Ecclesiology (The Church).

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III. The Events of Daniel's Seventieth Week and Following: The Things that shall take place after these (Chapters 4-22)

SCOPE: CHAPTERS FOUR THROUGH TWENTY-TWO DEAL WITH THE FULL SCOPE OF PROPHETIC EVENTS, GOING AS FAR BACK AS THE BIRTH OF CHRIST, AND AS FAR FORWARD AS THE END OF THE MILLENNIAL STATE. A COMMON ELEMENT OF THESE CHAPTERS IS THE PRINCIPLE OF RETROSPECTION, WHERE THE AUTHOR GOES BACK AND FORTH IN TIME, OFTEN RETURNING TO PREVIOUS EVENTS TO INDICATE DIFFERENT ELEMENTS THAT WERE NOT PREVIOUSLY COVERED.

Beginning with chapter four, the book of Revelation predicts the future, not only from John's perspective on the island of Patmos, but from the perspective of believers today. While the scope of the rest of Revelation is backward in time as well as forward, the purpose of the backward look is to lay background for future events.

Those who attempt to make the predictive elements of the rest of Revelation as having taken place in the first and second centuries are doomed to failure. In fact, unless one does great violence to the normal meaning of the words, phrases, and sentences of the rest of the book, there is no correspondence in history with what the Revelation is presenting.

Furthermore, approaches that attempt to place the book in the past from the modern perspective are mired in the unimaginable despondency of *a-* and *post-* millennial thinking, which rejects the normal meaning of the language of the Old Testament in favor of an abnormal, allegorical approach.

Dr. Walvoord cogently states,

The concept that the book of Revelation beginning with 4:1 is future, from the standpoint of the twentieth century, is a broad conclusion growing out of the lack of correspondence of these prophecies to anything that has been fulfilled.¹

Later on the same page he says,

A normal interpretation of this section which understands these prophecies as literal events would require that they be viewed as future.²

This is the only acceptable approach for the believer who is Spirit-filled. The future view begins with a vision of the throne room of God, which vision takes the apostle into the far future from John's time. For us today, of course, it is not as far in the future as it was then, yet we must be careful to not read into the rest of the book "signs of the times" by which we may conclude the coming of the Lord for the resurrection of the believer today is *required* to be soon. It could be, of course, and we want it to be, but none of the events in the Bible present information for us today that will give us a clue as to how soon that event will occur.

Chapters 4 and 5 present a series of scenes that clearly take place in heaven. The question arises, when do these events take place in relationship to events such as the rapture and the beginning of Daniel's Seventieth Week. Most pre-tribulational commentators, when they actually address the question, believe that these events are taking place during the first three and one half years of the Seventieth Week. That is, they take place in heaven in parallel with the first half of the tribulation on earth.

However, a better understanding is that these events take place after the resurrection/rapture, but before the signing of the seven year covenant by the Roman prince described in Daniel 9:24-27. The reasoning is straightforward. The resurrection/rapture is not predicted in the Hebrew Bible, nor in the Gospels. It is a "mystery" event (1 Corinthians 15:52ff). It is, therefore, immanent, and no prophecy

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can intervene between now and the resurrection/rapture. But the prediction of Daniel's 70 weeks deals with the Roman Empire. Virtually all premillennialists hold that the Roman Empire will be revived in the form of a ten-king federation sometime before the beginning of the Seventieth Week of Daniel. But this revival cannot be seen or understood to have happened prior to the rapture. Therefore, the rapture must occur, followed by a time of development of the ten-king Revived Roman Empire, followed by the beginning of the tribulation, that is, the Seventieth Week of Daniel.³

This "gap" between the rapture and the beginning of the tribulation appears to be the time period during which the visions of Revelation 4 and 5 take place, and the first event in the actual tribulation is presented in Revelation 6.

Chapter Four

A. The Throne Room (4:1-11)

- 1 After these things I saw, and behold, a door opened in heaven, and the first voice that I heard, a voice as of a trumpet speaking with me, one saying, Come up here, and I will show you the things which must come to pass afterward.
- 2-3 Immediately I was in the spirit, and behold, there was a throne set in heaven, and one sitting upon the throne, ³ and the one who sat was to look upon like a jasper stone and a sardius, and there was a rainbow round about the throne, like an emerald to look upon.
- 4 And round about the throne were twenty-four thrones, and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, arrayed in white garments, and on their heads crowns of gold.
- 5a And out of the throne proceed lightnings and voices and thunders.
- 5b-6 And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God, ⁶ and before the throne, as it were a sea of glass like a crystal, and in the middle of the throne, and round about the throne, four living creatures full of eyes before and behind.
- 7 And the first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face as of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle.
- 8 And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes round about and within, and they have no rest day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty *One*, who was and who is and who is to come.
- 9-11 And when the living creatures shall give glory and honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne, to him who lives for ever and ever, ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders shall fall down before him who sits on the throne, and shall worship him who lives for ever and ever, and shall cast their crowns before the throne, saying, ¹¹ Worthy are you, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power, because you created all things, and because of your desire they are, and were created.

1. The Throne of God (4:1-3)

Verse 1

Verse one shows that this is a future continuation of the vision that started in chapter 1. Consider the following elements:

1. *After these things* includes the command to write the letters to the 7 churches (1:20), as well as all the vision material he experienced for each of the assemblies. Notice that at this point John emphasizes the visual aspect of his experience with the words *I saw*, and then the auditory aspect of his experience with the words *I heard*. The past tense of the verbs shows that John is looking back to his auditory and visual experiences at the later time when he wrote the book.

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2. In verse 1, John states that he saw a door, the entry way into heaven. The perspective is one looking up from the earth to heaven. Not until verse 2 does John actually, in his visionary state, *go up* and *enter* the throne room.
3. John is invited to come up from the earth into heaven. The *voice like a trumpet* is a reference to the voice of the Lord in 1:10. The ascended Christ was speaking with John directly out of heaven, and giving him an invitation to “come up here.”
4. *I will show you things which must take place after this* refers back to the similar statement in 1:19. The Lord Jesus is the one doing the “showing” and the “the things which must come to pass afterward” refer to future events leading up to His second coming. Again, we see the word *must* indicating the certainty of the future as Christ lays it out for John.

Verse 2

As in 1:10, the phrase *in the spirit* has been interpreted two ways:

1. The Spirit refers to the Holy Spirit, and John was under His specific influence;
2. The phrase “in spirit” (without the article) refers to a visionary state of mind that indicates that John was not in heaven *physically*. This is consistent with the way Paul uses the same phrase in 1 Corinthians 5:3.

We conclude that the second meaning is preferred for the following reasons:

1. Since *I was in the spirit* has already occurred with exactly the same Greek wording, we must conclude John is expressing the same truth that he presented in 1:10. Clearly *in the spirit* is a state that comes and goes. He says “Immediately I was in the spirit” as though he were previously not in the spirit. The Greek word *was* could be translated “came to be,” as it is not *eimi*, but *ginomai*.⁴
2. If the statement in 1:10 indicated a semi-permanent state that continued throughout John’s experiences in receiving the revelation, the repetition of the phrase would not be needed here. The phrase *in the Spirit*, rather than *was in the Spirit* is used in 17:3 and 21:10, though those statements do not indicate that he came to be in the Spirit as it seems to here and in 1:10.
3. The idea seems to be that in order to actually enter the throne room of God, John had to be *in the spirit*. His subsequent vision of God the Father helps interpret the meaning of this phrase. God is represented symbolically, not as He actually is. This is consistent with the fact that no man has ever seen God, and this includes John in this vision. Therefore, *in the spirit* appears to mean that John is in an altered state of consciousness, a visionary state, where things appear to him that are real, but the actual substance is not seen. In other words, John is in a state in which Christ provides him with visual and auditory information, some of which is highly symbolical, and some of which is to be taken non-symbolically.

4. *In the spirit*, then, begins a new stage in the revelatory process. Tenney says,

The opening of the fourth chapter of Revelation introduces the second vision describing the process of world judgment. It initiates a second division in the structure of the book which can be established by three criteria: a change of scene, a change of time, and the recurrence of the phrase, “in the Spirit.... The phrase “in the Spirit” again indicated that a different experience or scene had begun, separating the context that follows from that which precedes, and opening a new unit of the apocalyptic panorama. (Merrill C. Tenny, *Interpreting Revelation*, pg. 70)

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In his vision, John sees a throne. There is probably not a literal chair in heaven upon which God the Father sits, as He is non-corporeal, and has no need of physical accouterments. However, John sees an actual throne in his vision. Why? The word throne came to refer by metonymy to the right and power to rule. It is clear from chapter 5 (q. v.) that the one sitting on the throne is God the Father, not the Lord Jesus Christ. This throne, then, is not the throne of the Davidic kingdom, upon which the Lord Jesus Christ will sit at the beginning of the millennial state. It is the throne of God's universal rule over creation, and as such is shared by the Son (3:21).

Verse 3

Verse 3 continues the sentence from verse 2. John uses a set of similes to describe the one who sat. This is God the Father rather than the Son. The emphasis seems to be on the color and brightness of the gemstones jasper and sardius, rather than their hardness or their value. God, therefore, is presented in colors similar to the precious stones. The jasper, rather than being a gem stone, was silica, an opaque material of various colors, while the sardius was *red*, with variations through *yellow*, yellow being the more common. In fact, *yellow* sardius was the most common gemstone of ancient times. However, the red was more valuable, and is probably what is meant here. The "color" emphasis is confirmed by the comparison of the rainbow around the throne as being like an emerald.

Interestingly, the jasper mentioned in chapter 21:11 (q. v.) is said to be "clear like crystal" in many translations. If the jasper there is a clear stone, some think it is possibly a diamond. However, the translation "clear" is uncertain at best, and the translation is better "like a crystal" than "clear as crystal." See comments on 21:11.

Stones are used in Exodus 28:17ff to represent the 12 tribes of Israel. Jasper was the first stone and represented *Reuben*, the firstborn. The sardine or sardius was the last stone and represented Benjamin, the youngest of the twelve. It is possible then that these two stones represent Israel as a nation, though it is uncertain whether the Gentiles in the Asian churches would have made this association. Since Israel is not in heaven at the time of the vision in Revelation four, it can only be represented indirectly in a heavenly vision. Contrast this with the twenty-four elders, who are before the throne in heaven.

Some believe the rainbow to represent *the covenant of God*, which seems highly unlikely. In the Old Testament the rainbow related to the end of the Noahic flood and the promise by God there, not to the Mosaic or New Covenants. More likely, it is simply to enhance the color motif, and if related back to the period of Noah, to emphasize God's faithfulness.

But the question remains, why is God represented so? If the two stones represent the nation Israel, as some think, then the answer is that God is being presented in His relationship to His chosen people. However, the emphasis on color suggests that God is presented in His magnificence and desirability, which seems to me to be more likely.

2. *The Twenty-four Elders (4:4-5a)*

Verse 4

Who are the twenty-four elders? Three major views have been promoted:

1. *They represent all saints of all ages.* This view is held by many who reject the futurist interpretation of the book, though some futurists also hold it. However, chronologically speaking, this seems impossible for two reasons.
 - a. The resurrection of Israel is not until much later in the book, where it is dealt with under the heading of the first resurrection in Revelation 20.

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- b. Furthermore, there is no indication in Scripture that believers of the Old Testament find their intermediate residence to be in heaven.
2. *They represent the church.* This view is held mainly by premillennialists who are pretribulationist. The idea is that the church will be taken to heaven before the beginning of Chapter 4, and the twenty-four elders represent the resurrected body of Christ. As we shall see, this view is undoubtedly the correct one, though the terminology is suspect.
3. *They represent angels.* This is usually held by those who make little or no distinction between types of spirit beings.

While many modern interpreters identify the twenty-four elders with angels, or spirit beings in general, this is an untenable interpretation for the following reasons:

1. In 5:11 the twenty-four elders are contrasted with angels, or spirit beings:
And I saw, and I heard a voice of many angels round about the throne and the living beings and the elders...
2. The twenty-four elders wear golden crowns (*stephanos*), the crown of a victor. These are best understood to be the crown of life mentioned in 2:10, and probably referenced in 3:11. Nowhere are angels said to get such rewards.
3. The elders are clothed in white robes, which earlier in the book were worn by church saints rather than angels.
4. This vision indicates the short period after the resurrection/rapture of the believer and prior to the actual beginning of the tribulation, which starts in chapter 7. In verse 5 the judgment of God is proceeding from the throne. It has yet to reach the earth, at least from John's vantage point.
5. The twenty-four elders are represented in a ruling position. They are seated on thrones, which would be singularly inappropriate for spirit beings. But in the letters to the seven assemblies, the victorious ones are represented as ruling with Christ (2:26-28), and sitting with Him on His throne (3:21). The best understanding is that these seats of authority indicate the believer of this age will have a position of rulership.
6. Elders are a *perfect representation* for the believers of this age. The number 24 is used in the Old Testament to refer to a representative body (1 Chronicles 24, where 24 groups represented the priesthood of Israel). The only representative bodies that elders could appropriately represent are Israel or the today's believers. However, Israel is not a heavenly body, and is not in heaven during the tribulation, or any other time. The elders are mentioned 12 times in Revelation, and each appearance is set in heaven, and is consistent with the identification of them with the resurrected believers of this age.
7. In the "new song" of chapter 5 the twenty-four elders are included with the redeemed, therefore, they cannot be angels. (There is a textual problem here. The Majority Text has the song read "us" whereas the critical text leaves out the word "us").

Verse 5a

The throne in this statement refers back to the single throne upon which God the Father is seated in verse 2, not to one of the twenty-four thrones upon which the elders sit. Thunder and lightning coming from the throne are taken by most expositors to represent judgment. The word *voices* simply means noises in this context. Walvoord says,

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“They are similar to the thunders, lightnings and voice of the trumpet which mark the giving of the law in Exodus 19:16 and are a fitting preliminary to the awful judgments which are to follow the great tribulation as God deals with the earth in righteousness.” (*Revelation*, page 108)

John does not yet see the *application* of God’s judgment on the earth. This reference is to the heavenly source of the judgment. It’s probable that chapters 4-6 refer primarily to the gap after the resurrection/rapture and leading up to the Seventieth Week.⁵ If that is the case, the time of God’s wrath will shortly begin on earth.

There is a pernicious view that the church does not enter heaven until the mid-tribulation period. Another form of this view is called the pre-wrath rapture view, which sets the rapture approximately three quarters through the tribulation period. However, the only consistent view of the twenty-four elders is that they represent the church in heaven, and in this passage, they are seen in heaven before the 70th week begins.

3. *The Lamps, Spirits and Living Living Beings (4:5b-8)*

Verse 5b

The seven Spirits of God, which we have decided refer to the Holy Spirit in His perfection, are here represented by the seven lamps of 5b. These lamps are *not* the lampstands that represented the seven churches in Asia, which were viewed during the earthly part of this vision. Rather, they are associated with the throne in heaven.

Verse 6

The “sea of glass, like crystal” seems to be a space before the throne that separates God and His attendants from the rest of the heavenly crowd. Those familiar with the Old Testament immediately think of the laver or “sea” that stood before the entrance to the Holy Place in the tabernacle and temple. While the word crystal can refer to ice, which is opaque, that does not seem to be the meaning here. The comparison of this space is to “rock crystal” which is transparent. The visual effect must have been stunning, provoking awe in the viewer. The probable purpose for this stretch like crystal is that it separates the holy God and His throne from the rest of the elements of the vision. Only those directly associated with God are close to the throne, the four living beings. The sea of glass is mentioned again in 15:2.

Who are the four living beings? Several interpretations have been posited, but they assume that these living beings are symbolic rather than literal. (Even Walvoord tends to the idea that they represent attributes or qualities of God. See *Revelation*, pg. 109.) However, there is no contextual reason to suppose that the representation is not of living individuals.

These beings are most likely seraphim. Because of their four kinds of faces, they are often taken to be cherubim. However, their appearance and activity is strikingly like the seraphim in Isaiah 6:1-4, both here and in 15:7. If so, they are the spirit-being servants of God in heaven, and probably never leave there, unlike the cherubim, who are active even on earth. As we shall see later, the comparison to the seraphim of Isaiah 6 is reinforced in verse 8.

Notice that the beings are “in the middle of the throne.” This is interpreted in several ways. Some say it means the beings were *under the throne*, as though the throne was sitting on them (Barnes). Others think that they were around the throne (JFB), and yet others that they were before the throne (ATR). One man, W. B. Johnson, even switches the meaning. He says that the throne was in their midst (*The People’s New Testament*), which seems similar to the view of JFB.

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The simplest explanation is that the beings were associated with the throne in such a way that *their physical proximity to it was undeniable*. Perhaps in his vision, John saw them intermingled with the throne itself. The point is clear, however. These are the spirit-beings that are most closely associated with God in His ruling capacity. They do His bidding as the ruler of the universe within the throne-room itself.

The eyes of the beings see all that happens in the throne-room. They are observant, and can be taken as ones who are ready to do God's bidding immediately without question (see comments on verse 8).

Verse 7

The specific distinguishing characteristics of the beings are provided in verse 7 through a series of *similes*. Some think that each being represents a picture of Christ and align their views with the supposed identification of the four gospels as being represented by three animals plus man.

Dr. McGee falls into this trap, and attempts to explain the symbolism of each likeness (*Revelation, Volume I*, pgs 135,136.). For instance, he makes the similarity to a lion represent Matthew's gospel, because the lion symbolizes kingship. Forget that Satan is also represented metaphorically by a lion, or that all four gospels present the kingship of Christ, not just Matthew. Sometimes the lion represents Judah (*Revelation 5:5*, for instance), and Judah is the tribe of the king, and therefore, some say, the lion must represent the gospel of Matthew in which the kingship of Christ is emphasized. Ignore the fact that the word lion does not occur in the gospel of Matthew, nor in any of the gospels, for that matter (the first occurrence of the word is 2 Timothy 4:17). We must have our symbolism, and it must mean what we want it to mean, otherwise, we cannot teach the significance of this passage. This view is the result of abandoning literal interpretation, to which Dr. McGee says he holds.

The approach is pure folly, as it reads into the text an idea that cannot be sustained by the propositions of Scripture. The Bible does not, ever, represent the four gospels in this way. This is a device made up by men who enjoy a mystical turn of mind. It over-simplifies, and therefore misrepresents, the truths that each of the gospels teach.

Furthermore, this is a dangerous approach to Scripture. It takes an assumption of symbolism and identifies it with doctrinal fidelity. Dr. McGee, to his credit, does not seem to do that, as he mentions that not all agree with his view. But the method he uses to arrive at such a view is specious, and based on no normal interpretive procedure.

Alford rejects this view citing the fact that many commentators disagree as to which living creature represents which Gospel. There is no contextual reason to carry this line of supposition any further.

In fact, we are not told why the spirit beings are compared to four different forms. The one thing that the four forms have in common is that they look similar to created beings, specifically animals. It is at least as legitimate to say that they are symbolical of the act of God's creating life as anything else. Perhaps they represent the creation as a whole. ***We simply do not know for certain.***

Verse 8

This verse continues the discussion of the living beings, and we have a close similarity to Isaiah 6. Each being had six wings, though these wings do not appear to be primarily for flight. The symbolic representation seems to be of deference to and service for God, which the wings may represent. Isaiah 6:2 states,

Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. (NKJV)

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The multitudinous eyes indicate the alertness of these beings, as befitting spirit-being servants of God. Nothing happens in the throne-room of which they are unaware. They are ready to move at a moment's notice.⁶

These spirit beings do not rest from stating God's holiness. That is not to say that they are ceaselessly repeating the refrain "Holy, holy, holy," etc. How often the refrain is repeated is unsaid, but verse 9 indicates that there are breaks in the repetition. Again we have a striking resemblance to Isaiah 6:3, which confirms the idea that the seraphim are throne-room attendants to God:

And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory! (NKJV)

The refrain itself has three distinct emphases:

1. The holiness of God, stated three times for emphasis. God is represented by the seraphim as distinct, separated from anything unlike Himself, the primary meaning of "holy."
2. God's omnipotence as expressed in "the Lord God, the Almighty (*pankrator*)."⁷ The word "almighty" has the article, indicating that it is a substantival adjective. It could be translated "the Almighty One." It indicates that God is the one who is without comparison in His might.
3. John presents God's eternal nature in the previously expressed three-fold statement, "Who was and is and is to come." A somewhat more accurate translation (though awkward in English) is, "the One who was, and the One who is being, and the One who is coming." Note that a similar phrase is used in Revelation 1:4 and 1:8, though with the first two elements reversed. See the notes on 1:4 for a discussion of the meaning of this honorific of God the Father.

4. *The Worship of God (4:9-11)*

Verse 9

While verse 8 indicates the individual distinction and general description of each creature, verse 9 indicates the corporate activity of all the beings.

The expression of the beings is indicated as giving glory, honor, and thanks to God. These are not acts of worship, per se, and the beings are not there to worship God, but to cause others to do so, in this case, the twenty-four elders. In Scripture, worship of God is not primarily verbal, but active, through physical obeisance and priestly sacrifice. Verse 9 introduces the actual worship which takes place in verse 10.

Verse 10

Verse 10 indicates the response of the twenty-four elders to the activity of the living beings in verse 9. Obeisance before the one who sits upon the throne is the act of true worship. The statement "and shall worship" indicates the significance of the twenty-four elder's falling down before God. The casting of the crowns is a worshipful response. The crowns seem to indicate the rewards for service given to the believers. They are returned to God as His just due, as the gracious One who made the rewards possible in the first place.

The word worship (*proskuneo*) occurs some 60 times in the New Testament, and is used 24 times in *The Revelation*. The first time is in 3:9, and refers to human obeisance to humans, not worship of God. The rest of the time it refers to legitimate or illegitimate worship of God, demons, the dragon, the beast and his image.

Before Christ's earthly ministry, worship was limited. Before the law, the priest who led worship seems to have been the head of the household or clan.

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Later under the law, God designated a priesthood from the tribe of Levi and the house of Aaron. True worship then became limited to meeting with God through the priests at the tabernacle, and later the temple. Only Aaronic priests could offer legitimate sacrifices of worship to God. But that changed with Christ's earthly ministry.

Christ personally explained the nature of worship for Gentiles in John 4:20-24. In doing so, He explained the nature of true *proskuneo* type worship. Beginning historically at that time, it was no longer required to worship solely in Jerusalem. This does not mean that future Jerusalem based worship is not legitimate for the Jews. But it is saying that the Jews and Gentiles will no longer be required to worship solely in the correct geographical place. This has implications not only for the Jews and Gentiles, but also for the body of Christ. For a fuller discussion of this topic, see the author's notes on John's Gospel.

Here in Revelation 4:10 we see the church worshiping God in heaven after the rapture, not on the earth. True *proskuneo* type worship is possible because the location is no longer geographical. The church will be able to worship in prostration before God because they are in His presence. In addition, sacrifice is regularly viewed as an act of worship. Thus we have the twenty-four elders casting their crowns before the throne.

Verse 11

Verse 11, which continues the worship indicated in verse 10, consists of an act of praise, which the writer to the Hebrews considers a spiritual sacrifice (Hebrews 13:15). Praise consists of "confessing His name," that is, agreeing with God concerning His "name" or reputation. Certainly Rev 4:11 is a wonderful example of such confession.

The twenty-four elders praise "our Lord and our God," referring to God the Father, as being worthy to receive three things:

1. Glory, which refers to the act of glorification of God by the believer. To glorify God means to accurately ascribe to Him His perfections, that is, to describe Him as He actually is. And because He is Who He is, He has glory. Once a person states the truths about God's perfections, he has praised God. The Apostle Paul refers to this as "the praise of His glory" (Ephesians 1:12, 14).
2. Honor, which refers to the holding God in highest esteem by the believer. One is honored when, first, He is deemed worthy of respect for his character and accomplishments, and second, when such respect is actually given to Him.
3. Power, which refers to ascribing to God by the believer the inherent power which He already has.

The reason that God is worthy is because he created all things. God the Creator is one of the major themes of Scripture, particularly in the Hebrew Bible. His act of creation is viewed as proof of His on-going activity. God is not passive, but active. Furthermore, the reason God created was because of His desire. Creation came out of the desirous will of God.

Endnotes

- ¹ Walvoord, *Revelation*, Page 101
- ² *ibid.*
- ³ Dr. Walvoord, in his work *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* reflects this position very handily on a chart on page 249.
- ⁴ We must not make too much of this fact. Εἶμι does not have a past tense in an aorist form, but uses the imperfect exclusively. The imperfect would be inappropriate in this place, as it implies a continual state in the past. When the simple aorist for the state-of-being concept is needed, γινομαι is regularly used, and means “was” rather than “became.” The most we can say is that γινομαι may mean “came to be” in this context.
- ⁵ See the author’s comments on Daniel 9, where the gap between the rapture of the church and the beginning of Daniel’s Seventieth Week is discussed in detail.
- ⁶ Remember that both John and Isaiah were experiencing visions. Spirit beings, which is what seraphim are, have no physical bodies or appearance. The description is purely symbolic. Spirit being certainly need no wings to fly.

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B. The Sealed Scroll (5:1-14)

- 1 And I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a book written within and on the back, close sealed with seven seals.
- 2 And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a great voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose its seals?
- 3 And no one in the heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book, or to view it.
- 4 And I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open the book, or to view it.
- 5 And one of the elders says to me, Weep not, behold, the Lion, the one of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, gained victory to open the book and its seven seals.
- 6 And I saw in the middle of the throne and of the four living beings, and in the middle of the elders, a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, having seven horns, and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth.
- 7 And he came, and he took it out of the right hand of the one who sat on the throne.
- 8 And when he had taken the book, the four living beings and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.
- 9-10 And they sing a new song, saying, Worthy are you to take the book, and to open its seals, because you were slain, and purchased us for God with your blood of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, 10 and made them to our God a kingdom and priests, and they shall reign upon earth.
- 11-12 And I saw, and I heard a voice of many angels round about the throne and the living beings and the elders, and the number of them was ten thousand of ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a great voice, Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might and honor, and glory, and blessing.
- 13 And every created thing which is in the heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and on the sea, and all things are in them, heard I saying, To him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be the blessing, and the honor, and the glory, and the dominion, for ever and ever.
- 14 And the four living beings said, Amen. And the elders fell down and worshiped.

This is a continuation of the heavenly scene that occurs before the beginning of Daniel's 70th week commences. It introduces the circumstances that begin to unfold the period of tribulation.

1. The Vision of the Lamb (5:1-7)

Verse 1

This is a continuation of the heavenly scene that occurs before the beginning of Daniel's 70th week commences.

What is the significance of the sealed Scroll?

The book (*biblion*) is a scroll that includes all the material from Revelation 6-22. The fact that it is written "within and on the back," that is, on both sides, was unusual, especially if it were papyrus. The papyrus reed scroll was designed only to be written on one side, which was rolled inside the scroll. The outside was difficult to write on because it still had the rough fibers of the papyrus plant on its surface. Also, in order to maintain the privacy of the writing, papyrus was written only on the inside of the roll.

It is possible, however, that the scroll mentioned here was actually made of animal skin, usually sheep or goat. In the second century B.C. men in Pergamos developed the animal skin as a scroll. This is the same as the city of Pergamos mentioned as one of the seven assemblies in Asia. According to *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, "This new substance was named 'parchment' in honor of its origin, and almost displaced papyrus in many regions." Still, parchment scrolls were generally written only on the inside.

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It is even possible that the scroll was written on leather. Writing on leather went back hundreds of years, and was still in use occasionally in New Testament times. The Dead Sea Scrolls were generally written on leather. One famous exception was the “copper scroll.” This scroll is written on metal: copper mixed with about 1% tin. Unlike the others, it is not a literary work, but contains a listing of locations at which various items of gold and silver are buried or hidden. None have ever been found.

Sometimes the outside of a scroll was written on because something had been omitted, but that is unlikely here. Another reason for writing on the back of a scroll was because the amount of information was too large for only one side. Therefore, the reason the scroll of Revelation 5 was written on both sides was probably because of the completeness and importance of the information included.

The phrase “in the right hand” in Greek is actually “*upon the right hand.*” Most likely this means that it sat in the palm of an open hand, as though being offered to someone. The *one offering the scroll* is God the Father “who sat upon the throne,” the *receiver of the scroll* is God the Son (verses 6 & 7). We have here an anthropomorphism. God is described in John’s vision as though He were a human being who has a right hand.

Some have thought that the seven seals refer to a last will and testament because it was required by Roman law that such a document have seven seals. A more plausible idea is that the scroll is an epistle from the Father to the Son indicating information that was kept in the Father’s mind and allowed only to be read by the Son. In the case of this set of seals, each makes it incumbent on the receiver to read the letter one section at a time. The procedure seems to have been that when the scroll was rolled, seals were placed periodically, which required the reader to break the seals one-by-one as he came to them. Only the one to whom it was addressed was “worthy” to break the seal.

We must not take the significance of the number seven too far. *It probably signifies completeness, an analogy to the seven days of creation.* Some numerologists have attempted a deeper meaning, but such an attempt is futile. Different individuals come up with different meanings, and there is no definite Scriptural symbology other than the one mentioned. Typical of an unacceptable numerological approach is that of JFB, who say, “The number *seven* (divided into four, the world-wide number, and three, the divine) abounds in Revelation and expresses *completeness.*”

Verse 2

This statement indicates the importance of this event. Some think the strong angel is perhaps *Gabriel*, whose name means “*strength of God,*” though there is no compelling evidence to support this view. The word strong here is *ischuros*, meaning an endowment of strength, not inherent power, which seems to be true of Gabriel. He is “proclaiming” (making a declarative statement) based on the authority of the one who sent him. He is acting, therefore, as a herald, calling out with a “great voice,” that is, with a loud voice. The word “great” is one of John’s favorite words in the Revelation. He uses it 82 times throughout the book. Approximately 20 times it is used with the word “voice,” the first being in 1:10 and the last in 21:3. The word “voice” can also be translated “noise” and is used 55 times in the Revelation.

The strong angel’s question is significant. Seals were used on documents to limit the right of opening them to one person, the addressee. The word “worthy” is not specifically referring to the high character of Christ, as some have supposed. Rather it refers to His right, or authority, to open the scroll. He is the only legitimate recipient. Only He can “loose its seals” one at a time.

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The significance of the act of passing of the book from the Father to the Son is of primary importance here. The rest of the book of Revelation is contained in the seven seals, and the majority of it is found in the seventh seal alone. *The purpose of this exchange from Father to Son is to express the flow of revelation. It was evidently determined in the decree how the prophetic information would be presented.* In Christ's deity, as equally omniscient with the Father, He already knew these things. But within His humanity, He had voluntarily limited His access to certain prophetic truths. It is this distinction between Christ's human and divine that is being emphasized here. Specifically, He is being portrayed as the Lamb of God.

Verse 3

Here we have presented the exclusivity of the ability to open and view the scroll. No one in three locations was able to open the scroll. This refers to the non-divine inhabitants of creation in heaven, on the earth, and under the earth. Two elements are barred to those who are not worthy: (1) none were able to open the scroll, that is to say, they could not break the seals, and (2) as a result, they were unable to view the book, which precluded their reading it.

Verse 4

The word "wept" is in the imperfect tense, used here to indicate on-going weeping, that is, *he kept on weeping*. This is intensified by the word "much." John was emotionally out of control because no one was found who was worthy to open the book, or to view it. John's weeping is the result of the fact that he understood the *importance* of the scroll. It needed to be opened and read, and to not do so was intolerable to him. But one of the elders came to his aid.

Verse 5

Christ is like a Lion in His messianic relationships, as well as in His redemptive relationships. These two human positions coalesce in Christ after the church has been raptured. Today we see Christ primarily as redeemer, not as messiah. But at that future time presented here, both relationships will be emphasized.

"One of the elders" is rightly "one from among the elders." No particular reason is stated for one elder as the one who comes to John's aid over another. The best understanding is that one elder speaks for the group as a literary convenience. It is the resurrected and raptured church that is speaking. The significance of the event is that the church understands who is worthy to open and read the scroll, which is understandable in light of their relationship to Christ.

The phraseology of the elder indicates his understanding of the messianic truth of the Old Testament Scriptures. He refers to both Genesis 49 and Isaiah 11 in his statement. Both are strong messianic references.

"The Lion of the tribe of Judah" is a literary allusion to Genesis 49:8-10:

8 **Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise;**

Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;

Your father's children shall bow down before you.

9 **Judah is a lion's whelp;**

From the prey, my son, you have gone up.

He bows down, he lies down as a lion;

And as a lion, who shall rouse him?

10 **The scepter shall not depart from Judah,**

Nor a lawgiver from between his feet,

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Until Shiloh comes;

And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.

This passage indicates the genetic relationship of Messiah to Israel, specifically, that He is a member of the tribe of Judah. Genesis 49 presents Jacob at the end of life communicating his blessings to his twelve sons. After disposing of Reuben, the firstborn, and Simeon and Levi, both full brothers to Reuben, Jacob addresses Judah, also a full brother to Reuben. Along with Issachar and Zebulun, they are all children of Leah.

The predictive element in Jacob's final blessing to his sons is somewhat startling. It is Judah who received the ultimate blessing of rule and leadership. It was Judah who was compared to a "lion's whelp" (Genesis 49:9). The reference is undoubtedly to the strength and ferocity of the lion. By extension, the elder in the Revelation applies this to the Lord Jesus Christ, the ultimate descendent of Judah, in His ascended state. Because He is the fulfillment of the prediction of verse 10, Christ is worthy to open the scroll. The Lord, who is later viewed as a lamb slain, is not being presented as the Savior in this statement, but as the Messiah of Israel in fulfillment of the predictions of the Hebrew Scriptures, and the scroll therefore is Messianic in its content.

Genesis 49:10 contains four elements concerning Judah and the coming Messiah.

1. Judah's rule (scepter, the staff of a ruler) will be permanent and perpetual (will not depart from Judah).
2. A lawgiver will not depart from between Judah's feet. This cannot be referring to Moses, the lawgiver, as he was long dead, and was of the tribe of Levi. The word "lawgiver" is actually "ruler's staff" and refers to the future Messianic reign wherein a new law (perhaps a predictive reference to the new covenant of Jeremiah 31) will be instituted in the future earthly kingdom.
3. There is great confusion and disagreement between scholars as to the meaning of the word Shiloh. In the translation the Shiloh is used as though the word were a title or a name, and there is a place name from the same root, first found in Joshua 18:1, and mentioned 32 times. But technically the word in Genesis 49:10 is not the noun Shiloh. Rather it is a clausal statement meaning "whose it is" referring back to the scepter. The statement properly means "until the one whose it (the scepter) is comes." It is a prediction of the coming ruler from the tribe of Judah, not a simple name or title.
4. The one to whom the scepter belongs will command the obedience of the people. The "people" are the descendants of Jacob, those who today we call Israelites. That the Messiah's authority will extend beyond Israel is true, but that rule is not emphasized here. Rather, His direct rule over the people of Israel is presented.

The elder also refers to Christ as related to David.

"The Root of David" is a reference to Isaiah 11:1:

**There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse,
And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.**

Isaiah 11 is one of the most prominent messianic chapters in the Scriptures. Verse one identifies the qualities of the Messiah, beginning with the fact that he is to be of the family of Jesse, the father of David.

1. An individual shall come forth as a "Rod from the stem of Jesse." The word "stem" rightly refers to a stump of a fallen tree. The word "rod" refers to a sprig or twig that comes from that stump. The emphasis seems to be on the humble origins of the individual. Until Jesse's son David was

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anointed king, that family was little known in Israel. They were, apparently, shepherders to the south of Jerusalem, at an insignificant location that was called “the house of bread” or in Hebrew “Bethlehem.”

2. The analogy of the tree stump is carried on, but raised to a new height. Now the one who is coming is a branch, not from the stump, but from the roots themselves. A better translation of the second clause of Isaiah 11:1 is “and a branch shall grow from his (Jesse’s) roots to bear fruit.” The NKJV translation loses sight of the actual force of the statement. The individual is more than a rod from the stem of Jesse, He is now a fruit bearing branch that is firmly rooted.

The elder uses the phrase “The root of David,” which is a *literary allusion* to Isaiah 11:1. The meaning is certainly that Messiah, Jesus Christ, is the physical fulfillment of David’s relationship to Jesse. It is not sufficient to limit the meaning of Isaiah 11 to David. It must be extended to David’s greater son, the Messiah of Israel.

Verse 6

This statement speaks of the *importance* of the Lamb, indicated by the phrase “in the middle”. The Lamb is the *central figure* in this visual montage that includes the throne, the four living beings, and the twenty-four elders. Christ as a lamb in this passage refers not to the Levitical sacrificial lamb, but to the same kind of lamb as the *passover lamb*. Just as the passover lamb was the basis for the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, Christ is viewed as the deliverer of Israel from the Gentile world domination as Messiah.

This view is confirmed by the fact that the word “lamb” is not the normal one in the New Testament (*arnion*), but a diminutive of *amnos*, which is found only in Luke 10:3 in its *non-diminutive* form. This diminutive form, meaning a small lamb, is found only in John’s writings some 30 times, once in John’s gospel (21:15), and the rest here in Revelation, of which this is the first of some twenty-nine uses.

This is a unique lamb indeed! In 5:7 He is found worthy to receive and open the scroll. He is worshiped as God in 5:8. In 5:12, 13, the lamb receives adoration in the same way and to the same extent that God the Father does. In 6:16 He is represented as a wrathful lamb. In Revelation 7:9-17 the Lamb is represented as the Savior of those who are slain during the tribulation period. In 12:11 He is presented as the deliverer of Israel and the one who establishes the earthly kingdom. We could go on, but these examples show the unique character of the lamb as presented in the Revelation.

The *significance* of the Lamb is indicated by the phrase “as though it had been slain,” a clear reference to the death of Christ. Taken together with the fact that the Lamb is standing (see below) we must conclude that the phrase must refer to His death, not for the sins of mankind, but in fulfillment of His messianic program. A review of Scripture shows that the death of Christ has several applications:

1. The mind of the believer generally goes to idea of Christ’s death for the sins of mankind. However, two other major applications of Christ’s death are seen in Scripture.
2. Christ is seen as dying in fulfillment of His rejection as the Messiah of Israel. Christ’s earthly ministry, including His suffering, was to save His people Israel from their sins in a unique way. Israel was removed from the land of promise, and the death of Christ is the basis for their return to that land. It will not be until Israel, true Israel, believes on Christ’s person and work that they can be returned to the land.

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3. Christ death is seen in the epistles of Paul as the basis for the positional truth concerning the Christian life (Romans 6:1-3). See Romans 6 notes for a complete discussion of this truth.

Therefore, it is clearly best to understand Christ as a lamb slain from the perspective of His deliverance of Israel as their Messiah. As such He represents the same kind of lamb slain as the passover lamb of Exodus rather than the later Levitical lamb of the law.

The *position* of the Lamb is indicated by the verb “standing.” This representation of the Lord in heaven is unique. From the perspective of Christ’s death for the sins of mankind, Jesus is seated, not standing. As seated, the Lord is showing that the salvation work is completed. As standing, the Lord shows that He is currently active. (Stephen saw Christ standing, and therefore active in Acts 7:56.) Therefore, this is not a representation of Christ as Savior, but as the deliverer of Israel at the beginning of the Seventieth Week of Daniel. He will be the divine actor throughout the rest of the book of Revelation.

The *appearance* of the Lamb is indicated by the phrases “seven horns” and “seven eyes.” The significance of the seven eyes is stated. They represent the seven spirits who are sent forth into all the earth. Hence, we see the eyes represent the *Holy Spirit* in His earthly ministry, though not during the present age. Rather, the *Spirit* is sent forth during Daniel’s Seventieth Week to perform whatever work the Lamb has for Him to do.

The significance of the seven horns is not identified in the immediate context. Virtually all scholars agree that horns are representative of power and authority, particularly over the earth. Dr. Barnes’ comments on this verse are typical. He says the horns are:

Emblems of authority and power - for the horn is a symbol of power and dominion. Compare Deu 33:17; 1Ki 22:11; Jer 48:25; Zec 1:18; Dan 7:24. The propriety of this symbol is laid in the fact that the strength of an animal is in the horn, and that it is by this that he obtains a victory over other animals. The number seven here seems to be designed, as in other places, to denote completeness.¹

Daniel 7:7, 8 uses ten horns to represent the authority of the Gentile rulers in the Revived Roman Empire. The man of sin, the Roman prince, is represented by an eleventh horn which destroys three of the previous ones. He takes their place, as it were, as the eighth horn. Here in Revelation Christ is represented as having seven horns, a symbolic way of stating that He is in authority over the Gentile earthly realms with which the first six seals deal.

Verse 7

The simple majesty of the act of taking the scroll is overwhelming. The Father presents to the Son in a formal way, from the right hand, the information of the scroll. The scroll, which had been in the right hand of the Father, and therefore under the control of the Father, is transferred to the Lamb. Hence, the Father is the *source of the rest of the knowledge presented in The Revelation*. He is the one who reveals, though the presentation of the revelation is done through the Son. Again we see the regular *economic relationships and activities* of the persons of the Trinity in the current creation. Each person of the Trinity has a job to do that is distinct from the others.

The Son, in all authority and without hesitation, receives the scroll (vs. 8). The scroll consists of the rest of the revelation of God concerning the future scope of prediction within the book of *The Revelation*. It is, essentially, a book within a book.

2. *The Worship of the Lamb (5:8-14)*

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Verse 8

As a response to the act of the Lamb's having taken the book, the four living beings and the twenty-four elders fall before the Lamb, the normal biblical posture of *worship*. The Lamb is now the *direct object of worship and obeisance* in His roll as Messiah.

Clearly the taking of the scroll signaled a special act. Only the Lamb is worthy of such a response. The living beings, till now associated exclusively with the Father, recognize in the Lamb one who is worthy. The twenty-four elders, representing the church, see its divine lamb now taking a position of messianic authority.

The twenty-four elders are emphasized over the four living beings by the description of their possessions. Each has two items, a harp and bowls (note plural). The word "harp" indicates rightly a lyre. The Greek word is *kithara* (from which the English *guitar* is ultimately derived), referring, according to Josephus, to a 10 stringed instrument played with a plectrum. It is probably the same instrument as the O.T. *kinnor* which was played by David. The Greeks had a similar instrument designated by the same Greek word, but it was used in funerals and other times of sorrow. On the other hand, the Hebrews used the lyre as instruments of joy and praise, as here.

The golden bowls of incense (strangely translated odors in some versions here and in 18:13, otherwise translated incense in the rest of the NT), which represent the prayers of the saints, is of great interest. Gold probably represents the value with which God views these prayers. The elders themselves do not pray, but hold the prayers. The saints on earth are the ones doing the praying, during the future time period being represented. During the tribulation *new post-rapture believers*, that is, those who were not believers before the rapture, both Jews and Gentiles, will offer up prayers to God. Prayer is an act of worship, and is the earthly counterpart to the prostration of the living beings and the elders. The fact that each elder holds more than one bowl probably represents the great number of prayers offered.

One note of caution. Some have understood the elders, that is, believers of this age in heaven, as receiving the prayers as though the prayers were directed toward them, and therefore find justification for praying to the saints as the Roman Catholic church teaches. Such a notion cannot be sustained here. The elders are represented as holding, or keeping, the prayers as a way of showing earthly *worship to God, not worship* to the elders themselves. The prayers are part of the *worship motif* of the context.

Why are the believers of this age represented as holding the prayers? It is impossible to say for certain, but perhaps the believers of this age take perform the priestly function during the tribulation of interceding for earthly saints. Revelation 5:10 represents the believers of this age as performing that function on earth during the millennial period, perhaps as an indication of their function before the kingdom period. There is no reason these believers could not act as priests during the post-rapture period while it is in heaven. A form of this view is held by Albert Barnes, though he confuses the people still on the earth with the resurrected/rapture saint. Later in Revelation 8:3, an angel is seen offering the prayers of the saints on the altar, and it may be the priestly function is shared by the believers and angels prior to the establishment of the earthly kingdom.

Verses 9-10

Verses 9 and 10 make up one sentence. The "they" (vs. 9) refers to the elders exclusively. Only they sing this song, as the living beings as spirit beings are not included. The song itself is directed to the

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Lamb as a praise, not to God the Father, as the Lamb is the one receiving the worship of the context. Praise is an aspect of sacrificial worship (Hebrews 13:15).

The fact that the song is a “new song” has raised much comment. Two views are generally presented:

1. Some think that the song is “new” because it could not be sung until the Lamb received the scroll (B. W. Johnson, et. al).
2. Others see it as a “new song” based on the redemption of Christ for mankind as opposed to the “old” songs sung in heaven before the act of redemption (Barnes, ATR, for instance). This second view is not particularly satisfying as nothing in the context particularly relates the song to the redemption of Christ. It is based on the view that the word we have translated “purchased” refers to the redemption of Christ as presented by Paul. However, this is a totally different Greek word, and does not carry the same concept as “redeem” does when used by Paul. For a further discussion of this point, see the comments on the phrase “purchased for God” below.
3. The word “new” is *kainos*, new-in-kind, not *neos*, new-in-time. In other words, *kainos* does not mean a *new-in-time* thing, but a new *kind* of thing. The idea seems to be that this is a *new kind of song*, or ode, that could only be directed toward the Lamb, and so, the view held by Johnson and others seems superior.

The *purpose* of the new song is found in its opening refrain, “Worthy are you to take the book, and to open its seals.” We are drawn to the importance of the scroll, and the vital nature of its contents because only the Lamb is worthy. To be worthy, in this instance, means that the lamb is the rightful recipient of the book, and, in the cultural sense of the day when receiving a sealed document, only He as the right to open the seals. What, then brought about the lamb’s worthiness?

That which brought about the Lamb’s worthiness is expressed in the three-fold parallel verbal presentation, slain, purchased, and made.

1. “Slain” again refers to the death of Christ, and again the emphasis is not on His redemptive work, but on His prophetic salvation plan for Israel.
2. The word “purchased” is a translation of the Greek word *agorazo*. This word is unfortunately translated “redeemed” in the KJV and NKJV. The *American Standard* and the *New American Standard* versions both translated it “purchased,” an altogether better approach. The word “redemption” that Paul uses in Ephesians 1:7 and Colossians 1:14 is *apolutrosis*, a word that carries an different meaning than *agorazo*. It is unfortunate that both words have been translated with forms of *redeem*, because such translation has caused many to confuse the concepts. Often, the doctrinal idea of *apolutrosis*, “redemption,” is combined with the meaning of *agorazo*, “to purchase from a market,” to arrive at a false definition of Christ redemptive work for mankind. As we shall see, the two words refer to distinct ideas.

Apolutrosis, redemption, emphasizes the idea of deliverance from the consequences of something. Both uses cited above indicate that Christ delivered men from the consequences of both sins and trespasses. This deliverance, while universal, was limited in application to those who believe. It is a redemptive act that covered all from Adam to the final man who will ever be born.

Agorazo, to purchase, has a different meaning. In the gospels it is used exclusively in the literal sense of buying from a market. It is not until one gets to Paul’s writing that it is applied to believers. But it does not simply mean “delivered,” and never refers to the payment of the penalty for either sin or trespass for mankind. Rather, Paul used it to emphasize the price that was paid for believers (1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23). Only Peter uses the words of unbelievers (2 Peter 2:1), but

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some believe the Peter is referring to believers even there. *Agorazo* is used six times in the Revelation, and the KJV translates it by a form of “buy” three times and “redeemed” three times, here in 5:9, and again in 14:3 and 14:4.

What, then, is the meaning of the word in the three places where it has been traditionally translated “redeemed?” It seems clear that the word is using to distinguish between believers and unbelievers. Only here in 5:9 could the word *agorazo* possibly be mistaken for *apolutrosis*, as the other two occurrences refer to the 144,000. In both cases they are said to be “purchased” from something or out of something.

In 14:3 they are said to be purchased “out from the earth.” The reference clearly limits the purchasing to the 144,000, because they are being distinguished from others who could not sing the new song. In 14:4, the 144,000 are said to have been purchased “from among men.” Clearly, not all mankind has been purchased in the same sense as the 144,000.

We conclude, then, that the word *agorazo* used in Revelation always means “to buy” or “to purchase” as from a market place. It refers to the specific *price* the lamb paid on behalf of *believers*. While it can be said that the same price was paid for universal redemption, the emphasis is totally different. It would never do to tell an unbeliever the value of the price Christ paid. As long as he is an unbeliever, he cannot appreciate the great value God places on believers. Christ’s purchasing the believer with His blood is a family truth, designed to distinguish the reason a believer operates in the way he does from the way an unbeliever operates.

Here in 5:9, that is obviously the meaning. The statement “purchased us for God with your blood” is designed to show the value the Lamb placed on those who are believers. The idea seems to be that the lamb purchased a gift for God the Father. The price that He paid for that gift was His own blood, a clear metonymy for His violent death on the cross.

The question arises, “Of what did the gift consist?” There is a textual problem here that has caused some to draw an erroneous conclusion. The Received Text of the KJV, as well as the Majority Text of the NKJV both have the pronoun “us” as the object of the verb purchased. The critical text, on very little evidence,² rejected it, leaving the object of the verb open, which, in turn, has caused further confusion about the nature of the so-called “redemption” of *agorazo*. However, no compelling evidence exists to reject “us.” The ones purchased includes those singing the new song, that is, the twenty-four elders, the church in heaven. Even if the word “us” is rejected, it does not mean that the statement is to be applied universally to mankind, a view held by a great many commentators, or that the twenty-four elders are not included in those for whom the purchase price was paid. This was the unfortunate view espoused by B. W. Johnson in *The People’s New Testament*. We conclude, therefore, that the ones purchased in this context is limited to the twenty-four elders, that is, the church. That others, such as the 144,000 are also purchased, does not mean that the object of Christ’s purchase in the new song is not the church.

To restate what I believe to be the correct view of redemption, then. Paul uses *apolutrosis* for the redemption of all of mankind. That redemption, while universal, is not to be confused with salvation or justification, which is limited to those who believe. In other words, Christ paid a sufficient penalty to pay for the sins and trespasses of all men. On the other hand, the word *agorazo*, especially in the book of Revelation, refers to the limited purchasing of certain groups of believers, not to the universal redemption of mankind. The two concepts should not be confused or combined.

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The source of those purchased is of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation. This description best refers to the church, the body of Christ, as it will exist in heaven at that time. It certainly cannot refer to Israel. Some have argued that it refers to all mankind who have been purchased, including Israel, but such an approach is foreign to Scripture where a sharp distinction is made between Israel and believers from other nations.

3. The statement in verse 10, “Made them to our God a kingdom and priests,” continues the reason the lamb is viewed as worthy to receive and open the scroll. Referring to the body of Christ, two words are used. “Kingdom” is actually a textual problem, as the majority text reads “king” rather than “kingdom.” Even so, if “kingdom” is retained, it does not refer to the millennial state or the Davidic kingdom in any way. Rather it is a metaphorical designation for the rule or authority that the church will have over the earth, as the next clause demonstrates, “they will reign upon the earth,” that is, they will rule as kings during the earthly kingdom.
The church is also viewed as priests. It is probable that the current priesthood of the believer is not the focus here, but the future time in which, as church-believers rule, they will represent their subjects before God, as the priests of Israel represented those people before God.

Verses 11-12

Verses 11 and 12 make up the next sentence. In verse 11 John states, “And I saw, and I heard a voice of many angels round about the throne and the living beings and the elders...” Once again John expresses both seeing and hearing as his apparatus of understanding. He saw angels, though he does not describe them. But he also heard a “voice” or perhaps a noise. Verse 12 presents the angels as speaking in a voice, but here, it seems that no single statement is being made. Perhaps John heard simply the sound of a great crowd of beings with the ambient noise such a crowd brings with it.

Here the angels are clearly distinguished from the four living beings and the twenty-four elders. The view that these two groups represent angels cannot be sustained in light of this statement. Both the *living beings* and the *elders* are more closely associated with the throne than the angels, who are said to be “round about the throne and the living beings and the elders.” Again we understand the living beings to be most likely seraphim, the personal attendants of God in His throne room in heaven.

The number of the angels was uncountable, for such must be the meaning “ten thousand of ten thousand, and thousands of thousands...” It is a hyperbolic way of saying an innumerable company.

In continuing the statement of verse 11, verse 12 presents the actual utterance of the angels. Again they speaking in a great, or loud voice. They, like the elders before them, praise the worthiness of the lamb who was slain, and expand that worthiness to receive not only the scroll, but seven other elements: power (*dunamis*), riches, wisdom (*sophia*), might (*ischus*, strength), honor, glory, and blessing (*eulogia*, well-speaking).

The doctrinal question we must answer is why these things are said to be received because of the lamb’s worthiness. Does not God already have in abundance all these things? Some might argue that not all human or spirit beings honor or glorify or speak well of God, but does not God already have all power, riches, wisdom and might? The answer to this question is found in the presentation of the Lamb as being Christ in His human nature, not His divine. Christ’s human nature limited the exercise of all the power, etc., that Christ has in His deity. This was a voluntary limiting, and in no way affected the divine nature which the Lord Jesus shares with the Father. Nevertheless, with reference to His messiahship, it is a real limitation. Not all things are yet under His feet. He is not yet the King of kings. But He is worthy, in His humanity, to receive all the benefits of deity. It is that which makes Him the perfect human being, the Messiah of Israel.

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Verse 13

The remarkable element of this statement is that “every created thing” sounds the blessing. None are left out, whether they be in heaven, on earth, under the earth, on the sea, or in the sea, they speak out the blessing. The universality of the blessing is symbolic of the ultimate purpose of creation. “Created thing” is the key. Creation praises God by its very existence. Will non-sentient animals actually speak? It’s possible, and they certainly do so in John’s visionary state, but the symbolism may simply be that creation speaks by its very existence, and animated beings, whether sentient or not, speak to the glory of God.

Verse 14

To the statement of the angels, the four living beings respond, “amen.” This utterance is *not* simply to show that the statement by the angels is at an end. Rather, it is a claim to the veracity of the angelic expression, since the word “amen” is a Hebrew word meaning “truth.” However, note that the four living beings do not join the elders in worship, which is evidently limited in this context to human beings.

Only the elders fell down and worshiped in John’s vision. It is for the church to respond in this way during this period, since it is *to the church* who God is making known, through John, the detail of events from the scroll.

Dr. Walvoord provides us with a fitting conclusion to our study of Chapter Five:

With the heavenly vision of chapters 4-5, the stage was set for the dramatic events to follow, the opening of the seven seals. It is clear from this revelation that heaven is real, not imagined. These two chapters reveal the indescribable glory and infinite majesty of the Godhead in heaven. The following chapters reveal this sovereign power of God expressed in judgment on a wicked world sunk in unprecedented depths of sin and blasphemy. Though believers today do not have the privilege of sharing John’s vision or a similar one granted to Paul (2Co 12:1-3), every believer can take the word pictures of Scripture here and anticipate the glory and the wonder of the heavenly scene that he will someday see with his own eyes.³

Endnotes

- ¹ Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Bible*. Electronic edition, E-sword.
- ² The evidence is scanty for rejection of the word “us.” Not only to the majority of manuscripts maintain “us,” Siniaticus (ⲥ) also retains it. The committee that rejected it for the UBS critical text assigned a “C” valuation on their decision, meaning that they weren’t all that sure about it. Furthermore, they rejected the word primarily because of internal considerations, not because of manuscript evidence.
- ³ Walvoord, John. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, “Revelation,” page 947.

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Chapter Six

C. The First Six Seals (Chap. 6)

SCOPE: THE ENTIRE SIXTH CHAPTER DEALS WITH EVENTS DURING THE FIRST HALF OF DANIEL'S SEVENTIETH WEEK.

- 1 And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living beings saying as with a voice of thunder, Come.
- 2 And I saw, and behold, a white horse, and the one who sat on it had a bow. And there was given to him a crown, and he came forth conquering, in order that he might conquer.
- 3 And when he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, Come.
- 4 And another horse came forth, a red horse, and to the one who sat on it was given to take peace from the earth, in order that they should kill one another. And there was given to him a great sword.
- 5 And when he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, Come. And I saw, and behold, a black horse, and the one who sat on it had a balance in his hand.
- 6 And I heard as it were a voice in the middle of the four living beings saying, A choenix¹ of wheat for a denarius, and three choenixes of barley for a denarius, and the oil and the wine do not hurt.
- 7 And when he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, Come.
- 8 And I saw, and behold, a green horse. And the one who sat upon him, his name was Death, and Hades followed with him. And there was given to them authority over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, even with famine, and with death, and by the wild beasts of the earth.
- 9 And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of the ones who had been slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held.
- 10 And they cried with a great voice, saying, How long, O Master, the holy and true, do you not judge and avenge our blood on the ones who dwell on the earth?
- 11 And there was given them to each one a white robe. And it was said to them that they should rest yet for a little time, until their fellow bond-servants also and their brothers, who should be killed even as they were, should have fulfilled their course.
- 12 And I saw when he opened the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the whole moon became as blood.
- 13 And the stars of the heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts her unripe figs when she is shaken by a great wind.
- 14 And the heaven was removed like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.
- 15-17 And the kings of the earth, and the princes, and the tribunes, and the rich, and the strong, and every slave and freeman, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains,¹⁶ and they say to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of the one who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb,¹⁷ because the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?

We now have a shift of scene from heaven to the earth. We've seen the events that take place in heaven after the catching up of the church, probably during the period of time between the rapture and the beginning of Daniel's 70th Week. Now we will begin to see the unfolding of events on earth. The first six seals predict the conditions during the first half of the tribulation period (see below for other views), called by Jesus *the beginning of sorrows* (Matthew 24:8). The sixth seal brings us to the middle of the tribulation period.

The historical school generally holds that the seals refer to the persecution of the church by the Romans. John Cumming is typical of this point of view: "The first six seals contain the history of the temporal glory and decline of Rome. . . ."

However, Walvoord is to the point when he says,

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If the events portrayed are taken in any literal sense, it should be clear that they describe an event yet future, in the words of Christ “the things which shall be hereafter” (1:19). (*Revelation*, pg. 123)

The same author says in another place concerning the historical school,

The decision to reject the historical school of interpretation...in favor of the futuristic approach is most important in understanding the subsequent chapters of the book of Revelation. While many arguments can be cited pro and con, the final choice must be based upon the judgment as to which provides the most sensible and self-consistent interpretation. At least fifty different systems of interpretation have arisen from the historical view alone. (*The Revelation*, pg. 125)

It is significant that the church is not mentioned in the earthly scenes in chapters six through eighteen. The church believer, in the guise of twenty-four elders, is viewed as being in the heavenly realms during this period, so throughout the book of the Revelation the elders are mentioned *only twelve times* in heavenly scenes (4:4; 4:10; 5:5; 5:6; 5:8; 5:11; 5:14; 7:11; 7:13; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4).

To what time period, then, do the first six seals correspond?

Three views have been presented by those who hold to the pretribulation view of The Revelation.

1. A popular view is that the first six seals represent the events beginning in the middle of the seventieth week of Daniel. Many who hold this view also hold that Matthew 24:4-7 represent the second half of the period as well. Walvoord holds this view. It is predicated on the idea that during the first half of the Seventieth Week Israel is in peace, and that the judgments of the first six seals are on Israel.
2. Some have held that the seven seals represent the entire panorama of the seventieth week (Pentecost, et. al.), that is, the entire seven year program. However, the events of the first six seals seem separated from the seventh seal events in a most dramatic way. It seems most reasonable to understand the first six seal events as preceding the seventh seal events. If the seventh seal does indeed begin the second three and one half years of the Seventieth Week of Daniel, then the first six seals must be limited to the first half of the week. Furthermore, the seventh seal seems to begin a discussion of Israel in its relationship to the Gentiles, especially in reference to its judgment, another indication that the seventh seal deals with the second half of the week.
3. A third view, which seems more appropriate, is that the period that is being presented here is particularly dealing with Gentiles rather than Israelites. As such, the first half of Daniel's Seventieth Week is preferred as the period during which the first six seals are opened. According to this view “the beginning of sorrows” of Matthew 24:8 indicates the first half of the Seventieth Week. Significant parallels in language occur between Matthew 24:4-7 and the first six seals of Revelation 6. The seventh seal, not viewed until chapter 8, begins a detailed exposition of the second half of the Seventieth Week.

1. 1st Seal (6:1-2)

Verse 1

In accordance with His worthiness, the lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, opens one of the seven seals. Furthermore, one of the four living beings, one of the seraphim, speaks. With a loud voice, he invites the rider of the horse to come, not for John to come, as have it. The creature means that the first rider should come in fulfillment of that rider's purpose and destiny. This scenario will be repeated with

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each of the riders, the so-called Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. The seraphim are representing God the Father in His relationship to the witness, John. They invite John to view the events of the seals based on and from the perspective of God in heaven.

Now, this scroll is quite peculiar. Rather than a scroll of writing, it is a scroll of visions. Today, we would recognize this flow of events as being similar to what we see on film, or on the television, but to John it must have been quite startling, and quite out of the ordinary.

Verse 2

Who is the Rider on a White Horse?

1. The historical school generally understands the rider of the white horse to be Jesus Christ. The subsequent riders are then viewed as persecution under the Roman emperors. Commenting on the historical view, Walvoord says,

A more plausible explanation is that the rider of the white horse is none other than the “prince that shall come” of Daniel 9:26, who is to head up the Revived Roman Empire and ultimately become the world Ruler. (*The Revelation*, pg. 126).

However, some futurists have come to the conclusion that this is Christ. Zane Hodges holds this view, as does William Newell. Hodges’ article in *Biblioteca Sacra* for October, 1962 presents a four-fold argument for identifying the first rider with Jesus Christ. His approach, however is unconvincing. It is unlikely that the first century believers to whom the Revelation was written would have thought along the lines he presents. In our opinion, Dr. Walvoord’s approach is more convincing.

2. A common view is that the conqueror brings peace during the first half of the tribulation. However, if this is true at all, the peace accrues only to Israel, as the Gentile world is undergoing “the beginning of sorrows” (Matthew 24). The rider is presented as one who conquers. This hardly seems to be a peaceful action, especially from the viewpoint of those who are conquered. Indeed, the entire sixth chapter is a chapter of violence, not of peace. It is clear in the statements of verses 16, 17 below, that it is God’s wrath, the wrath of the Lamb, that is being poured out in this chapter. So much for the nonsense that the wrath of God is limited to the second half of the 70th week, as this passage clearly refers to the first half of the week.

3. The futurist view is the only tenable view that is consistent with the rest of the book and the overall teaching of Scripture concerning Israel and the nations. The rider of the white horse is the same as the little horn of Daniel 7, the prince that shall come of Daniel 9, the man of sin of 2 Thessalonians 2, and the first beast of Revelation 13.

He is seen holding a bow, an instrument of War. His “going forth conquering, and to conquer” refers to the activity of the man of sin during the first half of Daniel’s Seventieth Week, during which Israel is in peace in the land, but are hearing of “wars and rumors of wars” (as stated by Jesus in Matthew 24) among the Gentile nations. Within the Revived Roman Empire, the state is one of conflict, of war, with only the nation of Israel at peace.

Apparently the man of sin will consolidate his hold over the Gentile world during this first three and one half year period. The symbolism of riding a white horse is consistent with this view, as it was the regular practice of the victorious Roman generals who conquered the world to ride white horses.

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Finally, it seems likely that all four horsemen represent the same individual (see the discussion for each of the other seals below). If this is true, the Lord Jesus Christ is highly unlikely to be the figure represented.

2. 2nd Seal (6:3-4)

Verses 3-4

Who is the Rider on the Red Horse?

In the symbolism of the Revelation we see the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, one of the best known sets of images in western culture. In the western culture they are seen as symbols of general devastation, and as such are not carefully considered individually. Several approaches have been suggested:

1. One common futurist interpretation seems to be that only the first horseman is an individual, and the others represent the conditions on the earth during the tribulation period.
2. Another view is that the first rider is the political ruler, and the rider on the red horse is the apostate church, red being the symbol of religion.
3. However, the best view seems to be that all four horsemen represent the same individual, the man of sin, with reference to different elements of his activity during the first half of the 70th Week. If this is true, the first horseman cannot be Jesus Christ.

Once again, the warfare presented here is not upon Israel, which lives in peace until the middle of the week (Daniel 9:27). Rather, the rider takes peace from the earth (See also Matthew 24:6-7). Is it world-wide warfare, or is it limited to a limited area? It has become popular to view this very broadly, but the context of Bible prophecy places the man of sin in the Revived Roman Empire at this time. It is more likely, then, that the word earth is used as a general reference in opposition to Heaven. War will not occur there until the middle of the 70th Week (Romans 12).

The area on earth is limited to the places where the man of sin conquers his enemies. This undoubtedly refers to the same event as Daniel 7:7-8:

- 7 **After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.**
- 8 **I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words.**

We take it that the fourth beast of Daniel 7 is the Revived Roman Empire. The ten horns, as well as the ten toes of chapter two, represent ten kings who will share power initially in that empire. The “little horn” is the *man of sin*. He will go to war against three of those kings, and will conquer them. He will then share power over the Revived Roman Empire with the seven remaining kings.

3. 3rd Seal (6:5-6)

Verse 5

Here the *man of sin* is seen as bringing famine to the Gentile world. The geographical location is undoubtedly the Revived Roman Empire rather than the whole earth. There will be wars among the Gentile pretenders in the Revived Roman Empire, while Israel is in peace in the land. See Daniel 7:7-8 above.

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The black horse probably signifies hunger. Such is the symbolism of black in Lamentations 4:8, 9. The condition pictures is one of famine as the result of war.

Verse 6

Evidently (because of the economic significance of balances) we have rationing of food at extremely high prices. God Himself is probably the voice in the middle of the four living beings. He gives a direct statement, probably to the man of sin on the black horse. It appears that prices for goods are set by God Himself. A choenix was a *measurement* of a little less than a modern quart. A denarius was one day's wage. In other words, it will take a full day's wage to buy one person enough wheat for approximately one meal.

Barley will be cheaper, and three people could have one meal for a day's wage. This is inflation at its worst, and a starvation diet, at best. Approximately 1 quart of wheat will be bought for what could normally buy 8 quarts. Three quarts of barley will be bought for what would normally buy 24 quarts.

Oil and wine will be plentiful, as God commands the man of sin to not hurt, or harm them. This indicates that those agricultural areas that are in open fields will be devastated (where grains are grown), probably by the passages of armies, while the more rocky terrain where plants for oil and wine are grown will be spared the ravages of war. Some have taken it that God is commanding the man of sin to not allow his soldiers to forage among the grape and olive trees. These same events are predicted from Israel's perspective in Matthew 24:6-8, which states:

- 6 **And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.**
- 7 **For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places.**
- 8 **All these are the beginning of sorrows.**

Jesus is speaking to Israelites in Matthew 24. He is predicting the future time of troubles, that is, Daniel's Seventieth Week, in a detailed manner. Israel is viewed as being in the land of promise. While in the land, they will hear of wars and rumors of wars. They will not, however, be experiencing them, only hearing about them.

These are wars among Gentiles, which are described in verse 7. There will be famines at this time, and it is this famine situation that the third horseman of Revelation is producing. Pestilences and earthquakes may very well be a contributing factor to the lack of food among Gentile lands.

4. **4th Seal (6:7-8)**

Verses 7-8

The word translated "pale" in some versions is literally *light green*, and so have we translated it here. It is not an altogether fitting color for a horse, and gives the impression of morbidity. It is also the color of Mark 6:39, "Then He commanded them to make them all sit down in groups on the green grass."

The man of sin is viewed as being death personified. Hades, the place of the dead, following him indicates that he kills many of those over whom he has been given authority, with their non-physical consciousness being sent to Hades. The four-fold method of death is stated (1) the sword – direct warfare, (2) hunger, (3) death, perhaps diseases or suicide, (4) beasts.

The phrase "the fourth part of the earth" has produced several views, of which we will observe three:

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1. Some have thought that the four kinds of death here represent the idea that one quarter of all mankind throughout the globe will be killed. Such a view sees the events of this part of the Revelation representing events that are world-wide, a view that is difficult to sustain.
2. Others hold that the word “earth” should be translated “land” and refers only to the promised land of Israel, that is, the nation of Israel during its tribulation existence. *This view is superior* to the first, but still not likely. It presumes that the first six seals primarily relate to Israel. As with the previous seals, however, the fourth seal refers to judgments on Gentiles. It is not until the seventh seal that we see Israel being brought under the wrath of God.
3. Still others view the word “earth” to refer to the Revived Roman Empire. This is by far the superior view, as it is consistent with the Hebrew Bible passages that relate Israel to the Gentiles.

One quarter of the Revived Roman Empire, then, will come under the authority of the rider of the green horse. This individual is the same as the previous riders, that is, the man of sin, commonly misrepresented as the antichrist. It appears from Daniel’s visions that the Revived Roman Empire has ten kings originally, but the man of sin destroys three of them (Daniel 7:7-8). He then becomes the eighth of eight kings still reigning. It is probably of the subduing of his royal rivals that this seal speaks.

It seems that the fourth seal pictures the devastation of the campaigns of the man of sin. Some have thought that the passage means that one quarter of the world’s population will die during that period, but such an interpretation seems contrary to the use of the word “earth.” Rather, the geographical refers indicates that the man of sin occupies territory, and during his campaigns, that territory is wracked by death and destruction.

5. *5th Seal (6:9-11)*

Verse 9

A *change of scene* occurs with the fifth seal. No longer is John viewing events on the earth from a heavenly perspective, but now he sees a situation away from the earth, though not precisely in heaven. John saw souls underneath the altar. The word souls evidently refers to disembodied human beings. The Greek *psuche* can carry that meaning. It can also mean “person” in some uses, and that may be the meaning here, as well. The two ideas are very closely held, as when an individual is disembodied, he maintains his personhood. We will identify who these souls are in our discussion below.

The altar, itself, is in heaven, but the fact that these souls are “beneath the altar” signifies that they are not yet in heaven, but at its edge. They are associated with the altar, but are not before it. The doctrinal reason for this is undoubtedly because tribulation saints have not yet been resurrected, and are not yet eligible to enter into heaven. Indeed, when these saints are resurrected, they will certainly return to earth as their permanent abode rather than enter heaven directly (see below).

The phrase “underneath the altar” has been particularly troublesome. This is the first of eight uses of the word altar in The Revelation. It is correctly held by most conservatives that the physical tabernacle (and later the temple) on the earth was a pattern taken from heaven itself. In other words, the *altar of sacrifice* and the *altar of incense* are reflections, though shadowy, of the construction of God’s throne-room in heaven. Therefore, one asks, which altar is in view here? Some hold to the altar of sacrifice (ATR, Albert Barnes, et. al.) and others hold to the altar of incense (JFB, et. al.).

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Those who hold to the altar of incense point out that the sacrificial altar was not actually in the tabernacle or temple, but in the court yard outside. They hold that this must be a reference to the altar of incense, which represents the prayers of the saints, because they cry out with a loud voice.

Those who hold to the sacrificial altar point out that the blood of the sacrificial victim was poured out at the foot of the altar. This is supported by the description of the souls as “those who had been slain.” Furthermore, the word “altar” in the heavenly visions seems to be used of a single altar with both functions. In Revelation 8:3 the *golden altar* is associated with incense and the prayers of the saints. However, in 9:13 the *golden altar* is said to have horns, which was true only of the altar of sacrifice. Perhaps there is only one altar in heaven which performs both functions, and was symbolized two ways in the earthly temple in order to provide a simplicity of symbolism for those Old Testament Hebrew who participated in the temple ritual.

At any rate, the altar, either the altar of incense or the altar of sacrifice, carries the idea of sacrificial service to God, which is appropriate when referring to these particular souls. We must, therefore, identify which group of people are “underneath the altar.”

“Those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held” has been interpreted in *at least* three ways:

1. An older, but still popular view, is that they are all “*martyrs, evidently from Adam on*” (Newell, pg. 107). In other words, they consist of all who have died for God from the beginning of man’s existence until the time of the vision. This would include not only Old Testament martyrs, but church martyrs, as well.

However, this argument is weak on several grounds. First, the scope of time in view here is not from Adam onward, but during a relatively short period of time, the Seventieth Week of Daniel. Second, if the twenty-four elders represent church believers, martyred Christians cannot be counted among those beneath the altar. Thirdly, this view divides Old Testament believers into two groups, those who die naturally, and those who die a martyr’s death. Old Testament believers are never distinguished that way in Scripture. Finally, these individuals are not “in heaven” where the altar is, but beneath the altar, that is, at the edge of the throne-room, looking in, which cannot include the church believer.

2. Another view, held by Dr. McGee and others, is that these souls are *all the Old Testament saints*. This view has some things to commend it, as we agree that Old Testament saints have been delivered from Hades, but seem to not be in heaven (see below). However, the text specifically identifies these as “Those who had been slain for the word of God.” In other words, these believers were killed for their faith, so this group does not include believers who died a natural or “accidental” death. We cannot expand this group to include all Old Testament believers.
3. “The souls underneath the altar” are *Gentile converts* during the 1st half of the Seventieth Week. Once the believer of this age is resurrected at the rapture, no believers remain on earth, but many will believe during Daniel’s Seventieth Week. They may become believers because of remembering the previous testimony of the resurrected believers, as some hold. Others think that they become believers because of the ministry of the 144,000, but this group of Israelites appear to begin their ministry in the middle of the week. In addition, these martyrs are told that they must wait for vengeance until their number is completed (vs. 11) which probably refers to the Gentile believers being killed during the second half of the week. It is during the second half of the week that the 144,000 appear to be ministering.

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But, one asks, what about the Israelites who die during the first half of Daniel's Seventieth Week? Why cannot they be included in the souls beneath the altar? The reason is contextual. The first six seals represent the events apart from Israel, that is, from a Gentile perspective. This is during the time in which Israel is in the land hearing of "wars and rumors of wars" (Matthew 24:6). While it is possible that the Israelite believer is also looking into heaven, he is probably not represented as part of this group. A consistent distinction between Israelites and Gentiles is held throughout the rest of the book of Revelation. Israelite martyrs during the Seventieth Week will enter into the Old Testament land promises for Israel upon their resurrection. Gentile martyrs will be related to the millennial period earth differently than will Israel. It seems unlikely that we would have a mixed group.

The souls underneath the altar, then, represent the disembodied believing *Gentile dead* of the first half of the tribulation period. They do not enter heaven, but wait without, observing the heavenly events. Doctrinally, when the resurrection of Old Testament believers occurs, the tribulation saints who have been slain will also rise. They will not enter heaven, but will find their destiny to be the earthly kingdom, initially during the first thousand years of the Kingdom of God on earth, and ultimately throughout time on the new earth as it is described in Revelation 21. This view is consistent with the statements made in verses 10 and 11.

Verse 10

These tribulation saints cry out loudly to the Lord for vengeance on those who have killed them. They refer to God (some say to God the Father, others to the Lord Jesus Christ) as Master. This is not the normal word for lord (*kurios*) in the New Testament though it is sometimes translated Lord, as in the KJV. Rather it is the word *despotes*, from which we get the word *despot*. It does not refer to the Kingship of God on the earth alone, but to His autocratic rule over the universe as the creator (See Acts 4:24). As such He has the right to exact retribution on the evil, for which these slain saints cry out. But they do not comprehend God's timetable. They see Him rightly as "holy and true" but are not yet in a position to understand the nature of His prophetic program, which is designed not simply to punish evildoers, but to bring glory to Himself according to His own timetable.

Those evil men who dwell on the earth during the Seventieth Week will be punished, but that punishment will not be simple vengeance on those who have spilled the blood of martyrs, but righteous retribution for those who have defied God's program of righteousness.

Verse 11

The slain Gentiles are given a white robe, indicating their status as believers, and they must "rest for a little time." That time period is described in terms of others, their fellow bond-servants and brothers, who were to be killed. These must have fulfilled their course.

Does this passage teach an "intermediate physical body?" Dr. Northrup, for example, holds that view. However, it may be that the vision simply represents a symbolical truth, that is, that these individuals are believers who have been slain for their faith.

This "little time" must refer to the rest of Daniel's Seventieth Week. The judgment of God upon the Gentiles comes through several events during the second half of the tribulation period. Other Gentile believers will die, those who are also bond-servants, or slaves of God. They are "brothers" to those already under the altar, and therefore Gentiles, rather than Jews.

6. 6th Seal (6:12-17)

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The six catastrophic events presented here bring us to the end of the first half of Daniel's Seventieth Week. The final phase of the tribulation will begin in chapter 7. The sixth seal presents that the judgment of the Lord Jesus Christ is expressed by the phrase "the wrath of the Lamb" (vs. 16).

As seen throughout the rest of the book of Revelation, these six events are characteristic of the second half of Daniel's Seventieth Week. It is altogether fitting that here, precisely at the end of the first three and one half years of the tribulation, they should be introduced as a preview of the rest of the Seventieth Week. Indeed, the entirety of the six seals, which refers to the first half of the week, seems to contain such a preview, while at the same time being directly applicable to the geography outside of the Promised Land. As we shall see, the geographical location narrows in chapter 7 to primarily the land of Israel.

Some interpreters attempt to explain these events as symbolical, or as figures of speech. Even Harry Ironside falls into this error when he says,

It is therefore not a world-wide, literal earthquake that the sixth seal introduces, but rather the destruction of the present order—political, social, and ecclesiastical—reduced to chaos; the breaking down of all authority, and the breaking up of all established and apparently permanent institutions. (*Lectures on the Revelation*, p. 114.)

However, the perspective is from the earthly rather than the heavenly, and there is no reason for these events to not be taken as literal earthly occurrences.

The assumption that Ironside makes, that this is a "world-wide" event is not sustained by the context. This falls back into a mistaken view of what is involved in the geographical relationships presented in the book of Revelation. The geographical scope is not global, but relates to the Revived Roman Empire, and beginning in chapter 7, is often limited to the Promised Land itself. In this particular instance, the application of these events seems to be outside the land area of the nation of Israel that will then exist, as Christ predicted in Matthew 24:7. It is the Gentile lands that first feel the wrath of the Lamb.

In support of the literal explanation of this passage, E. W. Bullinger states,

It is impossible for us to take this as symbolical; or as other than what it literally says. The difficulties of the symbolical interpretation are insuperable, while no difficulties whatever attend the literal interpretation. (*The Apocalypse*, p. 274.)

It seems highly unlikely that political, cultural, social, or ecclesiastical breakdown would result in the reaction of the Gentiles described in verses 15-17 (q.v.). Their reaction seems to be one of physical fear of calamity because they recognize the supernatural elements in these events.

We conclude, then, that the events predicted here will occur right at the end of the first three and one half years of the Seventieth Week of Daniel, and will be restricted to those land areas outside of the Holy Land. The events are supernaturally induced, and not natural phenomena at all. God will bring these great calamities on the Gentile world of the Revived Roman Empire. Furthermore, their portent is the ultimate destruction of Gentile rule, that is, the coming to an end of the times of the Gentiles at the end of the tribulation period (Romans 11:25).

Verse 12

The first three catastrophic events are presented in verse 12. The first half of the tribulation ends with three events as seem from an earthly perspective. First in this part of John's vision, there was a great earthquake. The following second half of the tribulation is previewed by and will be characterized by movements of the earth and physical events upon the earth. Not only will the earth shake, but the

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various bodies of water will be affected, as happens when great tidal waves, called tsunamis from the Japanese word, inundate coastal areas causing hundreds and even thousands of deaths.

Those who live in earthquake prone areas become somewhat immune to the shaking of the earth. That is, they (we) become complacent. But when a big one hits, as it has from time to time in my home state of California, complacency vanishes. At that time, an earthquake, undoubtedly centered somewhere in Europe, will begin shake up the complacency of those who experience it.

Second, the sun is will go through a series of light and heat changes at the end of the first half of the week. This great blackening of the sun is a portent of future changes. It becomes “black as sackcloth of hair.” Garments were sometimes made of the wool of the black goat, from which some sacks or bags were also made. The significance of sackcloth is one of mourning or great grief, and that is probably the import of the comparison here.

Third, associated with the blackness of the sun, will be a change in the look of the moon. It will appear to be blood-red. This is probably a supernatural effect that is distinct from the concept of reflected light. In other words, the moon does not become blood-like because of the blackening of the sun, but as a supernatural sign of the bloody events to follow.

Verse 13

The fourth catastrophic event is described in this statement. The specific circumstances of the fall of the stars to earth like unripe figs falling to the ground by a mighty wind is not stated. However, it is important to note that the word stars, *aster* in the Greek, was not confined to what we call stars today. Everything was seen to be a star that was not associated with the earth, including comets, meteors, and planets.

Probably what we see predicted here is the falling of a great number of what we today call asteroid type bodies (the word asteroid means “star like”). We see televised regularly fearsome predictions of what would happen if only one large asteroid were to hit the earth. Near the middle of Daniel’s Seventieth Week such bodies will come in numbers similar to unripe figs in a strong wind falling to the ground, and will hit the land in such a way as to cause great fear, and perhaps even great death, on the areas bombarded.

Verse 14

The fifth and sixth catastrophic events are expressed in verse 14. The word “removed” is sometimes understood as *splitting*, or tearing apart, such as in the NASB. The NKJV, on the other hand, translates the word as “receded,” another possible meaning of the Greek word *apochorizomai*. The word *heaven* here refers either to the atmospheric heaven or the starry heaven, not to the place where God dwells. The meaning is evident. There will be celestial events that will cause those who witness them to think that the world is coming to an end. They will not be able to interpret the events as being a natural phenomenon, but will panic, and come to the conclusion that divine judgment is upon them. Their reaction is provided in verses 15-17.

Verses 15-17

Verses 15-17 indicate the reaction of the human populace to the six catastrophic events. The Gentile perspective of the six seals is here emphasized. These are not events which Israel experiences, but which the “kings of the earth,” etc. are perceiving. At this point, Israel only *hears* of earthquakes in various places (Matthew 24), but does not experience them.

Obviously, the “day” of verse 17 is to be taken metaphorically of a longer period of time. It is common, even in modern English, to use the word day to refer to an extended period of time, or to a

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specific event that is shorter than the day in which it occurs. Such is a normal use of the word, and it would not be literal interpretation to ignore such a metaphor.

The great day of wrath is not identical to the “day of the Lord.” The latter phrase is used variously to refer to different eschatological periods. Sometimes it refers to the entire period of the tribulation and the subsequent kingdom. Other times to the tribulation itself, or the kingdom itself. But the great day of wrath is more specific. It refers to the Seventieth Week. Truly the wrath of God extends from the first day until the last day of the 7 year period.

Dr. Walvoord comments on “the great day of their wrath,”

The day of wrath is at the beginning of the day of the Lord, that extended period when God is going to deal directly in governing the entire world. It is significant that early in the book of Revelation the day of wrath is declared as having already come. It is another evidence that the great tribulation is already under way” (*The Revelation*, pg. 138).

The word “wrath,” a word which carries the idea of striking out against someone, is a common eschatological term in the New Testament. Indeed, the first time it is used in the Gospels (Matthew 3:7), the word refers to “the coming wrath.” The wrath of God coming upon mankind was not a new concept that Jesus had to explain to His audience. In Luke 21:23 the word wrath is used of the same period described by the phrase “the great day of their wrath.” Jesus is presenting the truth that Israelites during that future day will need to flee from Judea, which occurs in the second half of the week. He states, “But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people” (NKJV). “This people” refers to Israelites living in the land at that time. The great day of wrath, then, is the application of the wrath of God against Israel as well, and is not limited to Gentiles, though that is the focus of the passage before us. But the second half of the Seventieth Week (Chapter 7 and following) is primarily God’s judgment on His wayward people, the result of which only a remnant will remain.

Observe that the seven-fold description of humanity covers virtually every class of human being. Remember that during the Revived Roman Empire, the concept of kingship itself will be revived, not as it is today, but as those who truly rule as well as reign. Such cannot be described of kings today. Today, kings and queens are figureheads only. They reign, but they do not rule, as they are usually the symbolical head of a constitutional monarchy.

But during the time of the events of The Revelation, true autocratic rule by individuals, kings, will be re-established, evidently before the 7 year period begins. And as a result of that, the ruling class will be easily identifiable as the princes, and the tribunes, and the rich, and the strong. The rest of humanity abiding in that Empire are described as every slave and freeman, which has caused some to think that slavery will be re-instituted as it was during the original Roman Empire, a highly likely event.

Endnotes

- ¹ A choenix was a measurement of a little less than a modern quart. A denarius was a day's wage. In other words, it will take a full day's wage to buy one person enough wheat for approximately one meal. Barley was cheaper, and three people could have one meal for a day's wage. A starvation diet, at best.

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D. The Justified Tribulation Saints (7:1-17)

1. The 144,000 (7:1-8)

SCOPE: THE FIRST EIGHT VERSES OF CHAPTER SEVEN DEAL WITH EVENTS THAT ARE ASSOCIATED WITH THE MIDDLE OF THE SEVENTIETH WEEK OF DANIEL.

Introduction

The sixth seal continues. The seventh seal is not introduced immediately in the narrative, but the seventeen verses of the 7th chapter are clearly preparatory to it. Before the actual beginning of the second half of the week, certain identifications must be made. The chronology here is difficult, but it is clear that the first eight verses of this chapter belong to the middle of the week. The 144,000 are sealed. These are virgins who are protected from the day of wrath with God's seal. See Matt. 24:9-28 for a description of the second half of the week. It is this group who will ultimately fulfill the commission of the Lord given in Matthew 28:19-20. The age described in Matthew 24 cannot end until the gospel of the kingdom is proclaimed throughout the whole earth (24:14).

Two groups of justified *tribulation saints* are mentioned in this chapter. After the 144,000 Israelites from 12 tribes are listed, the Gentile believers are discussed (vs. 9). As a result of the proclamation of the gospel of the Kingdom, a great multitude of Gentiles will become believers, beginning during the first half of the tribulation and continuing through the second half of the week.

Chronology

Chronologically this chapter follows a straightforward approach: (1) Vss. 1-8 takes us to the middle of Daniel's 70th Week; (2) Vss. 9-17 deal with events beginning at the middle of the 70th Week, and proceed to describe conditions up to and during the millennial period. The brief summary of both past and future events is common in the Revelation (see comments on chapter 12).

- 1 **After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, in order that no wind should blow on the earth, or on the sea, or upon any tree.**
- 2-3 **And I saw another angel ascend from the sunrising, having the seal of the living God, and he cried with a great voice to the four angels to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, ³ saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we shall have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.**
- 4-8 **And I heard the number of the ones who were sealed, a hundred and forty and four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the children of Israel: ⁵ of the tribe of Judah were sealed twelve thousand, of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, ⁶ of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, ⁷ of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, ⁸ of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.**

I would like to briefly discuss a preliminary issue before diving into a detailed discussion of this passage. At one time it was common among evangelists to use fear tactics in an attempt to scare people into becoming Christians. Such a tactic has been largely abandoned today, but it was something that many did within the lifetime of the author.

One of the elements of their presentation is that there is no "second chance" to get saved after death, *a position with which I agree*. But some expanded their view to include the idea that if the Lord came and the rapture occurred, those left behind could not get saved.

More scholarly individuals, such as Dr. Walvoord, spend quite some time showing that in this passage we have two groups of people who get saved after the rapture of the church, namely, the

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144,000 Israelites, *and* the great multitude of Gentiles. While the thrust of this passage is not to disprove the false claims of over-zealous evangelists, it is true that we see two groups of justified saints who become so after the church believer has departed. Indeed, there is another group represented by the woman of Revelation 12, the remnant of Israel who flee to the wilderness who also become believers after the rapture.

a. The Four Angels – 7:1-3

Verse 1

This statement clearly presents the context as an earthly one, rather than heavenly. The heavenly vision resumes in verse 9.

“After this” in verse 1 is literally “after this thing,” and indicates the sequence of events rather than the sequence of the revelation. The sequence of events is important, as the 7th seal opened in chapter 8 begins the second half of Daniel’s Seventieth Week. At that time, the wind will have already stopped. These four angels standing at the four corners of the earth are the agents of God to bring hurt upon the earth (see verse 2 below). They are in control under God’s authority, and their first act of judgment will be to hold (stop) the four winds of the earth.

The result of the withholding of wind will be a raising of the temperature to an uncomfortable level. The “four corners of the earth” is reference to the sources of the “four winds of the earth,” a common concept at the time John wrote. Both statements are to be taken apocalyptically, as part of the vision that John saw. Nevertheless, John is describing events that will actually take place, specifically the earthly judgment that will be wrought by the four angels.

Does the coming judgment envelop the entire globe, or simply the Revived Roman Empire? The latter is certainly the most likely, however, some have that that the vision concerns only the land of Israel. It seems to me that the entire Mediterranean basin will be affected, as that is the primary sea of the Revived Roman Empire. The events are related to the 144,000 Israelites, who will be chosen from the nation of Israel as it then will exist, indicating that sometime during the first half of the tribulation there will be a major turning to Jesus Christ by the Israelites of that day. While that conversion is not presented in detail, several elements beginning here and continuing through the rest of the book clearly indicate its occurrence.

The refreshment that can normally be expected from the breeze patterns of the earth will be gone, beginning near the end of the first half of the week and continuing during the entire three and one half years to follow. No wind will blow on the earth, that is, upon the land, nor on the sea, a reference to the Mediterranean Sea. The normal sea breeze that cools the land of the empire will be lacking. No tree will be blown by wind, an indication that not the slightest breeze will blow, as it would be seen in the fluttering of the tree’s leaves. Furthermore, the trees will probably wither and die because of the lack of wind.

Some have speculated that the lack of wind will also cause rain to stop falling, as rain is dependent on the sea breeze. This is likely, though it is not stated directly. However, we know that lack of rain will be part of the judgments of the Seventieth Week, though it is not specifically associated with the stopping of the wind (see Revelation 11:6).

The *intention* of the statement in verse 1 seems to be *two-fold*. The *first* is to draw one’s attention to the importance of the following events, having to do with the sealing of God’s bond-servants. The next two verses further point to the importance of that event, as well as implying the time period involved. The *second intention* is to indicate that the period of judgment is widening beyond simply

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the judgment on the Gentiles which are seen in the first six seals. If the wind associated with the Mediterranean basin is supernaturally hindered, that would also affect the land of Israel, unless it were specifically excepted, which is not stated.

Verses 2-3

Verses 2 and 3 are a single sentence, and introduce a fifth angel who ascends from the sunrising, that is, from the east, probably as viewed from Israel. This individual has “the seal of the living God.” Seals were used in ancient times for several purposes. They were carved stone, metal, or baked clay, which were used to make an impression on something soft, like wet clay, or warm wax. The impression was for indicating ownership or to convey the authority of the seal-bearer.

Here, this angel, by holding the seal of God, bears God’s authority, and is able to use the seal as God has directed him. The fact that the term “living God” is used indicates that God is active, or perhaps even better, proactive, concerning the earthly realm. His authority is being applied to this specific situation.

Before he proceeds to seal the 144,000 Israelites, who have become believers during the first half of the week, he cries to the four angels who have authority over the earth, to stop their activity. His function must precede theirs, as God’s plan is being applied in an ordered chronology. Not until after the 144,000 are sealed will the four angels resume hurting the earth, the sea, and the trees.

The 144,000 are to be sealed on their foreheads by the angel with the result that God’s protection is on them. The seal will be plainly visible on their foreheads, so that none will mistake these individuals. Once they are sealed they are not susceptible to the “hurt” which the four angels will perform on the earth, sea, and trees.

God’s program is to run its course, and a major aspect of that program is the proclamation of the gospel during the second half of the week. The 144,000 are part of the remnant of Israel who will survive the tribulation period.

b. The 144,000 Israelites – 7:4-8

Verses 4-8

A long sentence begins in verse 4 and continues to verse 8. The 144,000 Israelites from 12 tribes are listed. It is common to interpret this as “the church” by those who reject the normal, literal interpretation of Scripture. Dr. Walvoord’s statement in Bible Knowledge Commentary is pertinent:

Attempts have been made to identify the 12 tribes here with the church, mostly to avoid the implication that this is literally Israel. The fact that specific tribes were mentioned and specific numbers from each tribe were indicated would seem to remove this from the symbolic and to justify literal interpretation. If God intended these verses to represent Israel literally, He would have used this means. Nowhere else in the Bible do a dozen references to the 12 tribes mean the church. Obviously Israel will be in the Tribulation, and though men do not know the identification of each tribe today, certainly God knows.

While the tribe of Dan is not included, Levi is. Some have suggested that Dan is left out of this accounting because of its leadership as the first tribe to accepted idol worship (i.e. Walvoord), but there is no statement to that effect here. It might be because Dan was the smallest of the twelve tribes, and perhaps during the tribulation period, not enough Danites will exist to make up the twelve thousand needed. However, Dan will be included in the portioning of the land during the Millennial period. See Ezekiel 48:2.

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Interestingly, the tribe of Joseph is mentioned. The most likely explanation is that the term refers to the half tribe of Ephraim, which is not otherwise mentioned in the list. However, Manasseh, the other half tribe of Joseph, is mentioned in verse 6. So, like other lists of the tribes of Israel (some 29 in the entire Bible), only twelve tribes are named. Usually Levi is left out, because it had no land portion, per se. But here Levi is included, which means if Dan were included, with both half tribes of Joseph, there would be thirteen tribes. But Joseph's tribe received two portions of land, and it is altogether fitting that each half would be included in any list of the twelve tribes. So the probable reason Dan is left out of the list is to maintain the symmetry of twelve tribes, and because it was the smallest of the tribes, though it is not possible to be dogmatic on this point.

Note on the Numbers

Twelve tribes with twelve thousand participants in the list brings up an interesting question. Why twelve? The answer is simple. The number twelve became a representative number (not so much symbolical as descriptive). Since there are, in reality, only twelve tribes, to apply a multiple of that number, 12,000, to each group of Israelites is representative of the entire tribe. In other words, the 12,000 participants from each tribe represent the entire tribe. So then, the twelve tribes listed are a way of representing the entire believing nation, the remnant that will enter the millennial period. Therefore, Israel's tribes are listed in such a positive way to show that the 12,000 from each tribe represent believing Israel in its entirety.

The 144,000 is only significant in that it is the sum total of the list, and therefore represents the entire nation. It carries no other particular symbolical or representative meaning.

This brief introduction of 144,000 Israelites is a prelude to a scene in chapter 14. From that chapter it is clear that these are believers in Christ who have a mission, which we will detail in comments on that chapter.

2. *The Great Multitude (7:9-17)*

SCOPE: VERSES NINE THROUGH SEVENTEEN DEAL WITH SITUATIONS AND EVENTS FROM THE MIDDLE OF THE SEVENTIETH WEEK INTO THE MILLENNIUM. THIS PASSAGE PRESENTS THOSE GENTILES WHO WILL SURVIVE THE 70TH WEEK AND ARE SEEN IN THE 75 DAY GAP BEFORE THE MILLENNIAL STATE.

- 9 **After these things I saw, and behold, a great multitude, which no man could number, out of every nation and of all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, arrayed in white robes, and palms in their hands.**
- 10 **And they cry with a great voice, saying, Salvation is to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.**
- 11-12 **And all the angels were standing round about the throne, and about the elders and the four living beings, and they fell before the throne on their faces, and worshiped God, ¹² saying, Amen, blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be to our God for ever and ever. Amen.**
- 13 **And one of the elders answered, saying to me, These that are arrayed in white robes, who are they, and from where came they?**
- 14 **And I say to him, My lord, you know. And he said to me, These are they who come out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.**
- 15 **Therefore they are before the throne of God, and they serve him day and night in his temple, and the one who sits on the throne shall spread his tabernacle over them.**

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16-17 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat,¹⁷ because the Lamb that is in the middle of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them to fountains of waters of life, and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.

1. *The Great Multitude (7:9-10)*

Verse 9

Another “after” occurs in verse 9, but here it’s not “after this thing” but “after these things.” John uses this phrase (and others like it) to indicate a chronological progression in the events he is describing, *not simply the order in which he sees them*. How, then, are we to take the phrase chronologically? Often this question is overlooked, but it needs to be answered, as it will, to a great extent, determine our understanding of who this great multitude is.

The answer is rather straightforward. If the first 8 verses of this chapter describe the final events of the first half of the tribulation, and if the 144,000 minister throughout that second half, verses 9-17 thrust us forward in time through and perhaps beyond the great day of God’s wrath. This is supported by verse 14b of this chapter. Those presented are individuals who have come “out of the great tribulation” (ἐκ τῆς θλίψεως τῆς μεγάλης). The “great tribulation” is not a reference to the entire seven years of trouble, but to the last half of that period. Certainly the tribulation of the last three and one-half years of the Seventieth Week is *greater* than the first three and one-half years, hence the articular use of the word *great*.

The scene, then, is best understood as *including events in heaven during the tribulation as well as after the tribulation is complete*. Many have assumed that the scene is *during* the second half of the tribulation only, but the fact that the multitude seems complete mitigates against that view. This is an apparent example of viewing forward in the chronological sequence. The question is, how far forward from the *middle* of the tribulation is this scene?

Two possible time periods can be in view.

1. First, this could possibly be a heavenly scene that extends to the first part of the millennial period.
2. The second possible view is that this period extends to after the tribulation but before the actual beginning of the millennial period. We know from Daniel 12 that there is a 75 day gap between those two events.¹ It is possible that Revelation 7:9-17 refers to a heavenly scene during that gap. Furthermore, it is likely that it is before the actual second coming, as we see the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, in heaven at this point, not yet on earth taking up His throne in the millennial period.² This seems to me to be the preferable view.

Some might ask, “Could this group not be those killed during the tribulation who are going to heaven?” This is, indeed, by far the majority view of expositors, after all. The answer lies, at least partly, in the nature of the group itself, and the fact that it does not appear previously in the heavenly realm. Indeed, those who die during the tribulation appear “beneath the throne” in 6:9. The great multitude stands “before the throne,” not beneath it as do those in chapter six. They are also standing “before the Lamb” which seems to place this event prior to the actual second coming, as the Lamb is still in heaven at this time. Another reason these do not seem to be resurrected believers is because of their statement in verse 10 (see below).

Furthermore, the group in chapter 7 seems to a homogeneous group, complete of itself, while those who were beneath the throne were required to wait for God’s vengeance, because their number was not yet complete. Some have suggested that the great multitude is the complete group of tribulation dead. They hold that those souls “under the throne” are included in the group standing before the

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throne. This seems to be based on the assumption that the great multitude must be the martyred saints of the tribulation. The argument is, therefore, circular.

The great multitude in chapter 7 seems distinct, however, from the group in chapter 6. Those were the *souls* of the dead. No statement about souls is made of the great multitude. Indeed, they seem to be standing (ἑστῶτες) in bodies in a live state. In Revelation 20:4 we see again the souls of those who died during the tribulation, probably the Gentile dead, clearly prior to their resurrection, which is stated in the next clause in that passage. It seems probable that this group of souls include those for whom the disembodied souls in Revelation 6 wait, as well as the souls of those in chapter 6, not the great multitude of Revelation 7.

Another indication of the distinction is that John did not seem to recognize the chapter 7 multitude. He seems unable to identify them, whereas it would have been clear to him who the ones beneath the throne were in chapter 6.

However, we must not get ahead of ourselves. The complete identification of this great multitude must wait until the elder explains their identity in verses 14b-17.

In the passage before us, John provides a description of the great multitude. The description makes five distinct points.

1. The multitude was one which no man could number. John means that the number of people was beyond the ability of a standing observer to count. He does not mean that they are truly innumerable in the ultimate sense (God can number any amount), but only that the number is very large. The figure of speech called hyperbole is at work here.
2. The multitude was out of every nation and of all tribes and peoples and tongues. Some have suggested at this point that we are looking at the church. This is not possible, since the church is represented by the twenty-four elders, a separate group. Indeed, the elders know who this multitude is (verse 14) and tell John so. Dr. Walvoord is correct when he identifies these as Gentile saints, the clear meaning of nation, tribe, peoples, and tongues.

Others have suggested that these are *all of humanity* who are resurrected in the first resurrection of Revelation 20, including O.T. Israel, tribulation saints, and even the church. This is incongruous. We've already mentioned why the church cannot be included. And this group seems distinct from the tribulation dead mentioned in chapter 6. Could it then be O.T. resurrection saints? This seems unlikely, given that this multitude appears not to have been resurrected at all.³ We will discuss this further in our discussion of verses 14-17 below.

3. The multitude is standing before the throne and before the Lamb. This is certainly the same throne as previously seen in the heavenly realm, and it is this statement that has caused premillennialists to question who this multitude represents. *How can resurrected O.T. saints, or resurrection tribulation saints be seen as occupying heaven?* This question generally goes unasked. Dr. Walvoord, for instance, sees these individuals as *martyred tribulation saints* (*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pg. 144-45). But that does not solve this particular problem, as martyred tribulation saints share the same destiny as Old Testament Gentile believers. They will be resurrected, and will enter the earthly kingdom, not heaven itself.

Also, as previously stated, John seems not able to identify this multitude. We've already seen martyred tribulation saints beneath the throne. Why, then, are we seeing them again before the throne? Have they been resurrected? If so, why are they in heaven, and not on the earth? Or is this

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just the souls of the martyred tribulation saints before their resurrection? If so, why are they not beneath the throne as in chapter 6? And why are they not called souls?

Perhaps the answer lies in the time period. Most pretribulation expositors see this scene as occurring during Daniel's Seventieth Week, if they address the issue at all. One expositor, Ford C. Ottman, sees this scene as taking place during the Millennium (*The Unfolding of the Ages*, pp 181-89). Dr. Walvoord rejects this view because Ottman does not explain the meaning of the throne, which, he says, "is clearly parallel to the throne in heaven in chapters 4-5." What Dr. Walvoord does not explain is why that heavenly throne does not continue to exist past the Seventieth Week, through the gap, and into the millennium. He is probably correct in saying that verses 9 and 10 do not have the millennial period in view, but he completely ignores the possibility that this scene takes place in the gap between the end of the tribulation and the beginning of the millennium. Indeed, he states unequivocally that only two time periods for this scene are possible, the Millennial period, or the tribulation (*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 146).

I disagree. One must include the 75 day gap in one's calculations of the end times. It is the only time period to place certain events that are said to be after the tribulation, but before the establishment of the kingdom, including the actual second coming of Christ itself (Matthew 24:29-31).

Another problem arises when we get to the description of the multitude by the elder in verses 14-17. There are elements in that description that seem to indicate a millennial time frame, which is what Ottman and others recognize.

We must not jump to a conclusion here, but the probabilities do seem to be narrowing. It is unlikely that verses 9 and 10 present a millennial scene, though verses 14-17 probably do. It is unlikely that these are the souls of martyred tribulation saints during the Seventieth Week of Daniel standing before the throne. It is unlikely that they are resurrected Gentile saints who, by all rights, would be living on earth.

4. The multitude is arrayed in white robes. This is not the first time white garments are mentioned the Revelation. Note the following: 1) Previously believers in Sardis walked with the Lord in white clothes (3:4-5). 2) White clothing is possible for some of the believers in Laodicea (3:18). 3) The twenty-four elders are garbed in white clothing (4:4). 4) Those who appeared beneath the throne were given white robes (6:11). 5) And here in 7:9, this great multitude is seen robed in white.

After this scene we see angels in white linen (15:6), and the bride of the lamb in white linen (19:8). *This last reference is of particular value, for the idea behind the white linen is provided.* John states, "And to her (the bride of the Lamb) it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints."

What can we understand concerning white clothing? It clearly represents either believers or unfallen angels. The implication of righteous saints standing before God seems evident. While church saints are robed in white, so are tribulation saints.

Without going into speculation, it is possible to say that white represents righteousness or purity. Other uses of the word white generally agree with this. Furthermore, white garments seem to indicate that the individuals so clothed are viewed as being righteous from God's perspective, though we cannot tell if they are resurrected, or whether they are viewed as disembodied, or even as still alive. From their white garments we can infer that these are believers standing before the throne being viewed as righteous before God, but not anything more.

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5. The multitude has palms in their hands. What is the significance of the palms? The word is used only one other time in Scripture, in John 12:13, where it was with palms that people of Jerusalem met the Lord during His triumphal entry and acknowledging Him as king of Israel.

Expositors take various positions:

- a. Walvoord ignores their significance, a common occurrence among expositors.
- b. Barnes says they are emblems of victory, which he gets from the use of palms for victors in the Roman games.
- c. B. W. Johnson says they are symbols of joy.
- d. ATR combines Barnes' and Johnson's view and says they are symbols of victory and joy (along with the white robes).
- e. JFB relate them as the antitype of the palms during Christ's triumphal entry, and like ATR makes them symbolical of joy and triumph. JFB also bring in the feast of tabernacles in a confused statement.
- f. Vine also says they are imagery drawn from the feast of tabernacles, but gives them no significance.

Such a plethora of views shows the difficulty of determining the significance here. Probably they are to be associated with the coming of the King of Israel, as were the palms in John 12:13. Perhaps these individuals are represented as being associated with an acceptance of the kingship of Christ. One cannot be certain, as the cultural significance may have contained more at the time of writing than has survived the centuries.

Verse 10

The people of the great multitude cry out loudly (with a great voice), and their message is instructive. They ascribe *salvation* to God the Father (Who sits on the throne) and to the Lamb. The almost knee-jerk reaction of expositors is to take the word *salvation* in the spiritual sense. However, salvation can refer to the physical salvation of Israel, as the word "saved" does in Romans 11:26.

In Revelation 7:10 the word salvation has the article, and is therefore specific. They are not referring to salvation generally, or qualitatively. Rather, a specific salvation is in view, and we must identify it. The most reasonable meaning in this context is that this multitude, having come out of the tribulation, are extolling *God the Father and the Lamb* because they are the ones who saved these individuals *physically*. In other words, this salvation is not personal spiritual salvation, the coming to faith for justification purposes, but the physical salvation of Gentile believers.

This view is consistent with the way the word salvation is used elsewhere in Revelation. In 12:10 the salvation of the Lord "has come" because of its association with the physical Kingdom of God having come. Salvation specifically refers to the physical entering into the Kingdom. The only other time salvation is used in Revelation is in 19:1, where it refers to salvation from the evil doing of Babylon the Great, which is viewed as having been judged in chapter 18.

2. The Heavenly Crowd (7:11-12)

Verses 11-12

The response of those already associated with the throne of God throughout the first half of the tribulation to the cry of the saved Gentiles is similar to what they have done previously. God's plan for the salvation of the nations has been completed, and therefore He is to be worshiped. The Lamb is not mentioned as one of the worshipers, a further indication of His deity.

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We find the specific identification of this group of Gentiles is in 7:13-17.

3. *The Specific Identification (7:13-17)*

a. **The Elder's Question (7:13)**

Verse 13

An elder, representing the believers of this age, asks John a two-part question: who are the people of the great multitude, and from where do they come? Why does he ask? Does he not know? As we shall see, he does know, and his purpose seems to be to require John to express his ignorance. John does not know, but the question provides an opening for the elder to answer his own two-part query. The only reasonable explanation for the question is to identify the multitude by a process of elimination. The question requires a response, and that response is informative.

b. **John's Response (7:14a)**

Verse 14a

It appears that John did not know who this multitude was. His statement in verse 9 indicates that he knew that they were Gentiles, and that they were believers. But beyond that, he seems ignorant of their identity. If he had been able to identify them, he undoubtedly would have said so. Rather, his response places the identification back on the elder.

Is it possible that John knew, and didn't want to say?⁴ If so, a new problem arises. Why would he not want to say, if he knew? Such an answer as John did give is best understood in the normal sense of passing off the question because of ignorance. He specifically does not identify them with those souls who were "under the altar" as most commentators maintain.

c. **The Elder's Statement (7:14b-17)**

Verse 14b

The specific identification of these Gentile believers is stated in verse 14b. They are, as we said above, people who come out of the great tribulation (οἱ ἐρχόμενοι ἐκ τῆς θλίψεως τῆς μεγάλης). To what does this phrase refer? Pretribulationists have identified it in one of two ways: 1) They are the entire group of Gentile believers who come out of the Seventieth Week of Daniel; or 2) they are the Gentile believers who come out of the second half of that week only.

The phrase "great tribulation" is found elsewhere in the Revelation (2:22), where the context *does not* refer to the Seventieth Week of Daniel at all. However, another place where the phrase occurs is Matthew 24:21, where it *does* refer to the Seventieth Week of Daniel. In that context the reference is to the second half of the week. The Lord Jesus Christ uses it *there* as a qualitative statement (without the article) rather than to specifically identify the event, but it is used *here with the article*. Nevertheless, it seems likely that in two contexts dealing with the Seventieth Week of Daniel, where the same phrase is used, that they refer to the same thing.⁵ Therefore, I take it that the phrase "the great tribulation" in Revelation 14b refers to the second half of Daniel's Seventieth Week only, not to the entire period.

"Out of the great tribulation" should be taken literally. The multitude is no longer in the tribulation, they are out of it. Since they are in heaven, this statement seems tautological, so a further purpose for the statement must be understood. They are out of the tribulation in a specific sense. If "salvation" in verse 10 above means "physical salvation"⁶ then the meaning here is that the tribulation is finished, and they came through the events of the second half of Daniel's Seventieth Week without being killed.

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They washed their robes, that is, made them clean, most probably a cryptic reference to their being purified in order to enter into heaven because of their faith. They made them white in the blood of the lamb. The way in which they washed them is thus identified. It was the death of Christ that made them able to enter God's presence in heaven.

Verse 15

This eligibility to be before the throne of God is stated more specifically in verse 15. The word *therefore* of verse 15 is the strong *dia touto* (διὰ τοῦτό), meaning "because of this," referring back to the statement of verse 14b. The symbolism of the washed-white robes seems to indicate that the multitude became eligible to enter into heaven to stand before the throne because they believed in the death of Christ.

However, the next statements in verses 15b-17 have caused much consternation among expositors, the great majority of whom identify this as the complete company of those martyred during the entirety of the Seventieth Week. The problems for that view are great. For instance, those beheaded for the Lord during the tribulation are said, in Revelation 20, to rule and reign with Christ for a thousand years after their resurrection. The multitude in chapter 7 is before the throne of God and serve Him day and *night in His temple*. The fact that the *day-night cycle* is mentioned causes one to think, not of heaven, but of earth. And the word temple identifies the specific place on the earth.

Therefore, the word "temple" does not refer to a *heavenly place*, but an *earthly*. The Greek word (ναός) is never used of heaven in its 46 occurrences in the New Testament, but only of earthly places. It is best to identify this service as being in an earthly temple. That makes the phrase throne of God in verse 15 to refer not to the *throne in heaven* before which this multitude appears, but of a future⁷ *earthly* throne. In other words, verses 15b-17 predict a future earthly reality, rather than the actual time of this heavenly scene. We know that the Lamb will establish Himself on earth during the millennial period, and then later, both the Father and the Son will inhabit the New Jerusalem. However, there is no temple in the New Jerusalem (21:22), where God the Father and the Lamb are the temple.

The best view seems to be that this service before God's throne will take place literally day and night during the millennial period in the millennial temple. God protects them (something not needed for resurrection saints) by placing His tabernacle over them. This is not a reference to the Old Testament tabernacle, but simply a tent (the basic meaning of the word *skenoo* [σκηνοῶ] to set up a tent), provided for a temporary purpose. Here it is used metaphorically of God's over-all protection. Again this best fits non-resurrected saints living on earth during a temporary period, that is, the first thousand years of the earthly kingdom. *Resurrected saints will need no protective tabernacle*. They will serve in that temple, though not the whole multitude at one time. It almost seems as though this group of Gentiles will either take the place of, or serve along side, the Levites (other than the actual priests themselves) during the thousand year period.

This is referred to in Zephaniah 3:8-9.

Therefore wait for Me," says the LORD, "Until the day I rise up for plunder; My determination is to gather the nations To My assembly of kingdoms, To pour on them My indignation, All my fierce anger; All the earth shall be devoured With the fire of My jealousy. ⁹ "For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, That they all may call on the name of the LORD, To serve Him with one accord.

After judging the Gentiles by pouring on them His wrath, God will restore them to a pure language. The confusion of tongues will be removed, so that they will be able to call on the name of the name

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of the LORD, that is, the name represented by the tetragrammaton, generally transliterated into English as Yahweh, something that can only be accomplished in the Hebrew language. Furthermore, the nations will *serve Him with one accord*.

The actual worship of the Gentiles at this time is referred to in Malachi 1:11:

For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; In every place incense shall be offered to My name, And a pure offering; For My name shall be great among the nations,” Says the LORD of hosts.

The Gentile ministry to God in the holy mountain, that is Jerusalem, is stated directly in Isaiah 56:6-8:

Also the sons of the foreigner Who join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him, And to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants -- Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, And holds fast My covenant -- Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices Will be accepted on My altar; For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations. The Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, says, Yet I will gather to him Others besides those who are gathered to him.

The word “foreigner” refers to non-Israelites, that is “all nations.” These are believers who serve the LORD (*Yahweh*). God brings them to His *holy mountain*, again a reference to the temple mount. They will be joyful in His *house of prayer*, a reference to the temple proper. Thus Gentiles will be allowed into the temple. They will offer burnt offerings and sacrifices, which God will accept. Even the description of the temple will change. It will be called *a house of prayer for all nations*.

Nothing could be more explicit. And nothing better fits the picture of Gentiles serving in the temple day and night. Hence we hold that Revelation 7:15 refers specifically to Gentile believers who survive the second half of Daniel’s Seventieth Week. They are not martyrs, as the great majority of expositors contend. Nor are they resurrected Gentiles. They are the *others* who God gathers, others than Israelites, that is. And these others, these Gentiles, are specifically chosen out of the nations to serve in the millennial temple along side Israelites, performing sacrificial duties.

Verses 16-17

Verse 16 indicates that this multitude will no longer hunger or thirst. Some think this is because they have resurrected bodies. But it may mean simply that their needs are supplied, so that *they will be able to eat and drink their fill*. The statement “neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat” does not mean that they cannot feel the sun nor the heat, but they will be protected from such. A resurrection body needs no such protection.

Verse 17 seems to clinch the millennial setting. The reason that the multitude of Gentile believers are protected is because the Lamb who is in the middle of the throne shall be their shepherd. In this statement we see the Lamb no longer before the throne, as in the heavenly vision, but in the middle of the throne. He is the one occupying the throne, not God the Father. The imagery is specific. The Lamb becomes the shepherd, and His protection guards them. He shall guide them to fountains of waters of life, a reference that cannot be heavenly. The meaning of the statement is that Christ will provide His guidance during the millennium for the maintaining physical life. It is best understood as meaning that during the time period involved, they cannot die.

God the Father is mentioned again. He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes. Why this distinction between Father and Son in ministry to the multitude exists is not stated. The purpose of the statement, though, is clear. Both the Father and the Son are involved in keeping the Gentile multitude in happiness.

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To summarize, these are Gentile believers who appear briefly in heaven during the first part of the 75 day gap between the end of the tribulation. They will not continue to abide in heaven, but will enter the kingdom in live bodies, where they serve in the millennial temple as per Isaiah 56:6-8. They are best identified with the “sheep nations” of Matthew 25, that last generation of Gentile believers who enter the kingdom in live bodies.

Endnotes

- ¹ See my notes on Revelation 12.
- ² Yes, this is an argument from silence, but I do not present it as proof of my position, but simply as interesting evidence that is consistent with the view I present.
- ³ Another argument from silence, but again consistent with my view of the passage.
- ⁴ I speak to this question because a student of mine some years ago brought it up. I know of no expositor of the Book of Revelation that holds this view.
- ⁵ Here contextual interpretation comes to the fore. The phrase used with the article is not always, nor even usually, referring to the same thing. But since the context of both passages is identical, it is impossible to apply the phrase to two different events or situations.
- ⁶ It does!
- ⁷ That is, future from the perspective of the great multitude then in heaven.

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Chapter Eight

E. The Seventh Seal and the First Six Trumpets (8:1-9:21)

SCOPE: CHAPTERS 8:1-11:18 DEAL WITH VARIOUS EVENTS AND SITUATIONS FROM THE MIDDLE OF THE SEVENTIETH WEEK OF DANIEL THROUGH THE MILLENNIUM.

1. The trumpets cover the second half of Daniel's Seventieth Week and beyond.
2. The 7th trumpet (11:15-19) takes place at the 2nd coming of Christ to establish His kingdom on earth.
3. Following the chronology into the 11th chapter, the 19th verse, the events go all the way through the millennial period.

1. The Silence in Heaven (8:1-6)

SCOPE: VERSES 1-6 DEAL WITH THE MIDDLE OF THE SEVENTIETH WEEK FROM A HEAVENLY PERSPECTIVE.

- 1 **And when he opened the seventh seal, there followed a silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.**
- 2 **And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and there were given to them seven trumpets.**
- 3 **And another angel came and stood over the altar, having a golden censer, and much incense was given to him, in order that he should add it to the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.**
- 4 **And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand.**
- 5 **And the angel takes the censer, and he filled it with the fire of the altar, and cast it upon the earth, and there followed thunders, and voices, and lightnings, and an earthquake.**
- 6 **And the seven angels that had the seven trumpets prepared themselves that they might sound.**

The introduction (8:1-6) is replete with Jewish imagery. The trumpet judgments are probably written from a Jewish point of view. The sea mentioned, for instance, is without doubt the Mediterranean. The earth is probably best viewed as the land that Israel occupies during the Seventieth Week.

The first four trumpets (chapter 8) all indicate physical judgment. Trumpets five and six indicate judgment on men.

Verse 1

The Lamb opens the seventh and final seal of the little scroll. Many interpreters hold that the silence in heaven shows the importance of the seventh seal. For instance, Dr. Walvoord states,

The opening of the seventh seal is a most important event, confirmed by the fact that there was silence in heaven for about half an hour after it was opened.¹

One must be careful at this point, however, in that we must not imply that the seventh seal is of more importance than the previous six seals.

B. W. Johnson states, "I think that it is a hush of awe before the march of the awful judgments about to come, the calm before the storm breaks forth, the oppressive silence before the burst of battle. It is designed to emphasize the events that follow."²

Johnson's view seems more consistent with the context. We are now entering into a portion of the book that emphasizes Israel rather than Gentiles. Specifically, it seems to me that the silence is a dividing line between the first half of the tribulation and the second half. We have seen God working over the Gentiles, and there will be more to come. But Israel takes center stage in the following chapters.

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Chronologically, we place Revelation 8:1-11:19 at the middle of the Seventieth Week of Daniel and continuing through the Millennium. This is not to indicate that the events are required to be in strict chronological order.

The seals are not chronological units, but literary ones. Likewise, the trumpets and bowls are to be taken as non-chronological elements, all of which are included within the 7th seal. The true reason for holding that the 7th seal introduces an extended time period is contextual. As one reads through the material it is clear that many of the events comprehended under the 7th seal refer to the second half of the week, though not necessarily in chronological order. In fact, elements in both chapters 12 and 13 go back historically to well before the beginning of the tribulation.

This view is consistent with the *reiterative nature* of apocalyptic literature. No mechanical formula can be made that determines the order of events. Only the logic of the human observer, carefully observing the events as they unfold and as compared to other Scriptures referring to the same set of events can discern the chronological changes that take place. For example the river Euphrates is dried up at the sixth trumpet (Chapter 9), but eventually has water in it at the pouring out of the sixth vial (16:12). Either the river is returned to a state of having water at a later time (unlikely), or the sixth vial of chapter 16 takes place prior to the sixth trumpet of chapter 9, which is perfectly in accord with the chronology of apocalyptic literature.

Verse 2

John introduces seven specific angels standing before God in heaven. These are angels distinguished from the great crowd of angels before the throne. Each of these seven angels is given a trumpet. The seventh seal will unfold through the trumpeting of the seven angels.

Verse 3

An *eighth* angel comes forth. He stands over the altar, or perhaps *on* (Greek = ἐπὶ) the altar. The significance is simply that the angel is about to sacrifice. The altar was mentioned once before, in 6:9. There appears to be only one altar in heaven, as opposed to the two altars in the earthly temple. See the notes on verse 5 below.

Much incense was given to the angel. The symbolism is directly stated. The incense was to be added to the prayers of all the saints. Incense was a symbol of prayer in the Old Testament, and continues to be so in the Revelation (see 5:8). The censer (mentioned in Exodus 37:25 and following) was a symbol of an actual element in the third heaven, here represented visually using that same Old Testament imagery. The actual censer associated with the tabernacle was bronze, or copper alloy. It was used to bring coals from the altar outside the tabernacle into the altar of incense inside the tabernacle. However, when Solomon built the temple, he had the censer made of gold (see 1 Kings 7:50), although it performed the same function. Here the functions of the two altars of the Old Testament are combined.

However, the actual purpose for this golden censer in the Revelation is different than the one in the tabernacle and temple. Since there is only one altar, there is no need to bear coals from one to another. The function of the censer is seen in verse 5 below (q.v.).

The prayers of the saints undoubtedly refers to the prayers of the tribulation saints.

Verse 4

Verse 4 continues the function of this eighth angel. Again the imagery is from the O.T. John sees the prayers of tribulation saints symbolically ascend to heaven with the incense, almost as though the incense bore the prayers. The smoke of incense is a strong symbol for prayers because it “goes up” or

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ascends. The ancient Israelites were given this symbol to show that their worship was viewed by God in heaven. That imagery remains strong during the future tribulation period, when saints are being persecuted mercilessly on the earth.

Verse 5

In this statement we have a shift in thought. No longer are we dealing with prayers of the saints, but with judgment of heaven upon earth. The phrase cast it upon the earth provides the perspective by expressing the heavenly source of the judgment.

We see that the censer in Revelation is different in function from the one in the Old Testament. There it bore coals from the altar of burnt sacrifice outside the temple proper into the Holy place where the altar of incense was. In the Revelation, that function is no longer necessary, as there appears to be only one altar. Here the angel fills the censer with fire and casts it upon the earth, either the Revived Roman Empire, or specifically the *Land of Israel*.

Thus, the fire from the altar refers to the judgmental character of the subsequent events. This would appear to be an inappropriate symbol for judgment on all mankind, but to the population of Israel, and perhaps to those living in the Revived Roman Empire, it would have great significance.

“The earth,” as stated, refers to either the Revived Roman Empire, or the land of Israel, as the term does not necessarily mean the entire earth. The same word was used for “land” in Koine Greek. I lean toward this being the land of Israel, as judgment on Israel seems to be the emphasis of the trumpets, though certainly Gentiles will be involved. Supernatural judgment has already come upon the Gentiles, and events of the 2nd half of the week may indeed include a continuation of these elements. But the over-all biblical emphasis is certainly on Israel during this period.

The cataclysms that follow are listed as 1) thunders, 2) voices (unspecified noises other than thunder), 3) occurrences of lightening, and 4) an earthquake. The same kind of events were presented earlier as occurring in the Gentile world. These are undoubtedly actual events that take place during the period of silence in heaven. On earth during that short period of time, all is chaos. It is likely that this angelic event signals the nature of the judgment that God has prepared for the second half of the week on the land of Israel.

Verse 6

The preparation to sound of verse 6 is not insignificant. The angels raise the trumpets to their lips. Might sound, is actually, *might play a trumpet*, as it is the verbal form of the word trumpet. B. W. Johnson’s comment is to the point:

There is the utmost deliberation. All must be made ready. The four angels hold back the winds (Rev 7:1), then there was the silence of half an hour (Rev. 8:1); now the seven angels prepared themselves to sound. (*The People’s New Testament*)

In other words, there is deliberate orderliness imposed on the application of heavenly judgment on the earth.

2. *The First Trumpet (8:7)*

SCOPE: THE FIRST SIX TRUMPETS DEAL WITH EVENTS THROUGHOUT THE SECOND HALF OF THE SEVENTIETH WEEK. IT IS NOT ALWAYS POSSIBLE TO IDENTIFY THE CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER, AS THESE EVENTS SEEM TO SPAN PART OR ALL OF THE PERIOD.

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Chapter Eight

- 7 **And the first sounded, and there followed hail and fire, mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth, and the third part of the earth was burnt up, and the third part of the trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.**

Verse 7

The silence in heaven is broken by the first angel trumpeting in verse 7. The word first is masculine and refers to the angel, not to the trumpet, which is feminine. This first act of trumpet playing announces the multiple part judgments that occur. It is likely that this first trumpet signified the quality of events that take place during the entire 3 ½ years of the of the Great Tribulation.

Unlike the judgments of verse 5, these judgments are viewed not from their source, but from their place of receipt, as though someone were experiencing the events while on earth. The two judgments, hail first, followed by fire mingled with blood, are specific statements of the judgments, followed by the results of the fire coming to earth from heaven. One-third of the earth, one-third of the trees, of all green grass is burnt.

The hail must be viewed as a supernatural element. This is not normal hail, but hail of terrible destruction, far beyond what one would normally expect even in the worst hail storm.

The fire mingled with blood is an unusual judgment. Does the statement refer to blood coming out of heaven with the fire, or is it a reference to the fire destroying the blood that is the result of the hail killing people caught in the hail storm? It is difficult to say, although there is some evidence for the former view. The *result* of the hail and fire coming down does not appear to affect people, only earth, trees and grass, so probably this is a fire storm that includes blood in it, which is the normal meaning of the word mingled (μίγνυμι). Here the word is a perfect passive participle (μεμιγμένα), which could be translated “*having been mingled.*”

We object to the position held by many (Albert Barnes is a prime example) that this is not to be taken as literal blood. He indicates that this is a natural event like the red snow that occurs on occasion, caused by pre-existing algae that makes the snow appear to be red. It is sometimes called watermelon snow, because it releases a watermelon-like smell when walked upon. But John is viewing a supernatural judgment, and there is no reason to take this as anything other than real blood.

Again, the question, is whether the catastrophe described here is worldwide, or is localized. Likely, the events are limited to the land of Israel, or perhaps to the land area of the Revived Roman Empire. However, the subject of the prophecy is certainly localized in and around Palestine. The local nature of the judgment is indicated in verses 8 and 9.

3. The Second Trumpet (8:8-9)

- 8-9 **And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea, and the third part of the sea became blood, ⁹ and there died the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, even they who had life, and the third part of the ships was destroyed.**

Verses 8-9

The second trumpet of verses 8 and 9 is more specific in its identification of locality. We are told that a great mountain was cast into the sea. The normal interpretation of “sea” here causes us to think of the *Mediterranean Sea*. It certainly cannot be that small lake called the Sea of Galilee. Nor would the ancients living in the area have thought of the Atlantic Ocean, which they generally did not ply. Furthermore, we have once again the repeated the concept of one-third of the sea becoming blood, one-third of the creatures dying, and one-third of the ships being destroyed. This idea of one-third connects the judgments of the second angel with those of the first, and draws our thoughts back to the land of Israel.

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The great, or large mountain is to be taken literally. It refers to a meteor-like object, perhaps an asteroid or fragment of another celestial body falling to earth. Objects falling to earth were known in biblical times as well as today. But this is a supernatural catastrophic event, causing great devastation, so it is possible that God will simply create this object in the future.

Again the sea becoming one-third blood has caused some commentators to question the literalness of this vision. Exodus 7:14-25 reminds us that the first plague was water turned into blood. God instructed Moses to tell Aaron to raise his staff over the river Nile; all of its water turned into blood. As a result of the blood, the fish of the Nile died, filling Egypt with an awful stench. Other water resources used by the Egyptians were turned to blood as well (7:19). The miracle in the Revelation is even more amazing. Somehow God turns one-third of the water of the Mediterranean into blood, which seems, in turn, to affect one-third of the sea creatures dying. For those who earn their living from the sea, this event could cause great suffering.

One-third of the ships of the Mediterranean are destroyed, probably by the falling body itself. This would curtail commerce and defense in the Mediterranean basin. It would signify the beginning of economic destruction, which is detailed later in the Revelation.

4. *The Third Trumpet (8:10-11)*

- 10 **And the third angel sounded, and there fell from heaven a great star, burning like a torch, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of the waters.**
- 11 **And the name of the star is called Wormwood, and the third part of the waters became wormwood, and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.**

Verse 10

The word “star” did not refer in the ancient world to the same thing as it does today. Anything above the earth that appeared to give light was a star (with the exception of the moon), including planets and comets. This may very well be a comet, as it would appear to be very bright from earth and it is burning “like a torch.” However, if so, it is a supernatural comet, not simply a natural phenomenon. It affects a proportion of the fresh water supply, rivers and fountains of the waters, probably referring to fresh water springs. The proportion of destruction remains the same, showing that this is a continuation of the judgment of the first two angels. The star affects one-third of the rivers and one-third of the fountains of waters. Hence, as before, the destruction is not total, and mankind can survive this judgment. But hardship and thirst will result.

Verse 11

The name Wormwood refers to a family of plants from the genus *Artemisia*, which has five species of shrubs or herbs found in Israel, all of which are bitter to the taste. In this case, the word metaphorically indicates the result of the star upon the waters. They become “bitter” so that they are, in fact, poisonous. During the second half of the Seventieth Week, many men will die from drinking this water, though the specific number is not stated.

5. *The Fourth Trumpet (8:12-13)*

- 12 **And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was struck, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars in order that the third part of them should be darkened, and the day should not shine for the third part of it, and the night in like manner.**
- 13 **And I saw, and I heard an eagle, flying in mid heaven, saying with a great voice, Woe, woe, woe, for the ones who dwell on the earth, because of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, who are yet to sound.**

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Verse 12

A supernatural darkening of the light-giving bodies occurs. Like the first three judgments one-third of the sun, moon and stars are affected. Unlike the three previous angelic judgments, this judgment is on heavenly bodies, not on the earth, and no intermediate cause is mentioned. The heavenly bodies that produce light on the earth are simply “struck.”

The result does not appear to be a simple dimming of light upon the earth, as is commonly supposed. It appears that the striking of these heaven bodies results in their not shining for one-third of the time. The “operating day” appears to be shortened to 16 hours. The result seems to be that the daylight hours are shortened, and the nights are one-third darker than previously. See Matt 24:22, where we read:

And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.

The common view of the above verse is that there will be fewer days that would have occurred otherwise. However, the number of days for both halves of the Seventieth Week are divinely determined, and there cannot be a shortening of the number of days. The correct view is undoubtedly that the daylight hours are shortened, as confirmed by the judgment of the fourth trumpet.

Verse 13

Verse 13 announces three woes, and does so in an unusual manner. A single eagle (lit. one eagle) flies in mid-heaven and cries with a loud voice. This verse contains a textual problem worth examining. The King James Version, followed by the NKJV, reads *angel* rather than *eagle*. In this, both versions follow the so-called Received Text, the text that was compiled by Erasmus (that is, the 3rd edition of his *Novum Testamentum omne*, [*All the New Testament*], published in 1522). In fact, the great mass of the Majority Text manuscripts read eagle rather than *angel*, as do the critical text manuscripts (the Uncials). The few manuscripts that read *angel* seem to come from a single corrupted source, probably a marginal reference a scribe included referring to Revelation 14:6, where an angel indeed flies in mid-heaven. At any rate, the word eagle is clearly the better reading here, and most likely goes back to the original manuscripts.

Some scholars (i.e. Thayer) believe the word eagle does not necessarily refer to simply the single bird, but to a variety of birds that include the eagle as well as certain carrion eating fowl such as the vulture, which resemble eagles (see Matthew 24:28; Luke 17:37). However, the word was used of the eagle on the Roman standard, of which visual representations still exist, and which show an eagle, not a vulture.

Here in vs. 13, the bird is definitely ominous. The message he utters is one of triple “woes” which will be examined in the next three trumpets; the first woe is found in the fifth trumpet, the second in the sixth, and the final in the seventh. The word “woe” is assigned to the next three trumpets because of the severity of their judgments. As bad as the judgments of the first four trumpets are, the next three judgments will be worse.

In order to emphasize that this message is broadcast, the eagle flies in “mid-heaven,” a reference to the atmospheric heaven where the fowls of the earth fly (see Revelation 19:17). It is directed toward the earth, then, and may be applied to all parts of the Revived Roman Empire, or it may be broadcast only to the land of Israel, a more likely scenario.

Endnotes

- ¹ Walvoord, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, “Revelation.” Electronic edition through E-sword.com.
- ² Johnson, B. W. *The People’s New Testament*, electronic edition provided by E-sword.com.

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G. The Two Witnesses (11:1-14)

SCOPE: THE FOCUS OF CHAPTER 11 IS ON EVENTS OF THE SECOND HALF OF THE SEVENTIETH WEEK. HOWEVER, IT APPEARS THAT THE MINISTRY OF THE TWO WITNESSES BEGINS PRIOR TO THE MIDDLE OF THE WEEK (SEE VERSE 3 COMPARED TO VERSES 9 & 11).

1. The Ministry of the Two Witnesses (11:1-6)

- 1 **And there was given me a reed like a rod, and one said, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and the ones who worship in it.**
- 2 **And the court which is outside the temple leave out, and measure it not, because it has been given to the nations, and they shall tread under foot the holy city forty-two months.**
- 3 **And I will give to my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.**
- 4 **These are the two olive trees and the two candlesticks, standing before the Lord of the earth.**
- 5 **And if any man desires to hurt them, fire comes out of their mouth and devours their enemies, and if any man shall desire to hurt them, in this manner must he be killed.**
- 6 **These have the authority to shut heaven, that it rain not during the days of their prophecy, and they have authority over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, if they desire.**

The problems associated with the interpretation of Chapter 11 of The Revelation are numerous. Dr. Walvoord adequately summed up those problems and their solution,

Careful students of the book of Revelation will probably agree with Alford that chapter 11 “is undoubtedly one of the most difficult in the whole Apocalypse.” A comparison of many commentaries will reveal the widest kind of disagreement as to the meaning of this chapter. Even Alford attempts to spiritualize the city, the temple, and the events portrayed in this chapter. The guiding lines which govern the exposition to follow regard this chapter as a legitimate prophetic utterance in which the terms are taken normally. Hence, the great city of 11:8 is identified as the literal city of Jerusalem. The time periods are taken as literal time periods. The two witnesses are interpreted as two individuals. The three and a half days are taken literally. The earthquake is a literal earthquake. The seven thousand men who are slain by the earthquake are seven thousand individuals who die in the catastrophe. The death of the witnesses is literal as are their resurrection and ascension. These major assumptions provide an intelligent understanding of this portion of prophecy....¹

Verse 1

John is still writing events that are related to the sixth trumpet. While many see this as an interlude, such a view is based on a strictly chronological approach to the book. The vision of the two witnesses does not necessarily follow in chronological order from the vision of the Euphrates which opened the sixth trumpet. We reject the idea that the trumpets are a chronological unfolding of the book. Rather they indicate important events dealing with Daniel’s Seventieth Week. While a chronological order may be implied within the events pictured, the events themselves are not necessarily presented in their actual order of occurrence.

John has a vision of the temple and the city of Jerusalem during the last 3.5 years of the Tribulation. He was given a reed like a rod with which to measure three elements:

1. He was to measure the temple of God.
2. He was to measure the altar.

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3. He was to measure the ones who worship in the temple.

The reed which was given to John refers to the bulrush common to the Jordan Valley. It was, when dry, light and easy to use as a rod, that is, a staff for measuring in this context. Why measure? Generally with property, measurements were taken then, as now, to establish the limits of ownership, and this seems to be the purpose here. This concept of measure to establish God as the owner is found elsewhere in Scripture. Ezekiel 40 presents the measurements of the future kingdom Temple. In Zechariah, chapter 2, a man is viewed as measuring the city of Jerusalem. In Revelation 21 the future New Jerusalem is measured, as well.

The measurement of the temple of God is limited, as we shall see in verse 2. The word for temple is *naos*, referring not to the entire temple compound, but to the actual sanctuary itself, consisting of the Holy Place, and the Holy of Holies.

Some controversy surrounds the meaning of the word altar. Does it refer to the outer altar of sacrifice, or to the inner altar of incense? In the throne room visions earlier in this book, the two altars seem to be combined in heaven. But here, the outer altar on earth must be in view, as John could not have entered the Holy Place to measure the inner altar. Furthermore, it will be the cessation of the sacrifices on the altar of sacrifice that will be one of the events that will signal the beginning of the second half of the tribulation period in Daniel 9:27:

Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate.

Similarly, the worshipers in the temple have caused disagreement. If these are the same individuals as in verse 2, then they are Gentile usurpers. But verse 2 does not seem to refer to worshipers, per se. It seems more likely that it is not Gentiles in general in view, but of a specific group. We know from other Scripture that during the second half of Daniel's Seventieth Week, the "abomination of desolation" will take place. Jesus spoke of this in Matthew 24:15-16,

Therefore when you see the "abomination of desolation," spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand), ¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

The phrase, "standing in the holy place" undoubtedly refers to the same event as spoke of by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4,

Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

During the 2nd half of the tribulation the temple of God will be turned into a throne room for the man of sin, the son of perdition. He will sit on the seat in the Holy of Holies, proclaiming himself to be God. It is most likely that those who come to worship him will be select individuals from the Gentiles, those who he trusts and are allowed into his presence. It is these, most likely, who John is commanded to measure. And they do not measure up. They are included in the "abomination of desolation," and it is to these individuals within the confines of the temple proper that the man of sin will proclaim his deity.

Verse 2

John is required to not measure the court outside the temple. The reason is a prophetic one. The outer court is given over to the nations, that is to the Gentiles. Now, in Jesus day there was a court outside

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the temple proper for the Gentiles. But this is not that court, which apparently was a limited area inside the “Golden Gate” on the east of the temple mount,² but the entirety of the outside court.

Gentiles will tread under foot the holy city for 42 months. Here we are introduced to the city of Jerusalem itself. It will be under Gentile control during the second half of the Seventieth Week. That this cannot be the situation that is true today is evident. The temple does not exist in today’s Jerusalem, even though the temple mount itself is in the hands of non-Jews. But this condition has gone on for around 2 thousand years, since the time the Romans took over the city. The 42 months spoke of here must be a literal period of time, and must not be spiritualized or allegorized, as many do to fit their preconceived notions of the Apocalypse.

These months are undoubtedly lunar months of thirty days each. Such months are the basis for the revelation of Daniel’s 70 weeks in Daniel 9. Furthermore, the actual days work out perfectly. Forty-two lunar months is exactly 1,260 days (see verse 3 below), or 3.5 years. We will see these numbers again Revelation 13:5 (q.v.).

Verse 3

Who are the Two Witnesses? Expositors have expressed several views:

1. Gaebelein holds that the two witnesses are individuals but are representative of a larger number of witnesses. “Perhaps the leaders would be two great instruments, manifesting the spirit of Moses and Elijah, endowed with supernatural power, but a larger number of witnesses is unquestionably in view here.”³
2. J. B. Smith holds that they are Moses and Elijah because of the similarity of judgment inflicted in the Revelation to those judgments pronounced by two prophets. In both cases there is fire from heaven, water is turned into blood, and the earth is smitten with plagues.
3. Some also derive support for Elijah being one of the two because of Malachi 4:5 which says that Elijah will come before the great and dreadful day of the Lord. This, however, seems to be fulfilled in John the Baptist.
4. Govett says that the two witnesses are Enoch and Elijah because they did not die, which is seen by some as a violation of Hebrews 9:27. (However, Hebrews 9:27 expresses not a rule but a general principle. The believers living at the rapture will not die, nor will they return to earth to die later.)
5. Walvoord seems to agree with Ainslie and Easton that these are two men whose identity cannot be now determined. This, it seems to me, is the best interpretation. E. Schuyler English who also holds this view says simply, “...these two witnesses cannot be identified...”

It is also the view of Pentecost who states:

It would seem best to conclude that the identity of these men is uncertain. They, in all probability, are not men who lived before and have been restored, but are two men raised up as a special witness, to whom sign-working power is given.⁴

The number of days the two witnesses prophesy is significant. The 1,260 days is exactly 42 months, the same number as the time the Gentiles will tread under the city of Jerusalem (vs. 2). It seems too great a coincidence to suppose that these are two different time periods. They must correspond to the last half of the tribulation period, during which time they prophesy. Evidently they begin their work on the day of the abomination of desolation, and continue it throughout the rest of the Seventieth Week, and are killed on the last day of the tribulation.

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Verse 4

In a metaphorical statement the two witnesses are called olive trees and candlesticks, or, in the KJV lampstands. Most commentators take this reference back to the book of Zechariah chapter 4:1-3:

Now the angel who talked with me came back and wakened me, as a man who is wakened out of his sleep. ² And he said to me, What do you see? So I said, I am looking, and there is a lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it, and on the stand seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps. ³ Two olive trees are by it, one at the right of the bowl and the other at its left.

Walvoord states,

The two witnesses are described as two olive trees and two lampstands...who stand before the God of the earth. This seems to be a reference to Zechariah 4, where a lampstand and two olive trees are mentioned. In answer to the question in the Zechariah incident, 'What are these?' the answer is given to Zerubbabel: 'This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.' It is evident that a similar meaning is intended in the book of Revelation. The olive oil from the olive trees in Zechariah's imaged provided fuel for the two lampstands. The two witnesses of this period of Israel's history, namely Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel, were the leaders of Israel in Zechariah's time. Just as these two witnesses were raised up to be lampstands or witnesses for God and were empowered by olive oil representing the power of the Holy Spirit, so the two witnesses of Revelation 11 will likewise execute their prophetic office. Their ministry does not rise in human ability but in the power of God.⁵

There are, of course, differences of opinion among scholars as to the associations that Dr. Walvoord and others make here. The most common objection is that in Zechariah there are, in fact, seven candlesticks or lampstands. Furthermore, in Zechariah 4, as Dr. Walvoord states, these objects are identified to Zerubbabel with the words "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts."

It seems that the passage from Zechariah is used in a general literary way to indicate that these two witnesses are empowered by the Holy Spirit in their ministry, and that their human abilities are not involved. Indeed, they are endowed with supernatural abilities. So, all-in-all, Dr. Walvoord's explanation seems adequate, and has the merit of using the general meaning of the Zechariah passage rather than trying to find a fulfillment of Zechariah 4 in Revelation 11.

Verse 5

The statements in verses 5 and 6 indicate that these witnesses have supernatural abilities. The first ability is to keep these men from harm during they days of their witness. As we will see in verse 7, they will be killed after their witness is finished. But until then, they will kill the enemies who attempt to harm them using fire out of their mouth. That this is a literal ability cannot be doubted, though it is regularly spiritualized (see Barnes' *Notes*, for example).

That some will desire to hurt them is indicated by the first class conditional statement. Such a condition assumes the condition to be true. We may read it, "If some desire to hurt them, and some will..." The condition is repeated for emphasis.⁶

Verse 6

Heaven here does not refer to the third heaven, where God dwells, but to the atmospheric heaven, from which rain falls. Like Elijah (1 Kings 17:1), they will have the ability to cause it to not rain. Some take it that there will be no rain at all during the 42 months they prophesy, but this is not

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required by the statement. They may be able to turn rain off as one would turn off a water spigot, and then allow rain later.

They will also have the ability to turn water into blood, a judgment that casts our eyes back to Exodus 7:17, where Moses performed the same miracle as part of the ten plagues. But their ability does not end there, as they are able to strike the earth with every plague, if they desire. This may be a reference back to the ten plagues of Egypt, as well. Such a demonstration would reinforce the fact that these witnesses have a ministry similar to Moses, and for a similar reason. Egypt was persecuting Israel in Moses' day, and Israel will be under the thumb of the Gentiles during the second half of Daniel's Seventieth Week, and they will attempt to destroy Israel at that future time. Hence the appropriateness of the plagues being visited upon them in judgment.

The word earth is generally assumed to be a global reference (Newell, for instance), but such is highly unlikely. The part of the earth that the two witness deal with is the land of Israel. Specifically, they are to be killed in the city of Jerusalem (2:8), where their bodies lay in the street. The portion of earth in view, then, must be limited to that area.

2. *The Death of the Two Witnesses (11:7-10)*

- 7 **And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss shall make war with them, and conquer them, and kill them.**
- 8 **And their dead bodies lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.**
- 9 **And from among the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations men look upon their dead bodies three and a half days, and do not allow their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb.**
- 10 **And they who dwell on the earth rejoice over them, and make merry, and they shall send gifts one to another, because these two prophets tormented the ones who dwell on the earth.**

Verse 7

The two witnesses cannot be killed until their testimony is finished, that is, after the 42 months is over. The one who will be able to kill them is described as "the beast that comes up out of the abyss." Who then, is this beast? He has not been mentioned before in The Apocalypse, but prophetic beasts are mentioned in the Old Testament. Furthermore, we see beasts in Revelation 13. Is this beast one of these?

Another complicating statement is that this beast comes up out of the abyss. None of the others do, which makes identifying this beast with them problematical at best. There are two common identifications provided for this beast.

First, many assume that this beast is the same as the first beast of Revelation 13, that is, the man of sin, popularly called the antichrist.⁷

Second, many identify the beast as Satan.⁸

In fact, neither of these views can be proven, and one hesitates to make a dogmatic statement. There is another candidate, however. In Revelation (see note there) we read of an angel of the abyss. This individual is the ruler, the king, over the demons who are set free. The one who opens the abyss, the one with the key in that passage, is most likely Satan, and the king angel is probably a spirit being who is specifically the ruler of those demons who come out of the abyss. It's at least possible that this "beast" is that "angel," an angel who has the name in both Greek and Hebrew of *Destroyer*.

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At any rate, this beast makes war against the two witnesses and kills them. This happens *after* the second half of the Seventieth Week, during the gap between the tribulation period and the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth.

Verse 8

Jerusalem is here identified as “the great city,” a reference to its importance. Likewise it is called spiritually Sodom and Egypt, two notorious locations in the Gentile world identified with great evil. During the second half of the Seventieth Week, Jerusalem will be the abode of the man of sin, and Gentiles will occupy it.

Lest there be any doubt as to which city is in view, it is identified as the place where the Lord was crucified. Again we note the specific geological reference of the activity of the two witnesses. The Apocalypse is filled with such specific references.

Verse 9

Gentiles are identified as peoples and tribes and tongues and nations. At this point in the history of Jerusalem, no Israelites are allowed in the city. They will have been scattered, as we shall see in Revelation 12. It will be Gentiles who will look on the dead bodies of the witnesses in the street in Jerusalem.

The duration of their bodies being in the street is said to be three and one half days. Why that particular period of time? Those who allegorize this section of the book of Revelation sometimes make the days equivalent to years, and make it the 3½ years of the last half of the Seventieth Week. This is based on the view that the original 1,260 days in verse 3 was the first half of the tribulation period.

But there is no reason to make it other than days, and several good reasons not to do so. First, if one makes the 3½ days to be three and one half years, then the rest of the passage must be spiritualized or allegorized. There could be no justification for leaving bodies that long in the street, so these must not be literal bodies (they would have gradually, decomposed, along with displaying the odor thereto!). If they are not literal bodies, there cannot be actual prophets who minister. That means the 1,260 days cannot be taken literally. Which, in turn, throws the entirety of normal interpretation out the window, and the Revelation becomes nothing but a speculative playground.

It seems clear that the second half of the Seventieth Week of Daniel is the 1,260 days mentioned in verse 3. So the 2nd half of the 7 year tribulation is the period when the two witnesses testify. This, then, makes the 3½ days begin the day after the Seventieth Week is complete. Now, it is commonly misunderstood that the Lord Jesus returns to establish His kingdom either on the last day of the tribulation, or on the first day after the tribulation. However, Daniel 12:11-12 makes that patently impossible:

And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days. ¹² “Blessed is he who waits, and comes to the one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days.

The time that the daily sacrifice is taken away and the abomination of desolation is set up takes place at the middle of the Seventieth Week. From that time forward there are two termini. The first is 1,290 days. This is exactly 30 days after the end of the 1,260 days of the 2nd half of the tribulation. During that thirty day period many events will take place, including the 3½ days the two witnesses lay in the streets of Jerusalem.

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But that 30 day period is not during the kingdom. “Blessed is he who waits” undoubtedly refers to the individual Israelites who continues on after that initial 30 day period. He must wait for a total of 1,335 days. The total period is 75 days. It seems clear that the kingdom will be established at that time. But when does the Lord Jesus return? We are not told, but it must be between the end of the Seventieth Week and the beginning of the kingdom, sometime during that 75 day gap.

This is consistent with the parables of Jesus, especially those in Matthew 24 and 25. For a further discussion, see my notes on those parables.

The question arises, then. Why do these bodies lay unburied for three and a half days? The reason is expressed in verse 10.

Verse 10

The result of the prophets not being buried is that many in Jerusalem rejoice and make merry, that is, celebrate during the three and one half days the bodies lie in the street. Dr. Walvoord goes to great lengths to make this a “worldwide” celebration.

Apparently the celebration is worldwide. By means of television and the transmission of pictures throughout the world by communication satellites and other means, the entire earth will see graphically the dead bodies of the two witnesses, a symbol of victory for the beast and those who oppose God.⁹

There is, however, no pressing need for this to be a worldwide merrymaking, nor for those who dwell upon the earth to be all mankind. Such a space-age, electronic interpretation could not have occurred to John and his initial readers, nor is there any symbolic reason to expand the interpretation beyond the normal meaning that the original readers would have understood. If this were the true interpretation, the only ones who could have understood it would have been these last few generations of the “electronic age.”

The reason the phrase “who dwell on the earth” is used twice is to distinguish the earthly group from those who live away from the earth, rather than to include all mankind or some kind of worldwide viewing. Such an interpretation is highly abnormal.

These prophets are not prophets to mankind in general, but to those operating in the area of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, and it is those entities who live upon the earth that do the rejoicing. The tormenting, that is the supernatural plagues and death the witnesses doled out, will come to an end, therefore people rejoice. The people who were helpless against them will exchange gifts among themselves as though this were a happy occasion such as a birthday. But their rejoicing will not continue very long. The 3½ day period is not set by the people on the earth, but by God who performs a great miracle which brings their celebration to an abrupt end (vs. 11).

3. *The Resurrection of the Two Witnesses (11:11-14)*

- 11 **And after the three and a half days the breath of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet, and great fear fell upon the ones who beheld them.**
- 12 **And they heard a great voice from heaven saying to them, Come up here. And they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies beheld them.**
- 13 **And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake seven thousand men were killed, and the rest became terrified, and gave glory to the God of heaven.**
- 14 **The second Woe is past, behold, the third Woe comes quickly.**

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Verse 11

The rejoicing of the ones who beheld the two witnesses comes to an end and is replaced by “great fear,” that is, fear beyond the norm. John is specific in the cause for the fear. The breath of life from God entered into the two prophets. They became alive again and stood upon their feet, enough to give anyone a large dose of fright.

After three and a half days the bodies will have begun to decompose, and it is possibly for that reason they were left for that long. There could be no doubt that they were dead, and the time was quickly approaching when these bodies would need to be buried, for sanitation purposes if for no other reason.

But God interrupts the revelry. While thinking that the worst is past, those who see this miraculous event will become terrified, perhaps finally realizing that things are not as they had hoped. Death of one’s enemies does not end the threat when those enemies are servants of God.

Verse 12

The word “they” in verse 12 probably refers back to the two witnesses rather than to their enemies. There is an ascension that takes place as well as a resurrection. Now, much has been made of this resurrection in light of the prophetic teachings of Scripture. Pre-tribulational scholars correctly teach that the resurrection for the believers of this age is not part of the original planned resurrections which are taught in 1 Corinthians 15:22-24:¹⁰

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. ²³ But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. 24 Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power.

This passage clearly teaches a chronological order for the resurrections. The first, of course, was the resurrection of Christ Himself. But two other resurrections are mentioned: 1) afterward (*epeita*, a time reference) those who are Christ’s at His coming, and 2) Then (*eita*, another time reference) comes the end. Number 1 is clearly the first resurrection of Revelation 20:4. That resurrection is also mentioned in Daniel 12:2 & 13¹¹ (q.v.). It takes place at the beginning of the kingdom period. Number 2, “Then comes the end,” refers to the final, or end resurrection. This is a normal Greek ellipsis, where the idea of the context, in this case the rising of dead people, must be understood. In other words, Paul is referring to the final, or end, resurrection. This is the second resurrection of Revelation 20:5 & 13. While the first resurrection takes place at the beginning of the thousand year period, the second resurrection takes place after it. For further discussion of this topic, see the notes on Revelation 20.

Where, then, does the resurrection and subsequent ascension of the two witnesses come into play? This simplest answer is that these two come to life as part of the first resurrection, though not at precisely the same time as the rest of that resurrection. There is no compelling reason to require that the first resurrection take place all at the same time. Just because the normal time for such a resurrection is at the beginning of the kingdom period, does not limit God to that event in His planning. Indeed, it is very likely that the ascension of Elijah was also part of that first resurrection scenario, even though it took place thousands of years earlier.

Verse 13

In the same hour as the resurrection and ascension of the two witnesses, a great judgment begins. It consists of a great earthquake, and is, evidently, limited to the city of Jerusalem. A tenth part of the city, presumably the structures, fall. Here again we see the limited geographical references in the

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book of Revelation. The seven thousand men who will be killed consist of the previously mentioned Gentiles who shall trod Jerusalem under foot.

The Gentiles who survive this judgment will give glory to the God of heaven. Whether any or all of them become true believers in the justifying sense is not stated. Having seen the resurrection and ascension of the witnesses as well as experiencing the earthquake produces their glorification of God, not their coming to faith. Marvin Vincent states, "The phrase signifies not conversion, nor repentance, nor thanksgiving, but *recognition*, which is its usual sense in scripture."¹²

Verse 14

The three woes continue. The first was in 9:12. Here is the second, and the third consists of the seventh trumpet.

H. The Seventh Trumpet (11:15-18)

- 15 **And the seventh angel sounded, and there followed great voices in heaven, and they said, The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.**
- 16-17 **And the twenty-four elders, who sit before God on their thrones, fell upon their faces and worshiped God,¹⁷ saying, We give you thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty One, who is and who was, because you have taken your great power, and did reign.**
- 18 **And the nations were wrathful, and your wrath came, and the season for the dead to be judged, and to give their reward to your bond-servants the prophets, and to the saints, and to the ones who fear your name, the small and the great, and to destroy the ones who destroy the earth.**

The seventh and final trumpet proclaims the establishment of the kingdom. Clearly 11:15-18 are introductory to the rest of the book of Revelation. And just as clearly, we have several obvious cases of reiteration through out the rest of the book, with several different chronological scopes presented by the Lord.

Although the past tense is used throughout verses 16-18, it is evident that the heavenly statements of the twenty-four elders look to the future. This is perfectly in accord with the nature of reiterative statements in apocalyptic literature, and the change from future to past tenses does not always mean that changes is from the perspective of the flow of events on earth. Sometimes the Greek aorist is used to signal a change of *perspective* from future to past as it does here. The twenty-four elders speak of future events because they are projecting themselves into the future beyond those events, and hence naturally refer to them in the past tense.

Verse 15

The great, or loud voices in heaven are for the proclamation of the kingdom of God. The announcement of the kingdom deserves voices, rather than the single voice of the previous trumpets. It is toward the establishment of the kingdom on the earth that the entirety of the Revelation has been proceeding.

The phrase the kingdom of the world identifies the location of the kingdom being proclaimed. The word world is *kosmos*, a reference to the world system which is on the earth, and which is being replaced. This is a reflection of Jesus words to Pilate recorded in John 18:36:

Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.

This statement is part of an interplay between the Lord Jesus Christ and Pilate. It is in response to the question, "Are you the king of the Jews?" recorded in John 18:33. The answer satisfied Pilate, as his response was to report to the Jews, "I find no fault in Him at all" (John 18:38). Pilate knew what the

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world was, and he knew that unless the entire system were destroyed Jesus would not claim a kingdom. And he also knew that he had no control over the world as a system, only over his little part of it. But it was that little part of the world about which the Jews in their spiritual myopia were concerned.

The phrase “the kingdoms of this world” is best understood as *the kingdoms that consist of the world system*. This current world system cannot co-exist with the kingdom of God, and will be totally eliminated by it. Why is this necessary? The world system is a political, as well as economic, system. Once the kingdom of God is established, the world system passes away. Hence, the millennial period, the first phase of the earthly kingdom, has no competition for the hearts of men. The earth will truly become a paradise from that point of view. Daniel 2:44 confirms this statement,

And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.

Part of the reason for this removal of the world system is that Satan is also removed from the earthly scene for a thousand years (Revelation 20:2). Hence, two of the three enemies of the believers, the two external ones, are eliminated from the scene. During the thousand years, only the sin principle will be active. Part of the purpose for the thousand year phase of the kingdom of God is to show that even when the environment is perfect, man’s sin must be controlled by force, that is, by the forceful reign of the Lord Jesus Christ with His rod of iron.

The voices proclaim that “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ.” The word “Lord” must refer to God the Father. This kingdom belongs to Him, and to His Christ, that is, to the Father’s anointed one, the Messiah of Israel.

“And he (that is, the Christ) shall reign for ever and ever.” This truth is mentioned a number of times in the Bible. Note in the previous quote from Daniel 2:44 that the kingdom which God sets up will “stand forever.” This truth is also stated at the announcement to Mary of the birth of Jesus, in Luke 1:31-33:

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS.³² He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David.³³ And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.

Verse 16-17

Although the past tense is used throughout verses 16-18, it is evident that the heavenly statements of the twenty-four elders in verse 18 look to the future from their perspective. This is perfectly in accord with the nature of reiterative statements in apocalyptic literature, and the change from future to past tenses does not always mean that changes is from the perspective of the flow of events on earth. Sometimes the Greek aorist is used to signal a change of perspective from the past to the future as it does beginning in verse 18. The twenty-four elders speak of future events because they are projecting themselves into the future beyond those events, and hence naturally refer to them in the past tense.

Verses 16 and 17 introduce the throne room vision. John sees the twenty-four elders who sit (present tense) before God on their thrones. Sit is present tense because John has been thrust into the far future in his vision, and he sees the heavenly events unfolding as though he were actually in the future time.

The response of the church believers, that is, the twenty-four elders who sit upon their thrones in heaven, to the announcement of the establishment of the kingdom on the earth is one of obeisance and worship. This is the expected response of those who have come to understand the great

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importance of the kingdom program upon the earth. God's creation was for the purpose of providing a perfect physical environment for men, and it is the establishment of the kingdom of God that provides it. One of the great lessons of the predictive Scriptures, including the book of Revelation, is that God's decree plan will come about. Nothing that Satan or man can do will stop it.

The statement made by the twenty-four elders may be considered under *three elements*:

1. The nature of their statement is found in the present tense phrase, "We give you thanks." One might expect praise rather than thanksgiving to be associated with the church's worship. But the context clearly calls for thanksgiving, as will be observed from the third element of their statement below.
2. The recipient of their statement is found in the phrases, "Lord God, the Almighty, who is and who was."¹³ The one to whom their thanks is directed is describe in three ways: a) "Lord God"; b) "the Almighty;" and c) "who is and who was." The designation "Lord God" is perhaps a reflection of the Old Testament designation of God as Yahweh Elohim. As used by the twenty-four elders, it is best thought of as a formal address called for because of the importance of the statement.

"The Almighty" might be translated "the Almighty One." It is a statement of God's divine ability to perform whatever task He deems necessary. Again, such a designation is consistent with the fact that the establishment of the kingdom according to God's divine plan is in view.

The dual clause "who is and who was" shows that God's control is not momentary, but is consistent with His ever present existence. God exists in time as One who both is and was without distinction. There is no time limitation with God so that the establishment of His earthly plan is not dependent on fulfilling man's idea of time. What seems to be a long process to mankind is an instantaneous "now" to God.

3. The cause of their thanksgiving is found in the past tense clause, "because you have taken your great power, and did reign." The twenty-four elders recognize what actually is operating with the establishment of the coming kingdom. First, God the Father has taken (perfect tense) His great power.

Now this sounds peculiar to us today, because we usually understand that God does not need to take power because He already has it. But, contrary to popular belief, the Bible does not teach that God is simply *all powerful*, but that He is *almighty*. The word might is a more intensive word than power, and basic to God's nature. Might is the latent strength that God has, whether He actually applies it or not. Power is God's might applied to specific situations. Since God is almighty by nature, He can apply power to any situation for exactly the outcome that He determines. Power must be taken to be used. Since it is derived from the might of God, power is inherent in God's being, hence the use of the Greek word *dunamis* for power. *Power is never applied without control, and we might describe power as being the controlled application of God's might.*

When the Father establishes the kingdom, He will apply the exact amount of power He had already taken, which is derived from His almighty nature. He will not apply too much power, nor will he apply too little power. He will apply the *exact amount* of power in order to get the job done at that time. The twenty-four elders recognize this truth. Hence, they call the Father the Almighty One, and give thanks because of the judicious application of His inherently great power derived from His almighty nature.

A second and related cause for the elders thanksgiving is found in the statement, "and did reign." Now it is evident that the "you" of the phrase "did reign" refers to God the Father rather than God the

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Son. This reign, then, cannot be the *millennial reign*, which belongs to the Son alone. Two possibilities arise:

1. This is a projection by the elders past the millennial period and refers to the future phase of the kingdom when the Son gives over the kingdom to the Father, and they share a co-regency (1 Corinthians 15:24). Hence the Father did reign with the Son.
2. A second possibility is that the phrase “did reign” refers to the universal reign of the Father over the universe. The fact that the Father reigns is mentioned in Revelation 3:21, where Jesus states that He now sits *together with the Father* on His, the Father’s, throne. God the Father’s throne refers not to the Davidic or Messianic reign, but the universal reign.

This makes sense, because the future application of God’s power through Christ in establishing the kingdom on earth is an extension of the power that He took when He established His reign over the Universe. Therefore, the second view seems preferable, as clearly God is already reigning, and it is the reign of God the Father that the Son shares today.

Verse 18

The perspective of verse 18 seems to be after the millennial period is over and the twenty-four elders are looking back over the tribulation and into the period immediately after the end of the millennium.

The nations, the Gentiles, were wrathful (not angry per the KJV). The Greek word is *orgidzo*, referring to their striking out in warfare. But their wrath was short-stopped by a four-fold intervention by God:

1. But God’s wrath came, which ended the wrath of the Gentiles. This would include not only the tribulation period, but that short period after the millennium when the nations come up against the “beloved city” (20:9).
2. This post-millennial perspective continues with the statement that the season for the dead to be judged also came. The dead refers to human beings who will be resurrected at that time for the final judgment. This, we know from later in this book, takes place at the great white throne judgment.
3. The third element which came was the rewarding of three groups of people: a) God’s bond-servants the prophets, which refers to all those prophets of the past that spoke forth the revelation of God; b) the saints in this place probably refers to all those Israelite saints who believed and remained faithful. It cannot include the church saints, as they have already received their rewards at the time of the reference. c) Associated with the saints are the ones who fear God’s name, who are further identified as small and great. These are undoubtedly believers who are to be rewarded. The temptation is to identify them with the Israelite saints, but it seems probable that this is referring to other than Israelites who believed in the God of Israel, perhaps including that great body of believers who existed before the establishment of the Nation of Israel.
4. The final element which came was the time to destroy the ones who destroy the earth. This cannot refer to the unbelieving dead, as they have already been accounted for. Who then are these destroyers? By process of elimination, it seems that there can be only one group left. It seems best to identify the ones who destroy the earth with fallen spirit beings. Satan and his spirit-being followers who have attempted to destroy the program of God upon the earth will themselves be destroyed.

I. The Seven Individuals (11:19-14:20)

The seven individuals of these three chapters are:

1. The Woman

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2. The Dragon
3. The Man-child
4. Michael, the Archangel
5. Israel's Remnant
6. The First Beast
7. The Second Beast

Two of them are not, as we shall see, specific persons, but represent Israel in slightly different ways.

Endnotes

- ¹ Walvoord, *Revelation*, pg. 175.
- ² Orr, *ISBE*, “Temple.” Electronic edition, E-sword.
- ³ Gaebelein, Arno Q., *The Revelation*, page 70. Sorry, Dr. Gaebelein, I do question it!
- ⁴ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, page 308.
- ⁵ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, page 180.
- ⁶ There is, however, a textual problem. The critical text has a subjunctive mood verb, rather than an indicative mood verb, a problem which confuses the condition, as a first class condition must have an indicative mood verb. ATR calls it a third class condition, while admitting that an indicative mood verb occurs in some manuscripts. In fact, the majority of manuscripts read as an indicative mood, and there is no doubt that the context supports that reading.
- ⁷ See Walvoord in *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Newell, McGee, et. al.)
- ⁸ Walvoord in *Revelation*,³² Strauss, et. al.
- ⁹ Walvoord, *Revelation*, pg. 181.
- ¹⁰ The resurrection of the church is not mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15 until verses 51-52. We learn there that that resurrection is a mystery resurrection, and therefore previously unrevealed. It is not part of the regular order of resurrections discussed in 15:22-24.
- ¹¹ Daniel 12:2 actually mentions both the first and second resurrections: “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt.” The first is “to everlasting life,” and the second is to “shame and everlasting contempt.” What we are not told in Daniel is the thousand year gap between the two resurrections. One must go to Revelation 20 for that information.
- ¹² Vincent, “Revelation 11:13.”
- ¹³ The addition of the phrase “and who is coming” is not found in this place except in very late manuscripts of the majority text type. The better majority text manuscripts reject it, as do the minority Egyptian texts. I have no problem in saying that it was included because of similar phraseology earlier in the book of Revelation and should be omitted here.

It is somewhat of a mystery as to why the NKJV translators included “and who is coming,” as it was not in the Farstad and Hodges text that they were using. They reverted here to the *Received Text* (*Textus Receptus*, or TR) that lies behind the original King James version.

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A careful analysis of Revelation 11 shows that the chapter division between it and chapter 12 is misplaced. The scene shifts from earth to heaven in 11:19, and continues that perspective throughout the 12th chapter, even though the scene switches back to the earth from time to time.

1. *The Persecution of Israel and Her Seed (11:19-12:17)*

SCOPE: THE TIME SPAN IS FROM FALL OF SATAN SOMETIME AFTER THE CREATION THROUGH THE END OF THE SEVENTIETH WEEK. ISRAEL COMES INTO EXISTENCE, GIVES BIRTH TO CHRIST, WHO ASCENDS TO HEAVEN. ISRAEL FLEES TO THE WILDERNESS, WHERE GOD PROTECTS HER UNTIL THE END OF THE TIME OF TRIBULATION. VERSES 12:7-12 ARE TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH THE MIDDLE OF DANIEL'S SEVENTIETH WEEK.

This section of the book is remarkable for several reasons as we shall see as we study through the statements. However, one of the most remarkable aspects of this section is rarely commented on. Not only is the time scope extraordinary, the theological structure is unusual. *The purpose of 11:19-12:17 is to present the outline of the fulfillment of God's heavenly plan upon the earth.* Chapter 12 presents the great scope of the Lord's purpose for creation, and the plan for the earth that was in His mind at the very beginning. It is as though the reader is seeing the outline, or perhaps abbreviated summary, of God's theological program for Israel as it was in His mind before any of the events took place. Of course there are great and important gaps. Cause and effect is only moderately provided. Nevertheless, from 11:19 through 12:17, we see the purpose for many of the earthly events and symbols found in the Old Testament Scriptures, even those that are not mentioned directly. The actual time frame of the vision does not emphasize the flow of events so much as the fact of the events in their certitude.

If this section has a theme beyond the ultimately predictive, it is the fact that God is, and from a heavenly perspective, has always been in charge of the program for His people Israel because He planned and established that program before it ever began. Chapter 12 takes every *major* aspect of the messianic plan consideration, and it is ultimately this chapter, almost exclusively in Scripture, that provides the reader with a snapshot of God's thinking in putting together history that relates to Israel and the program of earth the way that He did.

The scene opens in heaven, and we are reminded of the heavenly perspective periodically. Think of heaven as the control room for the great events that follow. God sits on His heavenly throne and controls the events that unfold.

This section reflects the determinative will of God as greatly as any passage in the Bible by showing the inevitability of the past historical events leading up to the birth of Christ, His death, His ascension, and the stage for His final victory. Here we see that was in the mind of God in heaven before its establishment as Israel on earth. We see Satan in rebellion before God before mankind was created and his final heavenly defeat which brings about almost the complete destruction of Israel. Revelation 12 provides the greatest scope of any predictive passage in Scripture simply in order to show that God controlled the history of earth from the beginning.

- 11:19** And the temple of God that is in heaven was opened, and in his temple the ark of his covenant was seen, and lightnings followed, and voices, and thunders, and an earthquake, and great hail.
- 12:1-2** And a great sign was seen in heaven, a woman arrayed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars, ² and she was with child, and she cries out, travailing in birth, and in pain to be delivered.
- 3** And there was seen another sign in heaven, and behold, a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his heads seven diadems.

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- 4 **And his tail draws the third part of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth, and the dragon stands before the woman that is about to be delivered, in order that when she is delivered he may devour her child.**
- 5 **And she was delivered of a son, a man child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, and her child was caught up to God, and to his throne.**
- 6 **And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in order that there they may nourish her one thousand two hundred sixty days.**
- 7-8 **And a war in heaven came about, Michael and his angels went to war with the dragon, and the dragon and his angels warred, ⁸ and they were not strong, neither was their place found any more in heaven.**
- 9 **And the great dragon was cast down, the old serpent, the one who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the one whole world. He was cast down to the earth, and his angels were cast down with him.**
- 10 **And I heard a great voice in heaven, saying, Now has come the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ, because the accuser of our brothers is cast down, who accuses them before our God day and night.**
- 11 **And they conquered him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony, and they loved not their life even to death.**
- 12 **Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them.**
Woe for the earth and for the sea, because the devil has descended to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has but a short season.
- 13 **And when the dragon saw that he was cast down to the earth, he persecuted the woman that brought forth the man child.**
- 14 **And there were given to the woman the two wings of the great eagle, in order that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.**
- 15 **And the serpent cast out of his mouth behind the woman water like a river, in order that it might sweep her away.**
- 16 **And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the river which the dragon cast out of his mouth.**
- 17 **And the dragon was wrathful against the woman, and went away to make war with the rest of her seed, who keep the commandments of God, and hold the testimony of Jesus, and I stood upon the sand of the sea.**

Some teach that the narrative of the book of Revelation is interrupted at this point and taken up again later. This view is aptly summarized by John Walvoord:

The dramatic introduction of the events relating to the seventh trumpet concluded here and will be resumed in Rev 16:1-21. Chronologically the time was close to Christ's second coming.

One can readily see how this might seem to be. But when the student realizes that chapter 12 actually opens with 11:19, such a view loses much of its force. The seventh trumpet is not interrupted, but continues through a series of introductory presentations that are designed to provide the present reader with the general conditions pertaining to the Seventieth Week of Daniel. Chapter 12 particularly sets up these presentations by returning to the throne room of God in heaven so as to indicate the certitude of the following predictions.

Revelation 11:19 does not indicate an interruption, but the beginning of a description of the *conditions* that prevail during Seventieth Week from God's perspective, and 16:1 reinforces that description by introducing the terrible judgment that *those conditions produce*.

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Verse 11:19

As stated in the above introduction, Revelation 11:19 rightly belongs as the first part of Chapter 12. It is a segue from the statements of the seventh trumpet and events in heaven that signal a new subsection of the narrative.

Verse 19 seems to be written from the point of view of an observer on earth. He sees the temple of God that is in heaven opened, yet the accompanying phenomena are earthly events, lightnings, noises (voices), thunders, an earthquake and great hail. These events signify the great importance of the heavenly opening.

Now the temple of God in heaven is the original from which the pattern for the earthly was taken. Here we get a momentary glimpse into the Holy of Holies where the ark of the covenant is located. Much speculation has occurred as to where the ark of the covenant has gotten to, even to the point of popular films being made to speculate on that subject. If John's vision is of the original ark of the covenant, and that is most probable, then there is no question that it is even now being preserved. Is it still on earth, or has it already been taken to heaven? It is impossible to say for certain, but when know where it will be at the time represented in John's vision. It will be in the actual temple in heaven.

The ark of the covenant is mentioned for a simple reason. The singular events of the rest of this section have to do with God's covenant people, Israel. The first great symbol of Chapter 12 is a woman who represents God's chosen nation.

Verses 12:1-2

The fact that the sign of the woman was seen in heaven initially, rather than on the earth, establishes the premise of the Chapter. It is written from a heavenly perspective. As we shall see, the woman represents the entirety of the nation Israel, even though that nation has not ever been in heaven literally, nor will it ever be. The purpose for having the sign in heaven is to show that Israel as an entity, including the entirety of its history in its most minute sense, was determined by the God who inhabits heaven. Likewise, the ultimate destiny of Israel is to inhabit the "kingdom of the heavens," that is, the earthly kingdom ruled by the heavenly ruler, the creator God, Jesus Christ.

The word sign refers to the fact that this is not a literal woman, but is a symbol of something else. As stated, the woman¹ is to be identified with the nation Israel throughout its entire history as viewed messianically. Her adornment of the sun carries the idea of her importance in this part of the narrative. as does the moon beneath her feet.² Those heavenly bodies also reflect the heavenly authority of God in establishing Israel as His people. In fact, the *subject* of this chapter is primarily the woman, whose presence is felt through the rest of the chapter, and who again comes into play near its end.

The crown of twelve stars clearly represents the twelve tribes of Israel. One's mind automatically considers the dreams of Joseph when reading of such similar imagery. The crown does not specifically refer to royalty, as it is the word *stephanos* rather than *diadema*.

As is evident from the context below, the child is the Lord Jesus Christ. Israel (not Mary, as some have suggested) agonized to give birth to its Messiah. John emphasizes her pain which refers to the difficulty Israel as a nation experienced over the years because of her lack of faith and going away from the Lord. The coming of the Messiah could have been relatively painless had the nation remained faithful to the Lord.

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Verse 3

The fact that we see another sign in heaven shows that we are still seeing a representation of God's heavenly plan. The word another (*allos*) means here *another of the same kind*, but cannot mean here the same kind of individuals, who are, indeed, at the opposite poles of God's plan. Rather, *another* means that the two signs, the woman and the dragon, are both part of the same plan; they are the same kinds of signs, dealing with God's plan for mankind. We do not need to guess at the identity of this sign in heaven. The great red dragon is later identified as Satan. One of the reasons Satan was created was to provide an antagonist to Israel, the woman.

He is described by several elements in the details of the vision. The word dragon itself is a transliteration from the Greek. Most lexicographers understand it to be a kind of *serpent*. Here it is represented as a great or large red serpent, reminiscent of large reptiles such as what are commonly called dinosaurs today. Some believe that such creatures existed up through the middle ages, gradually dying out in their larger forms so that today only such reptiles as the komodo dragon, crocodiles and alligators are all that remain of the larger species.³

At any rate, the red color would not have been normal for it, and must represent the negative aspects of Satan's violence. The seven heads and ten horns are reminiscent of the visions of Daniel 2 & 7, and certainly represent Satan's control over the Revived Roman Empire. In Daniel, the ten toes of chapter 2 and the ten horns of chapter seven represent the ten kings who rule over the Revived Roman Empire. The seven heads represent the seven kings who remained after the "little horn" destroys three of the ten kings.

The seven diadems (διάδημα) confirm that the heads represent kings, as this word for "crown" often carried the idea of royalty. During the time of the Revived Roman Empire, Satan will seek to control the political scene through his control first of the ten kings, and then of the seven subsequent kings. The "little horn" (the *man of sin*, commonly misrepresented by the title "The Antichrist") is not represented at all on his head because the control of the man of sin is basic to that individual's existence. He is controlled by Satan from the beginning, but it seems that the other kings of the Revived Roman Empire attempt to maintain control over their own constituency.

Verse 4

The stars of heaven are often taken to represent the spirit beings who fell with Satan. If this is so, the event took place prior to the events of Genesis 1:2. "A third part" is to be taken literally. One third of the then existing spirit beings were seduced by Satan. The casting of them to the earth would indicate that the spirits which followed Satan were part of his plan for the earth, to interfere with God's plan for mankind. The Bible provides many specific details of the devil's attempts to disrupt God's earthly program, starting in the garden temptation of Eve, through the early events of the book of Genesis, reflected in 2 Peter and Jude.

Shortly after the incarnation of Christ, Satan attempted to destroy the Child. Having failed in Old Testament times to interrupt God's program for mankind, he continued at the time of Christ's birth. Undoubtedly this refers to the killing of the babies in and around Bethlehem as a result of the visit by the wise men. But it might also imply Satan's continuing temptations of Christ as well as his dealings in influencing His death. Satan did not want God's messianic program to succeed, as his repeated attempts to derail it attest.

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Verse 5

However, Satan was not successful, and Israel brought forth Jesus of the Nazarene. It is significant that He is described in His messianic relationship to the Gentile nations. The image of Psalm 2 is invoked in this regard in the words “rule all the nations with a rod of iron.”

Christ’s entire earthly life is viewed in the gap indicated by the word “and” between the two parts of the sentence of this verse. Between the birth and the ascension is a gap of some 30-35 years. This is but a short chronological gap. A much longer one occurs between verses 5 and 6.

The child was caught up to God, a clear reference to His ascension. The word caught up is *harpazo*, the same word that Paul uses in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 of the rapture of the church. The ascension of Christ is presented here to take us back to the early part of the book of Revelation, as is indicated by the words “and to his throne.”

This is an allusion to Revelation 3:21 where Christ states that He sits with His Father on the Father’s throne. Now that Christ is ascended and seated on the Father’s throne, the next chronological gap in the narrative can take place, because the Lord Jesus is overseeing the events of the Seventieth Week.

Verse 6

From the end of verse five to this statement in verse six, over 2,000 years have elapsed *so far*. We still do not know how many years must remain before these events unfold. Israel flees to the wilderness in the middle of Daniel’s Seventieth Week. The reference to the woman fleeing is to be taken to the same event predicted by Christ in Matthew 24:15-21:

Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand), ¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁷ Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. ¹⁸ And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. ¹⁹ But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! ²⁰ And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. ²¹ For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. ²² And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened.

By the time of the abomination of desolation, three and one half years have already elapsed in the Seventieth Week. In the middle of the week, according to Daniel, the “abomination that makes desolate” occurs (see Daniel 11:31 and 12:11).

This fleeing into the wilderness is by design. God has prepared a place for the physical salvation of the nation. The second half of the week, described here in Revelation as “one thousand two hundred and sixty days,” refers to the last three and one half years, or forty-two months of thirty days each of this great tribulation period. (42 times 30 equals 1,260.)

At that time, the woman undoubtedly represents the remnant of Israel that has fled the persecutions of the man of sin. We do not know the exact number of Jews who will die at this time, but it is significant. Zechariah 13:8, 9 indicates that two-thirds of Israel will be destroyed during its time of Judgment:

And it shall come to pass in all the land, Says Yahweh, That two-thirds in it shall be cut off and die, But one-third shall be left in it: ⁹ I will bring the one-third through the fire, Will refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, And I will answer them. I will say, This is My people; And each one will say, Yahweh is my God.

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Verses 7-8

The scene shifts once again to heaven. The war in heaven is directly associated with the preceding event, and therefore takes place during the Seventieth Week.

Michael is, of course, the archangel; he is mentioned by name five times in the Bible: Daniel 10:13 & 21, Daniel 12:1, Jude 9 and here in Revelation 12:7. He is actually called archangel only once, in Jude 9. The word *archangel* means head angel. It is used in the sense of a rank, probably a military one since spirit beings are generally presented as a military host, or army. This angel is mentioned first by name in Daniel 10:13:

But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia.

The King James translation states that he is one of the “Chief Princes.” There are probably other spirit beings who are “chief princes,” perhaps over the cherubim and seraphim, but only one is a chief prince of angels, and that is Michael. Interestingly, the word translated “chief” is from the Hebrew word “head” and corresponds closely to “arch” in archangel. Furthermore, the Hebrew word translated “prince” is *sar*, and is regularly used as a military or service rank in the sense of an officer.⁴ Michael is also described by the word *sar* in Daniel 10:21 and 12:1. So rather than translating the phrase “chief princes” perhaps we should translate it “head officers.”

In his role as Head Angel, it is not unusual that Michael is the one to lead angels into war. This is undoubtedly the meaning of the statement in Daniel 12:1:

At that time Michael shall stand up, The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, Such as never was since there was a nation, Even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, Every one who is found written in the book.

Again Michael is referred to by the Hebrew word *sar*, and again we might more accurately translate “great prince” as “great officer.” One of his tasks is to stand watch over “the sons of your people.” Now, the word “your” refers to Daniel, and the sons of Daniel’s people are none other than the Israelites. So the archangel has a special relationship to Israel. When Michael “stands up” it is certainly for the purpose of exercising his authority and power in relationship to Israel. Daniel 12 gives no details of the events in heaven, but the occasion of his standing are given in the words, “And there shall be a time of trouble, Such as never was since there was a nation, Even to that time,” a close reflection of Christ’s statements in Matthew 24. Perhaps this act of Michael’s standing is to prepare for the heavenly war against Satan.

The specifics of Michael and Satan’s war are presented in Revelation 12:7 and 8. Two great angelic armies go to war. While we do know *where* the spirit being war will take place, that is, in heaven, *how* spirit beings fight we are not told. We know that there have been “skirmishes” going back into the Old Testament. Daniel 10:10-14 gives us a glimpse of this conflict, where Michael had to intercede between two spirit beings, one of whom was hindering another:

Suddenly, a hand touched me, which made me tremble on my knees and on the palms of my hands. ¹¹ And he said to me, O Daniel, man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you. While he was speaking this word to me, I stood trembling. ¹² Then he said to me, Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words. ¹³ But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes,⁵ came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia. ¹⁴ Now I have come to make you understand what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision refers to many days yet to come.

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The phrases “prince (*sar*) of the kingdom of Persia,” and “kings of Persia” do not refer to human beings, but to spirit beings who have authority in the spirit world over the geographical location of Persia. All that this authority entails we are not told, but it is obvious that one of the enemy spirit beings held up the spirit being sent to answer Daniel’s queries.

The resolution to the conflict among spirit beings is presented in Revelation 12. According to Revelation 12:8, Satan and his army are defeated. Up until this event takes place, Satan has his abode in heaven. He has his place removed, and he is cast to the earth. Make no mistake. Satan today resides in heaven. It is his domicile, though he is clearly not limited to it, but can and does “travel abroad.” (See Job 1:7.)

Verse 9

The great event actually takes place in verse 9. The great dragon is specifically identified as Satan. His description is significant. He is called the devil, a word which means “accuser” or “slanderer.” He is “Satan,” an ancient Aramaic word meaning “adversary.” The word devil indicates his lying methodology, while the name Satan accurately sums up his opposition to God and His plan, his primary motivation in all his activities.

He is also called “the deceiver of the one whole world.” Deception is Satan’s primary task in his attempt to control men, and he is succeeding magnificently. No Christian should be confused as to why the world today, and in times past, is in the state that it is. Satan is in control through lying deceit, and this state of affairs will continue until he is finally bound for a thousand years.

Dear Christian, are you looking for justice from the rulers of this world? You will rarely find it. Satan controls the affairs of men, and even the best of the unbelieving world is at war with God, because its cherub leader is at war with God. Mankind will not be at peace until Satan is removed physically from the scene by God Himself. True justice as a regular production of fallen man is impossible.

At the middle of the Seventieth Week, Satan no longer will dwell in heaven, nor, apparently, will he have access to the heavenly realm, as he had in the days of Job. He will be cast down, but not to hell, or to judgment, but to the earth which occasions rejoicing in heaven, and woe upon the earth.

Verse 10

John hears a great, or loud voice in heaven. Again we are brought back to the control room for the events that are unfolding. The angelic war is over, Satan has been defeated and cast to the earth.

Rejoicing in heaven begins. It is a great day, because it signals the beginning of the end of Satan’s activities. The voice proclaims salvation. The salvation in view is best understood as the eschatological salvation of Israel rather than spiritual salvation of the individual believer. The context bears this out by the statement that “the kingdom of our God and the power of His Christ have come.” While it is not yet established at this point in the book of Revelation, the kingdom is on the way and no one can stop it. The events described here are the opening salvos that result in the establishment of the kingdom of God on the earth.

The word “power” indicates the precise application of God’s might in bringing about the His kingdom. It is the Father’s kingdom in the sense that the application of the Father’s power will bring it into existence. But as a realm of authority, it belongs to “his Christ,” that is, to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Satan is described as “the accuser of our brethren,” that is, the accuser of the tribulation saints. This is an appropriate title, as one of the main purposes of the devil is to derail the program of God dealing with those who are justified. His accusations are such as those that he made against Job in Job 1:9-11:

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So Satan answered the LORD and said, Does Job fear God for nothing? ¹⁰ Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. ¹¹ But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!

It appears that Satan judges everyone by his own bias. He cannot conceive of someone who loves God because of who God is, rather than what he wants or gets from God. It is in Satan's nature to be a thief, and he believes everyone else has that same tendency. So he accuses believers of being like himself, small and petty minded, interested in only what they can gain.

Verse 11

To whom does the pronoun "they" refer. Generally the pronoun is taken to refer to believing human beings who die during the tribulation period. Indeed, most simply assume that view without explaining their reasons for it. However, there is a grammatical problem. The pronoun more naturally goes back to Michael and his angels. But if so, then we have the problem of the meaning of the "word of their testimony" and the fact that they seem able to die, which does not seem to fit spirit beings. However, we must not jump to conclusions, and it is at least possible that this victory is the angelic victory rather than the human victory over Satan.

If this is referring to human beings, the tribulation saints are in view here, rather than the martyrs of all time, as some would have it. They conquer (*nikao* - to be victorious over) Satan, not through their own ability, but because of the blood of the Lamb, a reference to the crucifixion of Christ. Most believe that these tribulation saints are limited to those who die during the 70th week. However, it may be that the remnant of Israel is also in view, since they defeat Satan by obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ's commands found in Matthew 24.

When Satan is cast to the earth, the violence of the tribulation period comes to fruition.

Verse 12

While the heavens rejoice, the to the earth a woe is announced, both statements being the figure of speech personification, although the inhabitants of heaven are included in the command to rejoice.

At the middle of the 70th week of Daniel, the devil descends to the earth, and throughout the second half of the tribulation, specifically with reference to the land of Israel and the Mediterranean Sea, he begins his onslaught against those who oppose his attempt at establishing personal control.

Satan, at this time, finally realizes that he is losing the war. It appears that until that time Satan believes that he is winning, but his delusional bubble is burst when he is finally cast out of heaven. This knowledge of forthcoming defeat brings about an outpouring of his wrath against the earth that is unprecedented. It is of this time that Jesus states in Matthew 24:21,

For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.

Verse 13

John reverts to the symbolism of the dragon and the woman, no longer calling Satan the devil. In the vision, the dragon "saw" that he was cast down to the earth. The implication of the verb is that Satan finally understood the results of the heavenly war, and will act accordingly. The focus, then, is no longer heavenly, but earthly. He persecutes the woman, Israel, during the second half of the week.

Again, the "man child" is mentioned to give strength to the symbolism of the woman. This is no ordinary symbol of a earthly nation, but of the nation that produced the messiah. The historical

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importance of Israel cannot be underestimated. It is through God's chosen people that the ultimate salvation and deliverance of the earth is to be accomplished.

Verse 14

The two wings are likely a reference to God's supernatural intervention, not to the modern idea of the airplane, as some have taken it. The wing is often used in Old Testament passages in a symbolic way, sometime referring to supernatural intervention or abnormal speed (Exodus 19:4; Psalm 17:8; Isaiah 8:8; Daniel 7:6). The "great" eagle⁶ means a large bird of prey, so that the picture is that of the woman prepared for rapid flight.

The place to where Israel will flee is unknown. The fact that it is described as "her place" and that it will be "prepared by God" indicates that the place is supernaturally impregnable. Some have thought it might be Petra, the city built by the Nabateans south of Israel. This may be, but not because it is a natural fortress that cannot be approached. Modern warfare cares nothing of long winding passages when danger can be dropped so easily from above. The place where Israel flees, wherever it may be, will be provided by God at the proper time.

Again we see the timetable of events. This certainly refers to the same event of verse 6 above. The phrase "a time and times and half a time" is taken directly from Daniel 7:25. Dr. John Whitcomb, in his article entitled "Daniel's Great Seventy-Weeks Prophecy: An Exegetical Insight," says,

It is in Revelation 12 that we discover the clear interpretation of that phrase. The fourteenth verse reads as follows: "The two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, in order that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time." Comparing this with v 6, we read: "And the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she might be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days." This same period of tribulation is mentioned also in Rev 11:3 as being 1260 days in length, while in 11:2 and 13:5 it is given as 42 months. It is, of course, a matter of simple arithmetic to demonstrate that 1260 days is equivalent to 42 thirty-day months, or approximately three and a half years. This proves conclusively that the phrase "time and times and half a time" in biblical prophecy means three and a half years, or, in other words, "a year and two years and half a year."⁷

Verse 15

Is this water, or people? Water and flooding is used both ways in Scripture. My best guess (and it is just a guess) given the literal nature of this passage is that the water consists of water energized by Satan to destroy Israel; that is, a liquid army is sent into the wilderness after her. That the serpent casts the "water like a river" out of his mouth may speak of the verbal control he has over nature. However, if flood is meant symbolically rather than literally, and therefore refers to people, which is possible, it will likewise be an ineffective army, though it is controlled by the mouth of the dragon.

Verse 16

The earth is personified as helping the woman, an undoubted reference to the means which God will use to overcome this Satanic attempt. The best interpretation is the simplest one. The earth, under supernatural control, simply opens up and the waters (or people) fall into it. Perhaps God will use an earthquake to do this deed, as He sometimes uses intermediate means to accomplish His tasks. Or perhaps He will simply say "open up."

The point, however, is straightforward. The nation Israel cannot be destroyed by Satan. It is, and always has been, God's plan to preserve His chosen people. Nothing that man or cherub can do will

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thwart God's program for Israel. Israel will enter the Kingdom of the Lord, though in reduced numbers.

Verse 17

The dragon raged (*orgizomai* - to strike out violently) against the woman, but because he is unsuccessful, he goes away to make war with the rest of her seed. Who are the "rest of her seed?" Probably the 144,000 sealed from each of the twelve tribes is in view. This would be consistent with their description as keeping the commandments of God and having the testimony of Jesus.

A minor textual problem occurs at this point. The final statement "and I stood upon the sand of the sea" occurs in the great majority of ancient manuscript, while "And he stood upon the sand of the sea" sometimes occurs in a few. The difference is the matter of one letter in Greek. The verb "he stood" is spelled "*estathe*" while the verb "I stood" is spelled "*estathen*." It appears that in some manuscripts the last letter of the verb dropped. Now, in copying manuscripts, most authorities recognize that it is more likely to drop a letter than to add a letter. Therefore the translation "I stood" is often preferred. Those who accept the translation "he stood" do so because the manuscripts which have no last "n" in the verb are the more ancient Egyptian texts. In this case, the "I stood" translation is probably better, but it is impossible to be absolutely dogmatic.

If, however, the translation "he stood" is retained, it obviously refers to the dragon. This is consistent with the context, as the next chapter is clearly a continuation of this one, and therefore the reference would be to the on-going activity of Satan. If, on the other hand, "I stood" is retained, it refers to John's witnessing of the beast coming out of the sea in the next chapter. Indeed, most who translate the word "I stood" attach it to the beginning of chapter 13.

Endnotes

- ¹ Some strive to make the woman represent the church. Those who hold to the false doctrine that says that all the people of God are one people, and hence confuse the church and Israel, usually take that position here. Some who hold that there is only one people of God make the woman to be Mary because she gives birth to the Christ. But the context will simply not allow that nefarious interpretation. The woman is Israel without dilution, not including the church, nor Gentile believers before the establishment of Israel, such as Adam or Enoch.
- ² Some have thought the sun and moon represent Jacob and Rachel because of Joseph's dream in Genesis 37:9-11. While there may be a literary allusion to that passage, it goes beyond normal interpretive procedure to identify Joseph's parents with the sun and moon.
- ³ For example, see *Dinosaurs by Design* by Duane Gish, who holds that the large land dinosaurs were destroyed in the flood, but the large semi-aquatic reptiles survived, and provide the basis for several later references in the Bible.
- ⁴ The "chief butler" and "chief baker" of Genesis 40 were officers in Pharaoh's court. In both cases, the word translated "chief" in the KJV is the Hebrew word *sar*.
- ⁵ Hebrew - הַשָּׂרִים הַרְאִישִׁיִּים, *ha sarim ha ri'shonim* – head officers.
- ⁶ The word eagle may refer either to the flocking birds that eat carrion, such as the vulture, or to the single pair birds such as the eagle, which also eat carrion. The ancients did not make the specific distinction that we do today. Nor does the word eagle ever refer to the bald eagle, as such were unknown in Israel. The "baldness like an eagle" in Micah 1:16 cannot refer to the bald eagle, but to the vulture which has no feathers above a certain point.
- ⁷ John Whitcomb, *Grace Theological Journal*, V2 #2:259-263—Fall 81

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Chapter Thirteen

2. *The Activity of the Man of Sin and the False Prophet (13:1-18)*

SCOPE: CHAPTER 13:1-2 OCCUR AFTER THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH BUT BEFORE THE ACTUAL BEGINNING OF DANIEL'S 70TH WEEK. VERSES 3-4 DEAL WITH THE FIRST 3 ½ YEARS OF THE TRIBULATION. VERSES 5-10 DEAL WITH THE SECOND 3 ½ YEARS OF THE TRIBULATION. VERSES 11-14 RETURN TO THE FIRST 3 ½ YEARS. THE EVENT OF VERSE 15 SEEMS TO TAKE PLACE RIGHT AT THE MIDDLE OF THE SEVENTIETH WEEK. VERSES 16-18 DESCRIBE EVENTS THAT OCCUR DURING THE LAST 3 ½ YEARS OF THE SEVENTIETH WEEK.

a. *The First Beast (13:1-10)*

- 1 **And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns, and seven heads, and on his horns ten diadems, and upon his heads names of blasphemy.**
- 2 **And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion, and the dragon gave him his power, and his throne, and great authority.**
- 3-4 **And I saw one of his heads as it were having been slain to death, and his death-stroke was healed, and the whole earth marveled after the beast, ⁴ and they worshiped the dragon, because he gave his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, Who is like the beast, and, who is able to war with him?**
- 5 **And there was given to him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and there was given to him authority to continue forty-two months.**
- 6 **And he opened his mouth for blasphemies against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, even the ones who tabernacle in heaven.**
- 7 **And it was given to him to make war with the saints, and to conquer them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him.**
- 8 **And all that dwell on the earth shall worship him, every one whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that has been slain.**
- 9 **If any man has an ear, let him hear.**
- 10 **If any one is for captivity, into captivity he is going, if any man is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he is to be killed.**

Here is the endurance and the faith of the saints.

Verse 1

Verses 1-4 deal with the first three and a half years of Daniel's 70th week. The first beast is to be identified with the Revived Roman Empire as exemplified by the man of sin, commonly called the antichrist. Again we have an example of reiteration. Whereas the previous chapter ended during the second half of the tribulation, this scene goes back to the first half of the Seventieth Week of Daniel, and perhaps even a little before. Dr. Walvoord states,

His 10 horns and 7 heads, with 10 crowns on his horns, depict the Revived Roman Empire, which was also represented by the fourth beast of Daniel, which also had 10 horns (Dan. 7:7-8; cf. Rev. 13:3; 17:3, 7) In Revelation 13 and 17 the beast is the world ruler, whereas in Daniel 7 the little horn on the beast was the world ruler. The fact that the beast comes out from the sea indicates that he is a Gentile, for the sea of humanity is involved as his source (cf. Rev. 17:15).¹

The fact that the beast arises from the sea is significant. Only the Mediterranean Sea can be meant, and the reason for the figure is evident. The geographical location of the following events is being identified by the Lord Jesus Christ. The Revived Roman Empire will occupy primarily the Mediterranean Basin as did the original Roman Empire.

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The 10 horns undoubtedly refer to the ten kings of the early form of the Revived Roman Empire. Each is wearing a diadem, the royal crown which is consistent with their royal authority. They correspond to the ten toes of the Daniel 2 vision of Nebuchadnezzar. This takes the vision to prior to the beginning of Daniel's 70th week. That week cannot be established until the "little horn" of Daniel 7 destroys three of the ten kings. He must come on the scene in a subordinate "little horn" position and take over the rule of three of the ten kings. Then he will have authority to sign a covenant with Israel for one week.

As to the seven heads, it seems best to see them as representative of the complete authority of the beast, the man of sin. The purpose for their existence, however, is clear. The Revived Roman Empire is the Satanic substitute for the kingdom of God. Just prior to the beginning of the 70 weeks, the ten king confederacy is, according to Daniel, reduced to seven kings plus the little horn, who alone protects Israel. Unlike the earlier kings, the man of sin will in all subtlety gain Israel's confidence before betraying them. What the seven horns could not do directly through blasphemy, the little horn will do through deceit.

Hence, we have seven heads. On these heads are written *the names of blasphemy*. Since we are not told what these names are, it is useless to speculate. But the little horn speaks pompous words according to Daniel 7:8. These pompous words are probably the blasphemy written on the seven heads. Given the context, it is probable that this blasphemy (the Greek word *blasphemia* primarily means an accusation) somehow makes accusation against God and His program in some way, especially His program for Israel.

Verse 2

The diverse character of the beast is represented by the various animals used to portray him. One is immediately reminded of Daniel 7:3-6 where these three animals are used to represent the previous three Gentile world powers that existed before the Roman empire came into existence:

And four great beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other. ⁴ The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings. I watched till its wings were plucked off; and it was lifted up from the earth and made to stand on two feet like a man, and a man's heart was given to it. ⁵ And suddenly another beast, a second, like a bear. It was raised up on one side, and had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. And they said thus to it: 'Arise, devour much flesh!' ⁶ After this I looked, and there was another, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird. The beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it.

Revelation 13:2 we have the lion/leopard/bear motif repeated. However, John sees not four animals, but one, and that one is unique. It is unlike any one of the Daniel beasts. In Daniel 7:7 we do indeed have a unique animal, a beast that is stated to be different than the three preceding beasts:

After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.

Undoubtedly, this first beast of Revelation 13 corresponds to the fourth beast of Daniel 7. No doubt, then, that this is the Revived Roman Empire, the establishment of which must precede the final week of Daniel. But because of the personal reference, "the dragon gave him his power, and his throne, and great authority," it seems that not just the empire is in view, but its final leader. In Daniel 7:8 he is referred to as a "little horn:"

I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words.

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With this view Dr. Walvoord agrees:

This passage is first of all a revelation of the Revived Roman Empire in its period of worldwide dominion, but more especially this paragraph directs attention to the evil character who exercises satanic power as the world dictator.²

Again, you will note that Dr. Walvoord falls into the trap of referring to “worldwide dominion” and “the world dictator.” This is a common mistake, as clearly there are areas outside of the Revived Roman Empire that are part of the world, and are predicted to go to war against it. (See author’s notes Daniel 11, for instance.)

Nevertheless, the beast must represent the man of sin who is so closely identified with the Revived Roman Empire, not simply the empire itself.

Verses 3&4

Several views have been presented concerning the wound that was healed:

1. Alford sees the deadly wound as the destruction of “the Roman pagan Empire” by “the Christian Roman Empire,” thus making it a matter of history rather than prophecy (*The Greek Testament*, 4: 675). The revival of the Roman Empire would then be its miraculous healing. This view can be discounted by the pretribulational scholar, as it has very little to commend it, especially in view of the close association of the events of Revelation 13:1-2 with Daniel’s prophecy.
2. Some have seen this wound to refer to some historical character who has survived some sickness or personal attack. Dr. Walvoord comments,

Among the more common suggestions are Nero, Judas Iscariot, and in modern times such personages as Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin.³

Such a view is untenable because, like the previous view, it places the events into contemporary history, based upon the bias of the individual in identifying who the man of sin is or was. As bad as some of those men were, they do not come near to fulfilling the evil that the Bible predicts concerning Daniel’s Seventieth Week.

3. The best view is that the future “man of sin” will receive a mortal wound to be miraculously healed, perhaps by Satan, who certainly has the power to perform such a miracle as an attestation to the authority of beast. However, the view of some that Satan raises the man of sin from the dead cannot be true. Satan does not have this ability, and this view seems to be based on a misunderstanding of this verse taken together with Revelation 17:8,

The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.⁴

The clause “and is not, and yet is” is taken to be a reference to the healing of the death stroke, but, in fact, it is not. The beast, the man of sin, “is not” because he has been held in the bottomless pit, not because he was previously killed. That “he was and is not and yet is” refers to his being on the earth, then not on the earth, and then again on the earth.

But only God working through the Son can raise the dead (John 5:21-29). Dr. McGee correctly states,

“...There are many who have taken the position that the Beast is actually raised from the dead by Satan. This cannot be because Satan does not have power to raise the dead; that power has not been given to him at all. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only One who can raise the dead.”⁵

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At the time of this vision, Satan will have been cast to the earth, and will seek temporal authority, something which He only has today in a limited way. During the second half of Seventieth Week of Daniel, his authority on the earth will be demonstrably more exercised. We read in the thirteenth chapter that he is wrathful because he knows that he only has a short time.

By giving his authority to the man of sin who heads the Revived Roman Empire, Satan is able to extend his government over the Gentile government of the day that will have the Holy Land as part of its territory. Within that territory no one can stand against the man of sin. But we know from other scriptures that the kings of the north, south, and east will come against him during this period.

Some, such as Dr. Walvoord, have associated this deadly wound with the idea that this man is a counterfeit Christ. The popular attribution to him as the “antichrist” seems to fit this same idea, as the word “anti” can mean “instead of” as well as “against.” However, the Bible nowhere calls this man antichrist, at least not directly. This view seems to be based on the statement in 1 John 2:18:

Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist⁶ is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour.

However, 1 and 2 John are the only places where the word *antichrist* appears in Scripture. And John himself seems to debunk the idea that there is a specific individual called antichrist. At the time that he wrote his epistle, “many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour.” John does not mean that it is the eschatological “last hour” but that in the historical process of his time, the church was about to undergo serious persecution, which indeed took place.⁷

Note his statements in 1 John 2:22:

Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son.

The term antichrist can be applied to anyone who a specific doctrine. First, John asks a rhetorical question, and identifies a liar as one who denies the messiahship of Jesus the Nazarene. The term “the Christ” means “the anointed one” and is the Greek equivalent of “the messiah.” Now John is making the statement of truth concerning Jesus being the Messiah to counter this false view, but he does not mean that Jesus is the Messiah for the church. Jesus is the Messiah for Israel, and as such He will return to establish the Davidic Israelite kingdom after the tribulation. But the first step in denying the deity of Christ and His relationship to God the Father is to deny His messiahship.

Then John goes on to identify the term *antichrist* with those who deny the Father and the Son. Already by the time of John’s writings there were those who were denying Trinitarian truth, especially regarding the relationship between the God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

One such man was named Cerinthus, a contemporary of John, who followed the Jewish law, denied that God had made the physical world and denied the deity of Jesus. Cerinthus taught that “the Christ” came upon Jesus at baptism and departed at the crucifixion. Later this error would be identified with gnosticism,⁸ but at this time it was simply a mixture of some Jewish legalistic ideas with certain Greek mystery religious concepts, and then mixed with a malicious view of Christ.

But John’s statement is broad enough to apply to any error that promotes false views of the Father and the Son, and is, today, to be identified with any individual or group that denies the deity of Christ and His correct relationship to the Father.

John makes a further statement in 1 John 4:2-3:

By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit who confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God,³ and every spirit who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God.

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And this is the *spirit* of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

This statement seems to preclude the possibility of applying the term “antichrist” to any specific individual. He refers to “every spirit” by which he means any fallen spirit being. He calls everyone of these spirits “the spirit of the Antichrist.” He undoubtedly means demonic spirits who influenced false teachers who, in turn, denied the truth of the incarnation. The word “confesses” could easily be translated “agrees.” Hence, the term antichrist *can only rightly be applied to those who make false statements concerning the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh* (some were calling Him an *aeon*, referring to the “demiurge,” that is, the lesser God who created the physical universe). When one denies the clear teaching of the New Testament concerning the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity, *that person is controlled by the spirit of the antichrist.*

John makes it clear. “And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.” John is correcting the error that his readers had been taught that the spirit of antichrist “was coming” by pointing out that the spirit of antichrist is now already in the world. This is confirmed in 2 John 1:7 where we read,

For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

Any human teacher who rejects the truth of the incarnation is “a deceiver and an antichrist.” It seems impossible to apply the term antichrist to any eschatological figure, since he is referred to in both first and second John as already being present. It is more accurate to use one of the biblical titles that the future Roman prince is given, such as “little horn,” or “man of sin,” in order to avoid confusion between the eschatological doctrine of the man of sin and the Christological doctrine of the antichrist.

As part of the confusion brought about using the term antichrist of the man of sin, the concept that the man of sin, Satan, and the false prophet make of a substitute or false Trinity is often urged upon Christians. Some time ago, this author wrote a short position paper on the man of sin, from which the following is a quote:

In this regard, much speculation is given over to the “unholy Trinity” of Satan, the antichrist, and the false prophet, as though they correspond to the biblical Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Indeed, some have so accepted this idea that they accuse one of heresy for questioning it!⁹ The fact of the matter is, however, that no such association is made by any author of Scripture. The argument seems to be based on the simple fact that three individuals are mentioned, that one is *incorrectly* called “antichrist,” which is taken to mean “false Christ,” as well as the fact that the second beast of Revelation 13 (the false prophet) has “horns like a lamb.” However, there are other, more normal, explanations of his having horns like a lamb than that he represents a false Christ. The idea of a false Trinity becomes a confused muddle when one realizes that both the first and second beast are said to be false Christs.

It is speculation at best to attempt to get a false Trinity from the incidental statements of the Book of Revelation. Indeed, when one becomes dogmatic about this speculation or any other, he is on a slippery slope leading to false and premature application.

What is the meaning of the clause “the whole earth marveled after the beast?” To some, this seems to go beyond the Revived Roman Empire. The words “whole earth” are ὅλη ἡ γῆ (*hole he ge*), and may refer, they say, to inhabitants of the entire globe. This is possible, one supposes, as, when the word

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gets out about this seemingly miraculous healing all who hear of it, no matter where they are, might be amazed. However, we must not overlook the fact that this is a figure of speech. The word “earth” is used in the sense of people who inhabit the earth, not the physical ground itself. The whole earth then would be all the people on the planet. But this cannot be, as believers who live at this time would not be included because of the next statement concerning them in verse 4, “and they worshiped the dragon, because he gave his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, Who is like the beast, and, who is able to war with him?”

Now, this statement could not be applied to believers, who will never worship Satan or the beast. It must be referring to all the unbelievers who hear of these events. So we have a hyperbole, an exaggeration for effect. Since the great many human beings will fall into this category, it is a reasonable figure of speech to employ.

Finally, a note on the word “worship.” We see this word almost exclusively in terms of its religious use today. However, in the first century, the Greek word was used regularly of honoring kings and secular authority. It carries the idea of bowing down, or falling at one’s feet. It need not mean, as some maintain, that the man of sin is worshiped as God by the whole world. Some unbelievers will indeed worship him, accepting his claims of deity. But we know others will not, for they will go to war against him. Rather, it seems that the worship here is rather obeisance to a ruler in the general sense, which could include both religious and non-religious observance.

If this view is true, and we believe it is, the “whole earth” refers to those who do obeisance to the man of sin because of his political and religious involvement. The most likely meaning to the phrase, the whole earth, then, becomes the entire land that encompasses the Revived Roman Empire, not the whole globe.

Furthermore, the question “who is able to war with him?” indicates an insular view, not a world-wide one. The question indicates that he will be thought of as invincible in warfare by those who bow to him. There are those who *will*, in fact, go to war with the man of sin and his Revived Roman Empire. They certainly will not take the view that he is unbeatable because of this apparently miraculous healing.

Verse 5

SCOPE: VERSES 5-10 DEAL WITH THE SECOND HALF OF DANIEL’S 70TH WEEK.

Again we see that the beast’s mouth is active. “Great things” and “blasphemies” come out of it. Daniel 7:25 also speaks of this event:

He shall speak *pompous* words against the Most High, Shall persecute the saints of the Most High, And shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand For a time and times and half a time.

The blasphemies probably correspond to the blasphemies written on the seven heads. See the note above on the seven heads for a short discussion of these blasphemies. The specific nature of these blasphemies is identified in the verse 6 below.

The forty two months is the “time and times and half a time of Daniel 7:25, the 1,260 days or three and one half years of the second half of the tribulation period. The man of sin’s power will be destroyed at the end of that time, although he continues for a short time thereafter. Eventually he will be cast into the lake of fire.

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Verse 6

John presents specific nature of the beast's blasphemies, that is, his false accusations, even though the exact wording is not provided. This seems to be a description of some of the verbal part of the abomination of desolation. The objects of the man of sin's false accusations are twofold:

1. He will blaspheme against God. This is his primary object of blasphemy. To blaspheme primarily means to make a false accusation against someone. Because of his particular agenda, the blasphemy must include the very character of God Himself, as is evidenced by the statement that the beast will blaspheme against God's *name*. The word "God" refers to God the Father, while the word *name* is used in the sense of God's reputation or expression of His very character. Satan understands the Trinity, and will make false accusations against the Father.
2. The second objects of Satan's blasphemies are stated to be "his tabernacle, even the ones who tabernacle in heaven." Since it is "in heaven," the term "tabernacle" itself must refer to the third heaven, but it is not the place itself which he blasphemes, but those who "tabernacle" there, that is, who inhabit heaven temporarily. This is a figurative way of referring to Christ and the church, as the use of the Greek word for tabernacle (*skene*) means literally a tent, and is used for those who temporarily inhabit a place. This best refers to Christ and His church, though it may include angels.

The idea that the church will spend eternity inhabiting the third heaven is false, and based on the worldly assumption of unbelievers. Ours will be a temporary habitation in the third heaven, and it appears that during future ages the church will not be limited to it. Perhaps the church will explore the entire universe to learn new things about God.

The point to the passage, however, is that the church and Christ will be the object of the man of sin's blasphemy. False accusations will be made against the church and Christ at that time, perhaps having something to do with the uniqueness of Christ's program for His body.

Verse 7

The word *saints* in the Revelation has a limited meaning each time it occurs. It never means all believers of all times, as some have attempted to maintain. It is found only 13 times in this book, and refers to various and specific bodies of believing individuals, depending on the context.

Here, the most likely meaning of the word "saint" is believing Israel. The man of sin, under the authority of Satan, attacks Israel in the middle of the week, and is militarily successful. Israel flees to the wilderness and the land of their habitation is taken over by the man of sin. Now, this military success is temporary, but nonetheless real. It will be the final act of conquering that will vex God's earthly people.

Likewise, the man of sin will have authority over all the other groups within the boundaries of the Revived Roman Empire. In order to indicate that the man of sin's authority is total, those living under his rule are designated four ways:

1. **Every tribe.** This is most likely a family designation rather than a political one. Some have related it to the twelve tribes of Israel, and they will certainly be included. But it is not likely that they are what is meant exclusively.
2. **Every people.** This word may be used in the sense of those who gather together for various reasons. It may refer to ethnic groups, but it is not exclusively used of language groups, as the next word would be meaningless if that were so.
3. **Every tongue.** The obvious meaning is the best. The various languages will be represented among those against whom the man of sin makes war.

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4. **Every nation.** The Revived Roman Empire, like the original Roman Empire, will contain individual political entities, that is, nations. Geographical areas that contained individual governments will be conquered and consolidated under the rule of the beast. No individual political entity, or nation within Empire, will be allowed to exist independently.

The effect of the four words is to show the total control the man of sin will exercise within the realm of his authority. He will be the ultimate dictator, and the Revived Roman Empire will be the ultimate totalitarian regime.

Verse 8

How wide this worship will be is a difficult matter to discern. “All who dwell on the earth” must refer to those living in the land area of the Revived Roman Empire. Some have suggested that through the electronic media, radio and television, his image will be shown world-wide and the entire planet will worship the beast. While this is technologically possible, such an interpretation is meaningless in the biblical setting. John and his readers knew nothing of such things, and to interpret modern technology back in to their day is specious.

The word translated “worship” may contain the concept of political subservience as well as religious observance. The same word was used for both, and the concepts were much more closely related in ancient times than they are today.

On the Lamb’s book of life see the comments on Revelation 3:5, 6. On the phrase “from the foundation of the world,” see the word “foundation” in my Word Studies Notebook.

Verse 9

This is a call to spiritual understanding. For a discussion of the statement see notes on Revelation 2:7. The reason the statement is included here is to bring the reader’s (both present and future) attention to the facts of the matter. Many do not wish to hear about bad things happening, but that will not change the facts. In that future time, some will still desire not to hear. They will tune out the message. Nevertheless, verse 10 will come to pass.

Verse 10

Dr. McGee makes it clear that this is not a passage which can be applied today,

What John is saying here is not for you and me—at least, I hope it is not for you; I know it is not for me—because, beginning with chapter 4, Revelation is dealing with future things which are beyond the church...John is speaking to God’s saints who will be in the world at that time.¹⁰

Verse 10 is a statement of *inevitability*. The Lord is stating that the events that relate to an individual are certain, specifically with reference to the tribulation period. Some are going into captivity. Some are going to be killed with a sword. Whether a person actually hears Scripture or not, whether one has the ear to hear, or not (vs. 9), God’s predictions are certain.

Now, there is a *textual problem here*. The critical manuscripts state, “if any man is to be killed, with the sword he is to be killed” while the majority manuscripts say, “if any man is to kill with the sword, it is necessary for him to be killed with a sword.”

The point, however, is clear. The saints alive at that time will express *endurance and faith* in response to the bad things that happen. Those who have an ear will have obeyed the Word of God. They will have fled to the wilderness. This is consistent with other passages of Scripture that deal with *endurance*, a word which means to remain under a load, in this case, a trial that leads to

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captivity or death. Likewise, one's faith in what he claims to believe will be tested during this time. Some will undoubtedly fail the test, but others will be victorious. They will believe Scripture, and in so doing, be preserved. They will endure to the end, and they will be saved (Matthew 24:13).

b. The Second Beast (13:11-18)

- 11 And I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spoke like a dragon.
- 12 And he performs all the authority of the first beast in his sight. And he makes the earth and the ones who dwell in it worship the first beast, whose death-stroke was healed.
- 13 And he does great signs, in order that he should make fire descend out of heaven upon the earth in the sight of men.
- 14 And he deceives the ones who dwell on the earth through the signs which it was given him to do in the sight of the beast, saying to the ones who dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast who has the blow of the sword and lived.
- 15 And it was given to him to give breath to it, to the image of the beast, in order that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.
- 16-17 And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free and the slaves, that there be given them a mark on their right hand, or upon their forehead,¹⁷ in order that no man should be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, the name of the beast or the number of his name.
- 18 Here is wisdom.
The one who has understanding, let him count the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is six hundred sixty-six.

Verse 11

Verses 11-14 return to the first 3 ½ years. The second beast is usually referred to as the “false prophet” for reasons that we will discuss in subsequent notes. Unlike the first beast who came from the Mediterranean Sea, this individual comes “up out of the earth (*ek tēs gēs*). Expositors have stated various views as to this difference of source.

1. Some, such as Dr. Walvoord, hold that *the earth* here is a general term and cannot be identified geographically.
2. Others state categorically that the land represents “society civilized, consolidated, and ordered, but still, with all its culture, of earth earthy: as distinguished from “the sea,” the troubled agitations of various peoples out of which the world power and its several kingdoms have emerged” (JFB). This is close to Dr. Walvoord’s view that the sea represents the Gentile peoples.

However, the overall geographical location is certain. We know that the previous chapter sets its geographical location in and around Jerusalem. Furthermore, “the sea” out of which the first beast sprang must refer to the Mediterranean Sea. There is simply no basis for a metaphorical or symbolical interpretation of the word sea. Hence, despite Dr. Walvoord’s view, the geographical interpretation is not without its merits.

3. Some have suggested that “out of the earth” could be translated “out of the land.” This is true, inasmuch as the Greek word for earth (*ge*) can refer to a specific land. It is likely that this individual, given his mission, is closely associated with the land area of the Revived Roman Empire. Some believe he may arise out of Palestine itself, as it appears to be the center of activity of the first beast. The word “earth” however, is more likely to be identified with the complete empire rather than just

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part of it (see comments on verse 13). The suggestion that this individual is therefore an Israelite is unnecessary. It is possible, of course, but the symbolism does not require it.

Three elements of his appearance are stated:

1. He is “another” beast. This is a description of his over-all appearance, so that we may conclude that in some ways he resembles the first beast. The word “another” is *allos*, meaning *another of the same kind*. The similarity of the two beasts is being emphasized. Also, the same Greek word, *thurion*, is used of both.
2. He has two horns like a lamb. The fact that he has a lamb’s horns immediately causes our minds to think in terms of the other use of the word lamb in this book, that is, the Lamb of God, the resurrected Christ. Yet horns are never used of the Lord’s lamb. Perhaps there is a correspondence between the horns of the first beast and the second, both referring to political power, a much more likely interpretation.

At any rate, many take “like a lamb” to carry the idea of taking the place of Christ in the religious arena. If this is true, which is at least questionable, it is the false prophet rather than the man of sin who more closely resembles the concept of “antichrist.” For instance, B. W. Johnson identifies him as a “counterfeit representation” of Christ. J. Vernon McGee actually uses the term “antichrist” of him. It is his view that there are two antichrists, the two beasts. He says:

And he had “two horns like a lamb.” This suggests his imitation of Christ. The first Beast is *opposed* to Christ—he is *Antichrist*. The second Beast *imitates* Christ. He also is *Antichrist* (considering *anti*, meaning instead of); he poses as Christ. He has two horns like a lamb. He imitates the “Lamb of God...”¹¹

It is unfortunate that expositors make so much of the term “antichrist” as though it were a word that is legitimately applied to these individuals. See my comments on verses 3 and 4 above concerning the word *antichrist*.

In fact, the association of the false prophet with Christ is tenuous at best. The statement is not that *he* is like a lamb, but that his *horns* are like a lamb’s horns. In other words, he has small horns as a lamb would, perhaps in contrast to the horns of the first beast. In the imagery of prophetic writings horns generally represent political power, and that is the more likely association here.

3. His speech is “like a dragon.” This takes us back the original dragon, Satan himself. Satan and the false prophet share a quality. It seems this second beast represents Satan orally to the subjects of the Revived Roman Empire. But, as we shall see, he does so as a complement, or a supporting player, to the first beast by promoting him and his agenda. It is for this reason that he is called the false prophet in Revelation 19:20 and 20:10. His specific acts are described beginning in verse 12.

Verse 12

The second beast expresses the authority of the first beast “in his sight,” a possible reference to the first beast’s authority over the second.

The second beast’s religious intervention as a false prophet is clearly seen in his ability to cause the earth (the Revived Roman Empire) and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast. Again the first beast is identified as the one whose death-stroke was healed. See the note on Verses 3 and 4 above. It appears that the false prophet uses this element as a means of bringing about the worship of the first beast.

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Verse 13

The second beast performs miracles, undoubtedly under Satanic authority, even duplicating the great miracle of the Old Testament performed by Elijah.

The word “signs” (*semion*) refers to miraculous acts designed to point to something or someone other than the act itself. They are used in the New Testament as attestation of the legitimacy of the one performing them. The best explanation for these signs is that the second beast is establishing himself authoritatively to his audience. The text specifically points out that he does them, “in the sight of men.” He is pointing out his own abilities, and therefore, his authority to further activity.

Verse 14

The ultimate result of these miracles is deception. In the sight of the first beast, probably meaning under the first beast’s authority, the second beast deceives the ones living in the land of the Revived Roman Empire to the extent that they will make an image of the beast. The essence of the false prophet’s program is found in his directing people to worship the first beast. It is the culmination of the *idolatrous attitude of mankind* which here finds its ultimate form. Speaking of this time, Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 says,

The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders,¹⁰ and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.¹¹ And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie,¹² that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

The word *image* is singular. Some have speculated that smaller idols will be made and shipped throughout the world. Others have thought that the image might be on a coin, such as the original Roman Empire produced. However, that does not seem to be the point of the passage. Perhaps this image is part of the abomination of desolation process, and possibly the image is to be established in Jerusalem, perhaps even in the Holy of Holies. Note Paul’s words in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4,

Let no one deceive you in any way; for that Day will not come unless the departure comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

The “temple of God” in verse four refers to the Holy of Holies (*naos*, not *hieron*). Certainly this act, which begins at the middle of the 70th week of Daniel, will be the final straw for the believing Israelite. Those who understand the seriousness of this event will flee for their lives.

Verse 15

The event of verse 15 seems to take place *right at the middle of the Seventieth Week*. People who do not worship the idol of the beast will be killed. For Israelites who have come to faith in Christ, this worship will be unacceptable. This is part of the abomination of desolation, the actual worshiping of the beast, that will engender the flight of Israel to the wilderness. Dr. Walvoord makes the following comment:

The fact that the second beast could give breath to the image of the first beast, even making it speak, has created problems for expositors, for the Bible does not seem to indicate that Satan has the power to give life to an inanimate object. Only God is the Creator. So probably the beast’s image is able to give an *impression* of breathing and speaking mechanically, like computerized talking robots today. There might be a combination of natural and

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supernatural powers to enable the beast out of the earth to accomplish his purpose. It apparently was quite convincing to people and induced them to worship the image.¹²

Exactly how far Satan's power extends we do not know. Giving breath to the image does not necessarily mean to give life to it, although some versions so translate this statement. The name of the game is deception. However far the second beast's ability extends, he is not a life giver. All in all, we agree with Dr. Walvoord. The trickster is at work.

Verse 16-17

Verses 16-18 describe events that occur during the last three and one-half years of the Seventieth Week. Every class of individual is given a mark on their hand or on their forehead. Many have speculated as to what this mark is. Some have thought that the "mark of the beast" is the number 666 mentioned in verse 18. However, verse 17 distinguishes between the mark of the beast, his name, and the number of his name. It is the number of his name that is referred to in verse 18. In fact, whatever the actual form of the mark of the beast is, we are not told. However, the *purpose* for the mark is quite clear as given in verse 17.

Another pure speculation that is often heard at this point in the book of Revelation is the method of how the mark is made on human flesh. But we are not told how the mark is to be applied, and it is best not to speculate. It makes no difference if it is a tattoo, a hot-iron brand such as is given to cattle, a laser burn, or some Satanic device of which we know nothing. (All of these have been expressed by expositors.)

The purpose for the mark is clear (vs. 17). It will be given to impose economic controls on the populace. Again, the most likely recipients for the mark will be those who are living in the Revived Roman Empire during this time. It is unlikely to the point of impossibility that the northern, southern, or eastern powers will be involved in this particular activity. It certainly will not be global, as is popularly taught.

Verse 18

The specific significance of the number is not given. Walvoord says,

Countless attempts have been made to interpret the number 666, usually using the numerical equivalents of letters in the Hebrew, Greek, or other alphabets. As there probably have been hundreds of explanations continuing down to the present day, it is obvious that if the number refers to an individual it is not clear to whom it refers.

Probably the best interpretation is that the number six is one less than the perfect number seven, and the threefold repetition of the six would indicate that for all their pretensions to deity, Satan and the two beasts were just creatures and not the Creator. That six is man's number is illustrated in many instances in the Bible, including the fact that man should work six days and rest the seventh.¹³

The idea that the number seven is the "perfect" number is problematical. Yes, it does represent certain series of completions, probably based on the seven days of creation. But to make it the perfect number that, by implication, stands for God, is questionable at best. And why the three-fold repetition of the number six indicates "that for all their pretensions to deity, Satan and the two beasts were just creatures and not the Creator" Dr. Walvoord does not state. Whether the number six was so chosen because it is "one less than the perfect number seven" is not stated in the context, and cannot be forced to be the purpose for the number here.

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In fact, if the number 666 is the same as the “number of his name” in verse 17, we know the significance.¹⁴ The number represents in some sense the name of the beast. If we take the word *name* to refer to his assumed or given name, the most likely interpretation, then the number somehow symbolizes it. What that symbolical meaning will be in the future we are not told, and it is useless to attempt to speculate. Undoubtedly the symbolical meaning will be understood by those at the time, but it is not realistic to think that we can decipher the meaning of 666 in our day.

Endnotes

- ¹ Walvoord. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, “Revelation.”
- ² Walvoord, *Revelation*, pg. 197.
- ³ Walvoord, *Revelation*, pg. 199.
- ⁴ Translation author’s.
- ⁵ McGee, *Revelation*, Vol. 2, pg. 179.
- ⁶ Some versions even capitalize the word antichrist as though it were a proper name.
- ⁷ The Greek phrase is the anarthrous ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν. Had John meant a specific last hour in the prophetic sense he would have more likely used an articular construction.
- ⁸ Some teach that 1 John was written to combat *gnosticism*, but that “movement,” if it can be called such, didn’t gain headway until after John’s death. At the time of John’s writing, the most that can be said is that certain views concerning Christ were already being promulgated in the early Christian assemblies that would later identified with some gnostic views. This is sometimes called “incipient gnosticism,” but the term is less than adequate.
- ⁹ The author speaks from personal experience in this matter.
- ¹⁰ McGee, *Revelation, Volume II*, pg. 186.
- ¹¹ McGee, *Revelation, Volume II*, pg. 188.
- ¹² Walvoord, *BKC*.
- ¹³ Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc. 1983, 1985. For further discussion of the many views cf. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 263-65; Smith, *A Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. 206-7; and Walvoord, *Revelation*, pp. 209-12.
- ¹⁴ Some have attempted to make them two different numbers, but their efforts are less than satisfying. There are grammatical ways in language for making the same word have two slightly different emphases or even meanings, but none of those appear to be used in this context. All in all, it is best to understand the word “number” to refer to the same thing in verses 17 and 18.

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3. *The Victory of the Lamb and the 144,000 (14:1-20)*

a. *Scene 1 (14:1-5)*

SCOPE: SCENE ONE TAKES PLACE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE MILLENNIAL STATE.

- 1 **And I saw, and behold, the Lamb standing on the mount Zion, and with him a hundred forty-four thousand, having his name, and the name of his Father, written on their foreheads.**
- 2-3 **And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder, and the voice which I heard was as the voice of harpists harping with their harps, ³ and they sing a new song before the throne, and before the four living beings and the elders, and no man could learn the song except the hundred forty-four thousand, who have been purchased out of the earth.**
- 4 **These are they who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are they who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These were purchased from among men, to be the firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.**
- 5 **And in their mouth was found no lie, they are without blemish.**

Verse 1

In the guise of the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ stands on Mt. Zion in Jerusalem. Several issues attend this passage.

1. The timing of this event is much disputed, but to one who takes a normal interpretive view of Scripture, the event must be during the millennial period. Without being dogmatic, it seems that the appearance of the 144,000 indicates that the most likely time is right at the beginning of the thousand years. We will proceed with our interpretation on this basis.
2. That Christ is seen on Mt. Zion is significant. There are those who identify Zion as being heaven (i.e. Albert Barnes, J. B. Smith, et. al.). But, in fact, there is no reason that this is not the literal Zion, the southern hill upon which the old city of Jerusalem sits, which is the normal meaning of Zion. Here the principle of normal interpretation applies. Just because a place can be used figuratively or symbolically in one place is no argument for its being so used in another place, unless there is an undoubted parallelism of the passages as to content and intent. Even then, one must be careful not to read the interpretation of one passage into another. We conclude that it is to this literal location that the Messiah will return at the beginning of the kingdom period.
3. On earth the 144,000 are standing on Mt. Zion in Jerusalem with the Lamb. Some, such as Walter Scott, say that this is a different 144,000 than in chapter seven. After correctly identifying Zion as the literal location on earth, Scott states,

The 144,000 here witnessed are of Judah; a similarly numbered company of all Israel (chap. 7.4) forms a separate vision. This company has the name of the Lamb and His (not their) Father's name written upon their foreheads.¹

Scott gives no reason for this strange view, and it is beyond belief that the same number would be used of two different groups, one consisting of all the tribes of Israelites, and another from only one tribe, which he seems to infer because they stand on Zion, which is in Judea. But that physical location in no way implies that they all must be of the tribe of Judah.

Furthermore, this vision takes place immediately after the end of the Seventieth Week. The 144,000 who were sealed in chapter 7, are so sealed to keep them from death, and they go directly from the tribulation to the millennial state. They do not go to heaven. They were sealed, and therefore protected from death.

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4. Two names are written on their foreheads (Greek), the name of the Lamb and the name of the Father. This is the seal that kept them from death. While not identified in chapter 7, we now are given this information. The actual wording of the seal is a matter of dispute, but we are not told the specific names used. “His name” may in this passage be simply “lamb” and the Father’s simply “the Father.” We do not know; however, some go to great lengths to find the tetragrammaton in this passage, but there is no evidence of this in the context.

The significance of having these names on their foreheads is clear, however. This group of Israelites are identified with God and the Lamb in a way that even other Israelites who survive the tribulation are not. They are a special group, and their special status is expanded upon in the following statements.

Verses 2-3

The word “voice” could be rendered here “noise” as the Greek word carries both ideas. The entire description in verse 2 is leading up to the new song being sung in verse 3. The voice, or noise, which is like many waters and great thunder, is designed to get John’s attention. It was similar to the noise of harpists harping. The word harp is *kithara*, from where we get the English “guitar.” The word refers to a lyre, of which our modern guitar is a kind. Josephus describes the *kithara* as an instrument having ten strings, played by a plectrum. In John’s mind, the sound he heard was like more than one instrument of this kind being played.

This figurative language (a simile) leads us to believe that John did not fully recognize the nature of the noise, and the sound of harps was as close as he could get in his description. The point is, that the noise had a melodic quality to it, which brings our attention to verse 3.

What John does recognize in some way is actually the song sung in verse 3. It was a “new song” sung in heaven before the throne. But, like the rest of humanity, he cannot learn the words. It is in the nature of the vision that the words are not able to be learned, but not that they can not be understood in any sense. The implication is one of limited understanding.

Who is singing the new song of verse 3? It was not sung by the living beings nor the elders, but before them as well as before the throne. The source is perhaps the great multitude of spirit beings who surround the throne, but this is supposition. Whoever is singing, however, it is clear what the purpose for the song is. It is to identify the importance of the 144,000.

The 144,000 are the only ones who can learn, and therefore completely understand, the new song, which is coming out of heaven to the earth, at least to that part of the earth on which the 144,000 are standing. The reason they are able to learn the new song is because of their unique nature as purchased ones. The description that follows in verses 4 and 5 goes on to tell why only they could learn the new song.

The 144,000 were purchased from the earth. The word “purchased” here does not refer to the doctrine of redemption, which is a totally different Greek word. While the KJV and the NKJV incorrectly translate the word “redeemed” the NASB correctly translates it “purchased.” Darby translates it simply “bought.” The Greek here and in verse 4 is *agorazo*, not *apolutrosis*, the word which is used for the doctrine of redemption. The idea seems to be that the 144,000 remained on earth until the kingdom was established because they were purchased in a special sense, in contrast to the martyred tribulation saints who ascended to the throne room and had not been purchased in this sense. But both groups count among the redeemed and justified in the broader sense. Verse 4 is consistent with this view, as we see that the 144,000 are purchased as “firstfruits.”

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So it seems clear that the 144,000 are representative of the entire nation of Israel in its idealized state. They alone go into the millennial state in absolute symbolical purity. Other Israelites are true believers, and are in a state of justification, but the 144,000, perhaps exclusively, stand in a state of perfect sanctification, and had done so throughout the Seventieth week of Daniel. See the notes on verses 4 and 5 below.

Verses 4 & 5

The 144,000 are all males who will keep from sexual activity during the tribulation.

1. They are not defiled, indicating a ceremonial purity similar to that in the O.T. Now, this is not simply a symbolical virginity of the entire nation. Some have attempted to make it so, as both Israel and the Church are described as virgins collectively. But the wording “not defiled with women” indicates that these are actual virgin males only, who abstained from sexual activity during the tribulation period. It does not mean that they remained unmarried for the rest of their lives. That seems unlikely in face of the fact that the future millennial blessing includes having children.
2. They are followers of the Lamb wherever He goes. This may indicate their millennial ministry. Perhaps they are the human servants of the Lamb. Complete dedication is in view.
3. They have been purchased (again *agrazo*) as first-fruits to God and the Lamb, perhaps because they are the first to enter into the millennial state in human bodies. But the word first-fruits also implies a representative relationship. Given that there are twelve thousand from each tribe, it is probable that they represent Israel in its purity.
4. They are totally truthful. No falsehood is found in their mouth, there is no compromise with the truth. The word translated “lie” is *dolos*, a word that indicates a lack of guile, the strongest word in the New Testament for deception. The 144,000 are also blameless, again similar to the O.T. view of purity, as the word carries the idea of being without blemish (*amomos*).

This picture of the 144,000 leads us to the conclusion that they represent idealized Israel, Israel as it was intended to be, not as it ever was, even during the tribulation period. God is looking forward to purifying His people, so that during the Millennium they will still be in the place of righteous living that God designed them for. But even then, Israel will not be truly pure. There will still be sacrifices for sin, as millennial law will demand. But God will not hold their sin against them (Jeremiah 31:31ff), and their idealized state will be upheld.

b. Scene 2 (14:6-7)

SCOPE: SCENE 2 DEALS WITH A PERIOD AT THE BEGINNING OF THE DAVIDIC KINGDOM.

- 6 **And I saw another angel flying in mid heaven, having an eternal gospel to evangelize the ones who dwell on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people, ⁷ and he says with a great voice, Fear God, and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment came, and worship the one who made the heaven and the earth and sea and fountains of waters.**

Verses 6-7

Scenes 2-6 in this passage deal with the Gentiles. The main emphasis is on the judgment of unbelievers, but believers are also seen, primarily in contrast to the unbelieving Gentile nations.

Again we are presented information from John’s perspective. He sees another (*allos*) angel flying. Mid heaven refers to the atmospheric heaven, not the starry heaven as some have supposed.

The gospel here is an eternal gospel in that it is a good news which contains eternal concepts (see point 4 below). It does not refer specifically to the gospel of salvation, nor of the gospel of the kingdom, both of which it has been assumed to be by expositors. John specifically states that the

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angel is evangelizing those on the earth. There is no human agency here, and this is not a reference to the same event as predicted by Jesus in Matthew 24 where He says that the gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole earth before the end of the age comes. That specific proclamation is complete by the time this angel flies and evangelizes, since he is doing so in the millennial age, not the age of which Jesus spoke in the gospels.

This gospel is directed over the whole earth to those “sitting” on the earth of all nations, tribes, tongues, etc., which is a clear reference to the Gentile nations. Since the scene here is millennial and not tribulational, the word “earth” may be referring to the entire globe rather than to just the Revived Roman Empire. It is to be identified with the establishment of the kingdom, and is a precursor to the judgment of the nations that occurs shortly after the 2nd coming of Christ, immediately after He establishes His throne on the earth. See Matt. 25:31-46.

In verse 7, John provides the content of the eternal gospel; it consists of three commands:

1. The first command is simply, Fear God. The word fear carries the idea of being reverent. To revere God is based on His eternal nature, not simply upon His current actions, even though those actions are the immediate reason for the fear (and glorification).
2. The second command is, Give Him Glory. To glorify God is to *express His very existence in the highest sense possible*. When one represents who God truly is, he is glorifying Him. Now, it is important to distinguish between glorifying God and praising God. Often the two terms are combined into one meaning. While they are related, they carry two different meanings. Glorifying is limited to the truths concerning God’s very existence, while praise has to do with how God presents Himself to mankind, especially how He acts with reference to His attributes. We are to praise God by confessing the name of God (Hebrews 13:15), that is, agreeing with His reputation, the truths about Him that are presented such as His holiness, righteousness, etc., which are seen in his activities. When we tell the truth about God’s attributes which govern His actions, we are not simply glorifying Him, we are praising Him.

Furthermore, praise must be done with the lips to be truly praise (Hebrews 13:15 again). But one can glorify God by what a person does as well as what he says, because he is expressing God’s existence by his very life. One cannot teach doctrine by glorifying, but one can teach it by praising.

It is, however, possible to link praise with glory. This is presented in Ephesians 1:12-14, where Paul speaks of the believers life resulting in “the praise of His glory.” It would be the worst kind of redundancy to say “the glorification of His glory,” and it wouldn’t mean the same thing. Paul is expressing the result of God’s existence being orally praised in this passage.

The immediate reason to fear and glorify God is given in the words, “because the hour of his judgment has come.” “The hour of His judgment” is undoubtedly referring to the tribulation period, not to the judgment of the nations that takes place at the beginning of the millennial period. In both cases gentiles are judged, but here in Revelation the judgment is one of battle, with blood spattering.

3. The third command is, Worship. Several words in the New Testament are translated worship. This word is the one closest to the idea of actual prostration before God. It is the word *proskuneo*, and is never used directly of the body of Christ’s worship of God until Revelation 4:10, because it implies being in the physical presence of the one who is being worshiped. It is, however, the word associated with the Temple in Jerusalem as late as Acts 24:11, because, even though the glory had departed the Temple, it was believed by the Jews that one could only worship at the Temple in Jerusalem as commanded in the Hebrew Scriptures.

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The command to worship in the passage before us is directed to those who will be in the direct presence of God to be judged, and is therefore appropriately used.

God, as the object of worship, is described in terms of His creative acts. Prostrating one's self physically in the presence of God cannot be done legitimately without an awareness of His relationship to the physical universe. He is the creator God. All things belong to Him, and He is the beneficiary of all creation as well as its cause. Note that four objects of creation are stated: 1) the heaven, 2) the earth, 3) the sea, 4) the fountain of waters. The grammar of this statement is specific. The words heaven and earth both have the word "the" in the original. The word sea has the word "the" in the majority manuscripts, and lacks it in the Egyptian texts. It is probably there, but even if it isn't, the word sea is connected to the phrase "fountains of waters," as distinct from the heaven and the earth.

What is the meaning, then, of the phrase "fountains of waters?" The phrase is used previously in Revelation 8:10 also. There we identified it as most likely referring to sources of fresh water. It seems to be the same here, as it is listed in conjunction with seas. Hence, God is stated to have created both non-fresh water as well as fresh water sources. It is the creation of fresh water that allows habitation of mankind (and most animals) upon this earth.

c. Scene 3 (14:8)

SCOPE: SCENE 3 DEALS WITH A PERIOD NEAR THE END OF THE SEVENTIETH WEEK OF DANIEL.

8 And another, a second angel, followed, saying, Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, because she has made all the nations to drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.

Verse 8

Babylon sometimes refers to the corrupt religious system of the tribulation (ch. 17), sometimes to an economic-political system, and sometimes to the literal city by that name. Here the reference seems to be to the literal city because it is distinguished from the Gentile nations who followed it.

The word "fallen" occurs twice in the critical text, but only one in the majority text. This is probably because of the reference to Revelation 18:1-24 where the word occurs twice, and future Babylon is seen in detail. It seems that the vision of Chapter 18 indicates the literal City of Babylon rebuilt, and becoming a commercial center. Here, the reference seems to be a notice of future great destruction of that city.

d. Scene 4 (14:9-11)

SCOPE: SCENE FOUR EXTENDS FROM THE MIDDLE OF THE SEVENTIETH WEEK OF DANIEL THROUGH THE MILLENNIAL STATE, AND INTO AGES BEYOND.

9-11 And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a great voice, If any man worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead, or upon his hand, ¹⁰ he also shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is prepared unmixed in the cup of his wrath, and he shall be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb, ¹¹ and the smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever, and they have no rest day and night, they who worship the beast and his image, and anyone receiving the mark of his name.

Verses 9-11

The condemnation is of those who, by taking the mark of the beast, forever reject the Lamb of God as the only means of justification.

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God's righteous character demands terrible judgment on those who commit terrible deeds. These are not simply sinners who are condemned for unbelief, but unbelievers who have actively opposed the program of God by receiving the mark of the beast. Dr. Walvoord's remarks are to the point:

Anyone who receives the mark of the beast as required in 13:17 shall also partake of the judgment of God. As he drinks of the wine of spiritual fornication, so he also shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God. It is described in most dramatic terms as wine that is unmixed, that is untempered by the mercy and grace of God; and these worshipers are declared to be "tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb." The same Scripture which assures all Christians of the love of God and the grace of God as extended to those who trust in Christ is unequivocal in its absolute statements of judgment upon the wicked.²

This is not a picture of the great white throne judgment alone, but is also a reference to the judgment of the nations that takes place at the end of the tribulation period. Those here judged will be cast into "outer darkness" that is, into Hades, to await the final judgment after the Millennium. These will remain in Hades for the 1,000 years of the millennial period, and then Hades is cast into the lake of fire. For this reason, "the smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever."

e. Scene 5 (14:12-13)

SCOPE: SCENE FIVE DEALS WITH THE LAST 3 ½ YEARS OF THE SEVENTIETH WEEK OF DANIEL.

- 12 **Here is the endurance of the saints, they who keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.**
13 **And I heard the voice from heaven saying, Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now, yes, says the Spirit, in order that they may rest from their labors, for their works follow with them.**

Verse 12

Note the strong contrast with unbelievers in the previous scene. Again, the saints are those who believe during the second half of the Seventieth Week. It undoubtedly refers to Gentile believers. They are pictured as keeping God's commandments, a reference not only to the ten commandments, but to the teachings of Jesus concerning this period of time. They have the "faith of Jesus," an objective genitive which means "belief in Jesus."

Verse 13

Those who "die in the Lord" in this passage are Gentile tribulation saints. This is not a reference to all who have died during the present age, or during previous ages, though it is often quoted as such.

The voice from heaven is the Holy Spirit who is pronouncing this blessing. The Greek word for blessing is *makarios*, meaning primarily happy. Note the wording. It is the dead who are happy in this statement. The reason is because the tribulation will be such a terrible time of horror for Gentile believers that death will be a release from the unhappy condition of existence on the earth. This is the meaning of the words "from now." The "now" is the tribulation period.

These individuals will "rest from their labors" in a particular sense. The word labor is *kopos*, and carries the idea of trouble and hardship. Certainly no hardship that has ever afflicted the earth could be any worse than what believing Gentiles will endure during Daniel's Seventieth Week.

"Their works follow with them" has been a troublesome phrase for some. The biblically deficient sometimes like to make a case for works salvation from this statement. However, the clause is about the already dead, not about the living and has been thought to teach the idea of purgatory or some such silly thing. As such, it is interpreted as referring to bad works as well as good works. But the meaning is more simple than that. These individuals will undoubtedly enter into the reward for their

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works after death. It is important to remember that their disembodied state of death is not permanent. They will rise as part of the first resurrection and will enter into a state of perfect bliss in a new body.

f. Scene 6 (14:14-20)

- 14 And I saw, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud I saw one sitting like a son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.
- 15 And another angel came out from the temple, crying with a great voice to the one who sat on the cloud, Send forth your sickle, and reap, because the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe.
- 16 And the one who sat on the cloud cast his sickle upon the earth, and the earth was reaped.
- 17 Another angel came out from the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle.
- 18 And another angel came out from the altar, the one who has authority over fire, and he called with a great voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, saying, Send forth your sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, because her grapes are fully ripe.
- 19 And the angel cast his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vintage of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress, of the wrath of God.
- 20 And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and there came out blood from the winepress, up to the bridles of the horses, as far as a thousand six hundred *stadia*.³

SCOPE: VERSE 14-20 DEAL WITH THE FINAL BATTLES DURING THE SECOND HALF OF THE SEVENTIETH WEEK OF DANIEL.

Verse 14

The scene opens with one “like a son of man” who sits on a white cloud and wears the golden *stephanos*, the victory crown, probably as an indication of his victory in battle. The phrase “like a son of man” has caused interpretive difficulties because of the simile involved. Many assume that this is Jesus and simply ignore the problem. Others hold that this cannot be Christ because in Matthew and other places He calls Himself the Son of Man directly. They usually take this individual to be an angel who is operating as the direct deputy of Christ. To support this view, they point out that verse 15 shows that an angel gives orders to the one on the cloud, which seems inappropriate at best if this were God incarnate.

However, the description of this one is that he has on his head a golden crown. Gold often speaks of kingship, and the word crown is the victor’s crown rather than the crown of royalty. However, that distinction must not be pushed too far, as kings sometimes wore the *stephanos* rather than the *diadem*.

Nor is the statement of command by an angel conclusive that this cannot be Christ on the cloud. If Christ is in view, He is in view as Messiah coming in judgment. As such, His humanity is at the fore, rather than His deity. See the notes on vs. 15.

Finally, the simile may not mean that this is not Christ, but that the phrase “son of man” carries a descriptive quality rather than a denominative force. If so, Christ is simply being described in His relationship to the Trinity determined by the Godhead. He is, then, like a human being rather than like God.

All in all, it seems best to interpret this individual as Christ overseeing the earth. He sits on a cloud, a symbolic way of showing His position of dominance.

The sickle is, of course, an instrument of reaping. The concept of reaping with a sickle is a perfect metaphor for warfare, and is so used a number of times in Scripture.

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Verse 15

Another angel comes from the temple. The word temple is *naos*, and undoubtedly refers to the throne room where God the Father sits. As such, he is the messenger of God speaking to the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, the angel does not speak from his own authority, but from the authority of the Father.

The best interpretation of the reaping mentioned is judgment that it refers to the judgment of Christ upon the earth.. This is confirmed by the fact that the harvest is said to be ripe, that is, ready to be reaped. The situation has come to a point where the only act that is left is that of judgment on the earth. The word translated “ripe” is from ξηραίνω (*exraino*), a verb that means to dry up or become withered. It speaks of the harvest in terms of it’s being beyond use. The need for judgment is paramount in this word. According to Walvoord:

The expression “the harvest of the earth is ripe” seems to imply that judgment is overdue. The verb form “is ripe” (Gr., *exeranthe*), meaning “to become dry or withered,” has a bad connotation (cf. Matt. 21:19-20; Mark 3:1, 3; 11:20; Luke 8:6; Rev. 16:12). The picture here is of a fruit or vegetable that has become so ripe that it has begun to dry up and wither. The rotten moral condition of the world is dealt with now with a sharp sickle.⁴

Verse 16

Note that this is not the second coming of Christ. He remains on the cloud, and casts His sickle to the earth. This must represent the judgment of the tribulation period coming to its ultimate terrible fullness, but it is not specifically the same event as recounted in verses 18-20. The best explanation seems to be that the Lord judges from the cloud during the second half of the week, while the specific event at the end of the week is spoken of in the following statements.

Verses 17-19

A second and third angel come from the throne room. The first has “a sharp sickle.” He’s ready to go to work. The third angel (vs. 18) comes, not simply from the temple (*naos*) but from the altar. As such, he is more closely connected to the Father, and is acting under His direct authority. He has authority over fire, a regular symbol for judgment in the Bible. He commands with a loud voice to the first angel.

The command is to commence the judgment. The “sharp sickle” is to be used to gather the “clusters of the vine of the earth,” a metaphor referring to human beings. The reason is because her grapes are full ripe. The word ripe here is different than back in verse 15. There ripe carried a negative connotation referring to the quality of the harvest as far as usefulness is concerned. Here the Greek word is ἀκμάζω (*akmadzo*), and comes from the idea of the maturity of the harvest. It emphasizes the time element of the event. The time has come.

When the third angel casts his sickle to the earth (vs. 19), we are again provided with the concept of gathering the “vintage of the earth.” As grapes are gathered together, human beings are brought together for a similar fate. The “winepress, the great winepress” is the perfect metaphor for the act of destruction that has come upon unbelieving mankind. It speaks of the application of “the wrath of God.” See 14:10 above.

The term “wrath” is used in its ultimate eschatological sense in this passage, as is the phrase “the wrath of God.” The concept is not of a generalized, but of a specific act of pouring out of God’s wrath. This has not yet happened in our day, but awaits the Seventieth Week of Daniel. The church is specifically delivered from the coming wrath as revealed in 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10:

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For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,¹⁰ and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

The coming of God's wrath upon mankind by the agency of angels in Revelation 14 is undoubtedly the same event that the Lord Jesus Christ described in the parable of The Tares and Wheat in Matthew 13:24-30:

Another parable He put forth to them, saying: The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field;²⁵ but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way.²⁶ But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared.²⁷ So the servants of the owner came and said to him, Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?²⁸ He said to them, An enemy has done this. The servants said to him, Do you want us then to go and gather them up?²⁹ But he said, No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them.³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.

During the preliminary events leading up to the second coming of Christ and the establishing of His kingdom, God will allow both tares (evil individuals) and wheat (righteous individuals) to continue in existence. But when the harvest is ripe, and the tares are obviously distinct from the wheat, God will bring judgment.

Again we must emphasize that this is not describing a condition looking forward to the rapture of the church. Some have attempted to use this parable to teach such, and associate it with a "general judgment" at the end time. But no such doctrine is taught in Scripture as a general judgment. The contexts of both Matthew 13 and Revelation 14 indicate a period of time in the future which is in direct preparation for the coming of Christ to establish His kingdom.

As we will see in our discussion of verse 20, this is not to be confused with the judgment of the nations discussed by Jesus in Matthew 25. That judgment is specific to the beginning of the Kingdom period *after* the return of Christ. This event speaks of a time *before* the second coming of Christ. See the notes on verse 20.

Verse 20

The act of harvest starting in verse 17 is the final war with the Gentiles prior to the 2nd coming of Christ presented in Revelation 16:14-16. It includes the battles that start in Jerusalem and end up at the valley of Megiddo. The specific scene here seems to be just outside the city, that is, the city of Jerusalem.

The blood to the horses bridals probably refers to blood being spattered that high, rather than to blood flowing that high. We are to take the word "blood" literally here as a striking incursion into the metaphor. This is an act of war, not the kind of thing that will take place in the judgment of the nations after the kingdom begins. Literal blood will be on the ground.

The 1,600 *stadia* is a distance of about 180 miles. This probably refers to the distance from Jerusalem covered by this judgment. The final war at the 2nd Coming of Christ will not be limited to Armageddon, but is a series of campaigns that includes areas to the south, west and north of Jerusalem.

Endnotes

- ¹ Walter Scott. *Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Pickering & Ingles, London, N.D. Pg. 291. The italics are in the original.
- ² Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, page 219.
- ³ A single *stadios* is slightly over 600 feet, or approximately 200 yards. One thousand six hundred *stadia* is about 181 miles.
- ⁴ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, page 221.

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J. The Seven Angels (15:1-8)

SCOPE: CHAPTERS 15 AND 16 REFER TO THE OUTPOURING OF THE WRATH OF GOD DURING THE LAST HALF OF THE SEVENTIETH WEEK.

- 1 **And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels having seven plagues, the last, because in them the wrath of God has been completed.**
- 2 **And I saw something like a glass sea mingled with fire, and the ones who were victorious over the beast, and over his image, and over the number of his name, standing on the glass sea, having harps of God.**
- 3 **And they sing the song of Moses the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvelous are your works, O Lord God, the Almighty, righteous and true are your ways, O King of the nations.**
- 4 **Who shall not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name, because you alone are holy, because all the nations shall come and worship before you, because your righteous acts have been manifested?**
- 5-6 **And after these things, I saw also the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened, ⁶ and there came out from the temple the seven angels that had the seven plagues, having been clothed with clean, bright linen, and having been girded around their breasts golden belts.**
- 7 **And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever.**
- 8 **And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power, and none was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels could be finished.**

The vision of the seven angels is continued by the vision of chapter 16. Indeed, they are the same vision, with a reference break beginning at verse 1 of chapter 16. See the note there.

Verse 1

Verses 1 and 2 are an introductory part of the vision and the aftermath of the judgments predicted. They point out the significance of the seven angels, but we must wait until verse 5 to see them begin their activity. Also verse 2 introduces those who are victorious over the beast standing on a sea of glass. But we see their activity immediately following in verses 3-4.

The vision Chapter 15 introduces the judgment of the bowls or vials of Chapter 16. John sees “another sign in heaven,” a third sign that consists of seven angels with seven plagues. These seven angels (anarthrous) are not to be confused with the other angels of this book. They are directly connected with the judgments that follow in Chapter 16. These seven last plagues are the final judgments of Daniel’s 70th week because “in them the wrath of God has been completed.” They are described in more detail in chapter 16.

Verse 2

The “something like a glass sea” is to be identified with the one in 4:6. There, it seems to be the pavement before the throne of God. But here, unlike chapter 4’s vision, John sees the sea “mingled with fire.” Fire in this context is a clear symbol of judgment, and it is judgment that is the ultimate theme of chapters 15 and 16. But, as we shall see from their song, the judgment is viewed as having already taken place.

Here victorious tribulation saints are standing on the sea. They are victorious over the beast, his image, and the number of his name. In other words, by standing firm and refusing to compromise by accepting the beast’s mark.

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Furthermore, because of the context, especially the statements in verse 3 and 4, it seems clear that these saints are Gentiles rather than Israelites. This view is also consistent with the overall context of these chapters in this part of the book of Revelation, where Gentile judgments are in view.

It seems most likely that this group is the same as those in Chapter 7:9-15. If that is so, verse 2 takes us forward into the millennial state. These are not the “martyred dead” as so many, including Dr. Walvoord, would have it, but the believing Gentiles who have been saved “out of the tribulation” (7:14).

The fact that the victorious ones are holding harps indicates a future time in which the following song will be sung.

Verses 3-4

The song is highly indicative of the nature of the contextual judgment. Note the following elements:

1. The song is sung by Gentile tribulation saints. It is a preface to the judgments about to be visited upon the Gentile world. However, it does not introduce those judgments, but indicates the result of them. This will be made clear as we examine the song.
2. The song is said to be the song of “Moses the slave (*doulos*) of God,” not in the sense that he is singing the song, but probably a reference to the leader of Israel as representative of Israel under bondage. “The slave” could not refer to Moses after the departure from Egypt. Therefore it seems that Israel’s bondage under Gentiles is in view. In a sense, the judgment on the Gentiles in the second half of the 70th week will be retribution by God for the persecution of His people going all the way back to their Egyptian captivity.

This brings us to the concept of collective responsibility, something that cannot be applied to the church. But God’s other programs do include the idea that groups of people are responsible for the actions of their governmental program. For instance, when Israel was taken into captivity to Babylon, the righteous as well as the unrighteous suffered. It was the nation that was being judged, not just those evil individuals in the nation. Hence, Daniel and his friends were taken captive. Likewise Ezekiel was included in that judgment.

Now we will see in the judgment of the seven angels Gentiles as a collective body are judged for their historical persecution of God’s people. And, in fact, the final great persecution of Israel takes place during the second half of the week, a period that Jesus called the time of great tribulation for Israel.

Also, it is important to remember that the reason these Gentiles are being judged in the first place is that they entered the 70th week of Daniel because they were unbelievers, having rejected the truth of Jesus Christ as savior.

3. The song is also said to be the song of the Lamb, but not because He is singing the song. It represents the truth that Christ’s desires as the lamb be made known concerning God the Father. While it is true that all three persons of the Godhead share equally in these qualities, it is God the Father who is the ultimate source of the contextual judgment, so it is fitting that His perfect character be emphasized.

Some, like Dr. Walvoord, make the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb two distinct songs. He says,

These may be two separate songs, the first referring to God’s faithfulness to Israel and the second referring to their present situation in the Great Tribulation.¹

He bases this view on the fact that the word *the* occurs before both occurrences of the word *song*. However, the second article may simply be an article of previous reference, as this interpretation

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seems impossible to reconcile with the context, where the content of the song is given, and it is clearly a single song. Rather, the description of the song being the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb are better explained as having both Moses and the Lamb as subjects of the song.

4. God's works are presented as being indicative of His ability. He is called "almighty" (*pankrator*) which refers to God's very nature. The "works" must include the coming judgment as well as His other works. His works, including His acts of judgment are "righteous and true."

They are righteous because they are perfectly applied in judgment in a just way. Unlike the works of man's judicial systems on earth, God's heavenly judicial systems convicts no one wrongly, excuses no one who is guilty, and misapplies no act of punishment in the smallest sense.

God's *works are true* in that they represent God's character accurately. No falsehood is found in Him, and no act of judgment comes forth because He misread the situation, or because He willfully misrepresents the truth of the situation that brings about judgment.

5. The "nations" are mentioned twice in the song. First, God is said to be "the King of the Nations." In other words, God the Father (not the Son) is the rightful sovereign ruler over the Gentiles. That authority will be given to the Son when the kingdom is introduced, and the Son rules the nations. And while the Son's rule over the new earth continues, He will share that future kingdom state with the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24).
6. The second mention of the "nations" is found in Verse 4, which presents some of the song in terms of a compound rhetorical question. "Who shall not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name?" The answer is, of course, no one. All among the Gentiles will fear God the Father, that is, respect His person, and glorify His name, meaning to accurately reflect His character.

The tense of the verbs is instructive. The verb fear, while translated as a future, is actually an aorist subjunctive. It signifies a possible future event and is used because of the adverb "not." It is used in the sense of affirming the positive by presenting a negative, a regular figure of speech.

The second verb, "will glorify" is a simple future indicative. It is a statement of future fact. Taken together, these two verbs affirm that the song being sung is looking forward to events, undoubtedly in the millennial period when all the nations will fear and glorify God.

Three causes are given for these acts of fear and glory:

1. *Because you alone are holy...*

True holiness belongs to God alone. Here the purity of God's holiness is being accentuated. Unlike human beings who can only reflect holiness based on God's programs on earth, God Himself is distinct, unlike anything or anyone else. Such is the true meaning of holiness. No human or spirit being can compare to Him in any way concerning His character or His works.

2. *Because all the nations shall come and worship before you...*

Notice the change of tense. If the song is being sung by the same group of Gentiles as those in chapter 7, then the time of the singing is to be identified as being in the gap between the end of the 70th week and the beginning of the kingdom. The nations will not yet have begun to worship the Father, but they will in the future.

That the Gentile nations will come to worship (*proskuneo*) before God in the future kingdom is clearly established in the Hebrew Scriptures (see our notes on chapter 7 for a discussion of this vital point. Those who sing this song are Gentile believers who have survived the time of great tribulation, and will participate in that worship. It will continue throughout the thousand years, but not all the

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children of this great multitude will become believers in God. It is possible that this worship will be a requirement imposed by the Lord Jesus Christ ruling with His rod of iron upon on unbelieving Gentiles, as well as upon willing believing Gentiles.

3. *Because your righteous acts have been manifested...*

This third cause is sometimes taken back to worship, rather than to “fear and glorify” but that seems unlikely because of the parallelism of the passage. It seems to me that another cause for their fearing and glorifying God is because the Gentiles have seen His righteous acts in the judgment of the plagues from the seven angels.

Note the change in verbal tense. The multitude of singing Gentile believers sees God’s righteous acts as having been already manifested. Now, if this refers to the acts of judgment in this context, the tense tells us that the singing of this song is after the works have been seen. In other words, the song is sung after the tribulation is over and perfect righteousness has been established over the Gentile nations.

This situation was predicted by Isaiah over twenty-five hundred years before in Isaiah 2:2-4.

Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of Yahweh’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. ³ Many people shall come and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem. ⁴ He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

Verses 5-6

Because of the words “after these things,” some have thought a new vision starts here, but it is better to think that this is a shift of scene within the same vision. The phrase “after these things” refers to the chronology within John’s vision, not to the beginning of a new vision. Nor does it refer to events after the song is sung. Note that the preposition *after* refers to the verb *saw*. After John saw the previous scene of this vision, he sees a new set of events. But the song is sung during the gap between the 70th week and the millennium, and the part of the vision John now sees reverts back to the second half of the 70th week.

Now, we have an unusual statement. John refers to “the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven.” This extended descriptions shows that the earthly tabernacle was not the true one. The word temple, *naos*, refers to the true Holy of Holies in heaven, not its shadowy counterpart on earth. The fact that it is the “tabernacle of the testimony” bears this out. It is so called because it bears witness, or testifies, to the residence of God within His creation.

But even heaven is viewed as a “tabernacle,” that is a *tent*. This presents the fact that God’s dwelling place is not permanently in the third heaven; it is but a temporary stopping place. Eventually, God the Father along with the Son will set up residence on the new earth.

At this point we learn what the progress of the angles actually is. John sees the throne room in heaven opened and they come out of the Holy of Holies (*ho naos*) with the plagues. They are on a mission from God the Father, the one who commands judgment.

The angels are clothed in white, undoubtedly a representation of their righteous actions. They also have a golden belt, probably a representation of their being representatives of God, as such belts seem to represent the rank of the individual wearing them.

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Verse 7

These are the same four living creatures which were introduced in 4:6, 7. There we identified these creatures as most likely being *seraphim*. They are the direct attendants of God, and do His bidding. The creature gives the angels seven golden bowels, each one full of God's wrath. The symbolism is striking. God's wrath has been transmitted to His messengers through His attendants, and is about to be poured out upon Gentile humanity.

Interestingly, God is not described in His eternality, but in His ongoing perpetuity. The clause "who lives for ever and ever" refers to His continued presence within the time succession of His creation, and His authority over the time sequences of the universe. In other words, His timing is perfect in His righteous judgments upon the Gentile nations.

Verse 8

"Smoke from the glory of God" reminds us of the cloud that filled the earthly tabernacle in Exodus 40:34 and following. It was a symbol of God's presence with Israel during their wilderness wanderings and their time in Canaan before the deportation. The term "glory" used in these kinds of passages speaks of the personal presence of one of the persons of the Godhead. In the Old Testament on earth, that was undoubtedly the presence of the Son. But in heaven during the tribulation period, the glory of God indicates the presence of the Father.

It is particularly interesting that "from His power" (*dunamis*) also is stated as a source of the smoke. The power of God is to be expressed in the pouring out of His wrath.

No one will be able to enter the Holy of Holies during the period of God's judgment. The reason given is that the seven plagues of the seven angels were to be "finished." This statement, taken together with the statement of finality in verse 1 indicate that these seven plagues are the final act of the second half of Daniel's 70th week. The 42 months comes to an end. That does not mean, however, that the end of God's workings on earth has arrived, simply that the judgments on the Gentiles are completed.

With this as a backdrop, then, we have chapter 16 presenting the pouring out of each of the bowls that contain God's wrath, culminating with the final series of battles of the tribulation period.

Endnotes

- ¹ Walvoord, *BKC*, electronic edition.

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K. The Seven Bowls (16:1-21)

- 1 And I heard a loud voice out of the temple, saying to the seven angels, Go, and pour out the seven bowls of the wrath of God into the earth.
- 2 And the first went, and poured out his bowl into the earth, and it became a harmful and malignant sore upon the men who had the mark of the beast, and who worshiped his image.
- 3 And the second poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like from a dead man, and every living soul in the sea died.
- 4 And the third poured out his bowl into the rivers and the fountains of the waters, and it became blood.
- 5-6 And I heard the angel of the waters saying, Righteous are you, who is and who was, who is holy, because you judged these things, ⁶ because they poured out the blood of the saints and the prophets, and you gave to them blood to drink; they are deserving.
- 7 And I heard the altar saying, Yes, Lord God, the Almighty One, true and righteous are your judgments.
- 8 And the fourth poured out his bowl upon the sun, and it was given to it to scorch men with fire.
- 9 And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has the authority over these plagues, and they repented not to give him glory.
- 10-11 And the fifth poured out his bowl upon the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was darkened, and they gnawed their tongues for pain, ¹¹ and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and they repented not of their works.
- 12 And the sixth poured out his bowl upon the great river, the river Euphrates, and the its water was dried up, in order that the way might by made ready for the kings that come from the sun rising.
- 13-14 And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits, like frogs, ¹⁴ for they are spirits of demons, working signs, which go forth to the kings of the whole inhabited earth, to gather them together to the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.
- 15 (Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is the one who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.)
- 16 And they gathered them together into the place which is called in Hebrew Harmagedon.
- 17 And the seventh poured out his bowl upon the air, and there came forth a great voice out of the temple, from the throne of heaven, saying, It is done.
- 18 And there were lightnings, and voices, and thunders, and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since there were men upon the earth, so great an earthquake, so large.
- 19 And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and Babylon the great was remembered in the presence of God, to give to her the cup of the wine of the anger of his wrath.
- 20 And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.
- 21 And great hail, every stone about the weight of a talent, descends out of heaven upon men, and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague is exceedingly great.

Introduction to the Bowl Judgments

The seven bowls indicate the final acts of judgment during the second half of Daniel's 70th week. It appears that the judgments occur fairly close together, culminating in the final events of the tribulation period. The judgments are upon Gentile humanity, though some have suggested that unbelieving Israelites are also included.

Chronologically, the bowls deal with the same period spoken of in Daniel 11:36-46:

Then the king shall do according to his own will: he shall exalt and magnify himself above every god, shall speak blasphemies against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the wrath has been accomplished; for what has been determined shall be done. ³⁷ He shall regard neither the God of his

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fathers nor the desire of women, nor regard any god; for he shall exalt himself above them all. ³⁸ But in their place he shall honor a god of fortresses; and a god which his fathers did not know he shall honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and pleasant things. ³⁹ Thus he shall act against the strongest fortresses with a foreign god, which he shall acknowledge, and advance its glory; and he shall cause them to rule over many, and divide the land for gain. ⁴⁰ At the time of the end the king of the South shall attack him; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter the countries, overwhelm them, and pass through. ⁴¹ He shall also enter the Glorious Land, and many countries shall be overthrown; but these shall escape from his hand: Edom, Moab, and the prominent people of Ammon. ⁴² He shall stretch out his hand against the countries, and the land of Egypt shall not escape. ⁴³ He shall have power over the treasures of gold and silver, and over all the precious things of Egypt; also the Libyans and Ethiopians shall follow at his heels. ⁴⁴ But news from the east and the north shall trouble him; therefore he shall go out with great fury to destroy and annihilate many. ⁴⁵ And he shall plant the tents of his palace between the seas and the glorious holy mountain; yet he shall come to his end, and no one will help him.

The bowl judgments and the previous trumpet judgments *must be distinguished*. There are similarities, but the two sets of judgments are not identical.

Some suggest that the seventh trumpet is *unfolded* in the seven bowls. While this is an attractive approach, the fact is that the seventh trumpet sounded at the end of chapter 11, and several visions have taken place between it and the beginning of this vision in chapter 15. It seems better to think of these bowls as a separate and specific series of judgments near the end of the 70th week, rather than to think that the reader's mind will automatically jump back to the seventh trumpet.

As one reads of the seven bowls, it become clear that these are the *culminating judgments of the 70th week*. Several of the bowls present scenes that deal with the final destruction of that which was only partially destroyed previously.

1. *The First Bowl (16:1-2)*

Verse 1

The vision continues. John says, "And I heard" again speaking to his own auditory experience. He hears a great or loud voice again out of the Holy of Holies, presumably God the Father speaking, though it is impossible to say specifically. The voice is unidentified so as not to lose the point of the passage.

The objects of the speaking are the previously mentioned seven angels. It is time for them to begin their activity, reflected in the imperative "Go." As in modern English, the statement does not always mean to move physically from one place to another. We have the phrase "go on" which says much the same thing. It means to perform the task at hand.

The bowls are identified as "bowls of the wrath of God." The word wrath has the article, which identifies this as referring to the specific wrath of God upon mankind. The phrase "into the earth" means that the object of the angels pouring is the land under consideration, in this case, the Revived Roman Empire. Again, there is no basis for making these bowls global, though that is the general understanding of interpreters.

However, it is not primarily the physical earth of the Revived Roman Empire that is the object of God's wrath, but men living upon it.

Verse 2

The revelation changes from an auditory one to a visual one. John sees the first angel pour out his bowl on the earth. I take it that this refers to a judgment on the people on land in contrast to the second bowl which is upon the sea.

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The first bowl is judgment on those who voluntarily took the mark of the beast and who worshiped the image of the beast. The word “sore” is singular, but it appears that it grows. The word translated “malignant” is *poneros*, and does carry the idea of growth, like a cancer. The word “harmful” is *kakos*, and probably means painful in this context.

The distinction between this judgment and some of the others is that it is specific to individuals. All who take the mark receive it, so that they all undergo serious pain. Contrast that to the judgment of the second bowl.

2. The Second Bowl (16:3)

Verse 3

This bowl is not applied to men directly, but is applied to the sea and those in it (*en* rather than *epi*), that is, the animal life supported by it. The sea, to John and his readers, would have meant the Mediterranean Sea, not the oceans of the world, and there is no reason to apply it more broadly.

The blood-like consistency of the judgment produced death on every animal swimming in its waters. For the Mediterranean basin, this will be a tremendous blow both economically as well as nutritionally. Clearly the fishing industry will collapse totally at this point.

This judgment is parallel to the partial judgment on the sea of the second trumpet (Revelation 8:8). The judgment on the sea is now complete.

3. The Third Bowl (16:4-7)

Verse 4

The third bowl, like the third trumpet, judges the freshwater systems. But unlike that earlier judgment upon a third of the sources of water, this judgment indicates that all the water becomes blood. It's likely that chronologically this judgment is sometime subsequent to the trumpet judgment.

Verses 5-7

This third angel also speaks, unlike the angel of the third trumpet. He explains the righteousness of this judgment in terms of God's character.

The one “who is and who was” speaks of God's continued existence as the judge of mankind. “Who is holy because you judged these things” expresses the truth that no one else has the character of God, and presumably, only He is able to bring ultimate righteous judgment.

The turning of the drinking water to blood is righteous retribution by God for the killing of the saints and the prophets. Those who did so are deserving of having only blood to drink.

Verse 7 personifies the altar. It speaks of the totality of God's might, and goes on to describe His judgments as true and righteous. They are true in that they are the correct judgments for those who receive them, and they are righteous because they are neither too much nor too little payment for the evil acts they punish.

4. The Fourth Bowl (16:8-9)

Verse 8

The fourth bowl causes the sun to bring more heat, whereas the fourth trumpet brought darkness. Both are heavenly phenomena, but of two different kinds. The judgment affects men by “scorching them with fire,” a terrible punishment on individuals, and more intense than the fourth trumpet. Again, it is likely that it is subsequent to the trumpet judgment.

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Because this judgment is based on heavenly events, most expositors make it a global event. But, in fact, there is no reason to not limit the scorching to one spot on the globe for at least three reasons: 1) half of the globe will be in darkness at this time, facing away from the sun, and 2) this is a supernatural event, which God directs, and He is perfectly able to direct it against only those living in the area of the Revived Roman Empire, and 3) it is unlikely that every individual living in the area of the scorching will be affected, because verse 9 indicates that it is the unbelievers who are being judged. Therefore, the believers on the earth at that time will not be scorched. Again, this is a specifically directed judgment, not an indiscriminate judgment against all mankind.

Verse 9

Again we see that God's judgments do not bring the repentance of unbelievers, but blasphemy, which consists of making false accusations against the "name of God," that is, against His expressed character. The fact that God has authority over "these plagues" is not sufficient for non-elect men to accept the truth concerning Him and His glorious existence.

5. *The Fifth Bowl (16:10-11)*

Verses 10-11

The fifth bowl is similar to the fifth trumpet in that both deal with darkness. But there the similarity ends, as the fifth trumpet deals with demonic activity upon the population of the Empire, while this bowl is specific in its judgment against "the throne of the beast and his kingdom." This terminology makes it clear that the leadership of the Revived Roman Empire is being judged, as distinct from the general population of that Empire which was judged by the fourth bowl.

The nature of the darkness will somehow bring pain on those afflicted, so that they "gnawed their tongues for pain." Here we find the final statement in the Revelation concerning the refusal to repent. The judgment again produces blasphemy, a false accusation against God.

6. *The Sixth Bowl (16:12-16)*

Verse 12

The sixth bowl speaks of the final gathering of the armies to do battle. It begins by making a way for the eastern powers to invade Israel and concludes with the armies being gathered together at Mt. Meggido, or more technically, at the plain of Esdraelon on which the mountain sits.

Like the sixth trumpet, the sixth bowl relates to the river Euphrates, the second and final time that river is mentioned in the Revelation. In Revelation 9 we saw a description of an army of horsemen. But no such description is given here, and the emphasis is not on the nature of that army, but upon the direction of its coming.

The Euphrates was the natural eastern boundary of the Roman Empire, which will likely be true of the Revived Roman Empire. The actual drying up of the Euphrates¹ is to make way for the kings that come from the sun rising, that is, from the east.² Our minds are immediately cast back to Daniel 11 where the man of sin hears news from the north and the east. Here in Revelation, it is the eastern invasion that is viewed in detail, and we must look elsewhere for a biblical discussion of the northern invader. (Compare Daniel 11:40 with Ezekiel 38.)

Verses 13-14

This symbolic representation speaks to the control of demonic beings by the dragon (Satan), the beast (the man of sin), and the false prophet (the second beast of Revelation 13). These spirit beings are

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similar to frogs, perhaps because of their incessant croaking. By performing miraculous signs, designed to establish their authority, they gather the kings of the “whole inhabited earth” to go to war. The word translated inhabited earth (οἰκουμένη) is used rather than the simple word earth or even world. Sometimes it is limited in use, even referring to the Roman Empire sometimes. But here it is modified not by “all” (*pas*), but by “whole” (*holos*). It refers to all those who oppose the Revived Roman Empire and its leadership outside its boundaries. The various factions within the Revived Roman Empire are not meant here, but those international groups, perhaps confederations or sets of allies from the north, east, and south.

The incitement to war seems to come from the forces of evil within the Revived Roman Empire. Some have asked, since the Satan is motivating the forces within the Empire, why would he and his minions incite such a war?

Walvoord presents his view thusly,

Satan, knowing that the second coming of Christ is near, will gather all the military might of the world into the Holy Land to resist the coming of the Son of Man who will return to the Mount of Olives (Zec 14:4). Though the nations may be deceived in entering into the war in hope of gaining world political power, the satanic purpose is to combat the armies from heaven (introduced in Rev 19:1-21) at the second coming of Christ.

If Walvoord’s position is correct, the “great day of God, the Almighty” takes place at least partly *after* the 70th week has been completed. We know from Christ’s own statement that the second coming takes place “after the tribulation of those days” (Matthew 24:29). There are other passages which seem to confirm this truth. Note Zechariah 14:1-4:

Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, And your spoil will be divided in your midst. ² For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; The city shall be taken, The houses rifled, And the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, But the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. ³ Then the LORD will go forth And fight against those nations, As He fights in the day of battle. ⁴ And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, Which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, From east to west, Making a very large valley; Half of the mountain shall move toward the north And half of it toward the south.

There can be little doubt that the vision of the sixth bowl refers to the same events. The second coming of Christ is clearly in view (see verse 15 below), and the final events leading up to it. The sixth bowl does not describe the actual war, but rather the preparation for the “the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.” The word “day” is not used of a single twenty-four hour period, but metaphorically of the last series of events culminating in the second coming of Christ, no matter how many twenty-four hour days it might take.

Verse 15

Verse 15 reflects the wording of 1 Thessalonians 5:2:

For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.

The idea of coming like a thief speaks of an unexpected event. The actual second coming is never given a specific date at which it will occur. Nor will the individuals going through the final events of this future time know when the Lord will come. Some have supposed that it will be on the very last day of the 70th week of Daniel, but that cannot be. We’ve already seen that the Lord predicted His coming after the time of great tribulation. Furthermore, the parable of the virgins in Matthew 25:1-13 makes it clear that those waiting for the second coming must be alert. The same truth is reflected

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here, which truth would be absurd for those future individuals if they knew which day He would arrive.

There will be individuals embarrassed at the second coming because they will not have been alert. A person, spiritually speaking, may not be dressed appropriately, but will be naked and the Lord will “see his shame.”

Verse 16

The word “*har*” in Hebrew means mount; therefore the place of gathering is “Mount Megiddo.” Some have thought the reference to Mt. Gilboa, others to the highlands to the south and east of Megiddo. The picture is one of preparation for war. Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as the “battle of Armageddon.” Rather, the plain of Esdraelon, sometimes called the Plain of Jezreel, will be the staging area for the armies which will come against the man of sin’s armies in the final war. It seems evident that this war will overlap the end of the 70th week and go into the gap of 75 days before the establishment of the kingdom.

7. *The Seventh Bowl (16:17-21)*

Verse 17

The final bowl of God’s wrath is to be poured out upon the air. The voice out of the temple indicates that the process has been completed. It has happened. This bowl of judgment probably takes place during the 75 day gap and culminates in the actual second coming of Christ.

Verse 18

First there are atmospheric events, lightening, voices (noises) and thunder. But the final act seems to be a great earthquake, the largest in history. It is possible that this is the earthquake that is the result of the splitting of the Mount of Olives at the second coming (See Zechariah 14:1-4).

Verse 19

The timing here is probably at the moment of the earthquake, which will undoubtedly affect a large area of the eastern Mediterranean land mass. Three distinct statements are made in this sentence:

1. The great city was divided into three parts. Much debate has occurred as to the identity of this city. Some, such as Walvoord, see this as referring to Babylon, which is mentioned two clauses later. This identification seems unlikely, as the grammar clearly distinguishes between the verb “divided” and the other two verbs “fell” and “remembered.” Furthermore, the falling of cities of the nations is contrasted with the division of the “great city.” It seems better to make the Lord’s remembering Babylon to be associated with the falling of the gentile cities.

A second view is that the “great city” is to be identified as Rome. This view is held specifically by those who identify Babylon the great as a reference to the city of Rome. Some associate it with the “apostate church” which supposedly will exist at this time, which they believe to be the Roman Catholic Church. But again, this identification as an assumption seems unlikely.

In fact, the great city is Jerusalem. This is certain because the term has been used before in this book, and it seems very unlikely that any other city would have been understood by John’s readers. Note again the statement in Revelation 11:8:

And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.

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We know from Zechariah 14 that the one part of Jerusalem will be split into two parts, the Mount of Olives. It now appears that another great splitting will take place so that Jerusalem will be divided into three parts.

2. The cities of the nations fell. This refers to the devastation this final earthquake has on the gentile cities in the Revived Roman Empire. Take “fell” literally. The buildings of these cities will crumble to the ground in this greatest of all seismic events.
3. Babylon the great was remembered in the presence of God, to give to her the cup of the wine of the anger of his wrath. Many have attempted to make Babylon to be Rome, but such an identification is specious. When fanciful interpretation takes over, words lose their meanings. Here, if Rome were meant, why not say Rome? To make Babylon to be Rome makes it impossible to ever say Babylon and mean Babylon.

The city of Babylon will again rise to prominence during the tribulation period, and the book of Revelation discusses it in detail. The fall of Babylon is mentioned first in Revelation 14:8. There we stated, “It seems that the vision of Chapter 18 indicates the literal City of Babylon rebuilt, and becoming a commercial center. Here, the reference seems to be a notice of future great destruction of that city.” We reaffirm that interpretation here. Literal Babylon will be remembered in a most judgmental way.

God will give her special attention at the time of the final earthquake. The cup of the wine of His wrath refers to the striking out of God so as to totally destroy Babylon at this future time. This statement is an introduction to the visions that John received concerning Babylon found in chapters 17 and 18.

Verse 20

This short notice tells of the geological results of the earthquake. The land will become flat, and there will be no more islands. Whether this refers just to the Mediterranean basin or to the entire globe is difficult to determine. The location elements in the context, however, emphasize the land area where the final battles will be fought as well as the greater land mass that includes the gentile cities and the city of Babylon. It is most likely that the reference to the leveling of the ground will be restricted to that area.

Verse 21

A final great hail storm occurs in association with the final earthquake. That this is not a natural phenomenon is evident because of the weight of the hail. The Phoenician talent of biblical times was over 90 pounds. The later Greek silver talent was a little over 80 pounds. Either way, they will be deadly hail stones.

Again the results on unbelieving men is predictable. They will blaspheme God because of the plague of the hail. Its very largeness will give vent to this blasphemy.

Endnotes

- ¹ Some hold that Isaiah 11:15 and Zechariah 10:11 refer to the drying up of the Euphrates River. The Isaiah passage, however, seems to be in a discussion of the Kingdom of God realized (the millennial period) rather than the 70th week of Daniel. Likewise, Zechariah 10:10-11 refer to the regathering of Israel at the beginning of the kingdom period.
- ² According to Walvoord, as many as 50 different interpretations of the kings of the east have been presented by the historical school. See *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pg. 236.

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L. The Judgment of Babylon (17:1-18:24)

SCOPE: THE 17TH AND 18TH CHAPTERS COVER EVENTS AND SITUATIONS DURING THE SEVENTIETH WEEK.

Introduction

By far the most common interpretation of “mystery Babylon” is that it refers to the city of Rome. Furthermore, it is assumed that the city of Rome will be the “capital” of the Revived Roman Empire. However, as we shall see when we discuss verses 1 and 2 below, it is best to make the word *Babylon* mean Babylon and not Rome. It is not impossible that the City of Babylon will become the capital of the future Roman Empire.

The scope of the Babylonian visions extends from the beginning of the first half of the seventieth week of Daniel until its end, and perhaps slightly beyond. It is possible that a rebuilt city of Babylon will already exist at that time, and there are specific statements that identify this vision as dealing with that City. But it must be remembered that the entirety of this vision of judgment extends beyond just the city. It includes both spiritual and economic/political elements. And those elements seem to be concentrated in their effects toward the middle and end of the week rather than at the beginning.

Indeed, the destruction of the spiritual aspect of Babylon seems to take place, as we will see, right at the beginning of the second half of the week. However, Babylon itself, especially in its commercial existence continues into the second half of the week.

1. *Mystery: Babylon (17:1-18)*

a. The Vision (17:1-6a)

- 1-2 **And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came, and spoke with me, saying, Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who sits upon many waters, ² with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and they who dwell in the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication.**
- 3 **And he carried me away in spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet-colored beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.**
- 4-5 **And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and gilded with gold and precious stone and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations, even the unclean things of her fornication, ⁵ and upon her forehead a name written, a mystery: Babylon the Great, the Mother of the Prostitutes and the Abominations of the Earth.**
- 6 **And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus.**

Verses 1-2

The continuity of chapter 17 with the seven bowls is indicated by the fact that one of the seven angels who had the bowls speaks with John. The word “and” at the beginning of verse 1 also represents that continuity. The reason is simple. The following information about Babylon is a continuation of the statement in 16:19 concerning God’s wrath coming upon it.

In chapters 17 and 18 we see a further development of the reasons for that wrath, and the ultimate consequence of Babylon’s perfidious influences. The sixth and seventh bowls are undoubtedly very near the end of the seventieth week. But the vision of the seventeenth chapter, though later in the book than the events presented in the bowl visions, are associated with them, even though the situation presented in those two chapters includes information that predates the bowl judgments. The probable reason is that it is specifically the evil qualities of Babylon that are directly associated with the nature of the bowl judgments.

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“The great prostitute who sits upon many waters” (vs. 1) is judged. Many recognize that she represents a literal city (vs. 18), which is the only interpretive statement the angel makes concerning the prostitute. His primary emphasis in his interpretation deals with the beast upon which she sits. However, the question is, which city does the prostitute represent? Many believe that this is a reference to the Babylon of the Old Testament. Dr. Walvoord, for instance, holds this view. Other expositors hold that she is to be identified with the city of Rome. Especially, some say, the Vatican, as it is the seat of the authority of false Christian religion. William R. Newell, for instance, holds this view.

The question arises, why would Rome be called Babylon? It seems much more likely that Rome would be called Rome. Some have suggested that John was couching his prophecy against Rome using the name Babylon because he feared that he would be executed by the Roman authorities if he named that city. This seems highly doubtful. John was an old man at this time, and it is unlikely that such a thought would keep him from writing the truth. Furthermore, this prophecy is from Jesus Christ, not from John. John is the messenger only, and he writes only what he sees and hears.

That the Lord here refers to historical Babylon is much more likely. When one begins interpreting proper names metaphorically without Scripture pointing out the fact, it is extremely dangerous. One must ask, if Jesus had meant Babylon, how could He have said it without using the word Babylon? To say that the word Babylon means Rome makes it impossible for the Lord to use the word Babylon in its natural way. So the normal use of the word has become so undermined so as to become unusable. As we shall see, the arguments from the various statements in these chapters that make the prostitute the City of Rome do not hold water.

The idea that the woman represents false religion is not based on any specific statement in the passage, but upon the fact that she is called a prostitute, and is described in a certain way. The word “prostitute” is instructive. In Scripture prostitution and adultery are often used symbolically and metaphorically as indicators of spiritual departure. For instance, Hosea was instructed to take a prostitute as a wife. She symbolized the evil of Israel’s departure from Yahweh. The entire book is given over to that figure.

The concept of marriage is a very powerful one, and the Lord uses it to refer to His relationship to Israel. Note the statement in Jeremiah 3:14:

Return, O backsliding children, says Yahweh; "for I am married to you. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion.

The prostitute, then, most likely represents spiritual violation. But unlike the Old Testament prophecies, there is no appeal here for the prostitute to return to the Lord. Here we have judgment only. So we must not take this figure too far. While it is certainly a figure of religious violation, it does not necessarily refer to a false Christian religion, at least not exclusively, and we must be extremely suspicious of any interpretation that names a specific branch of false Christianity as being the prostitute.

One major traditional view of the prostitute is that she represents the Roman Catholic Church.¹ Dave Hunt, for instance, states the following:

That she represents revived paganism is clear. Most interesting of all, however, is the fact that she embodies paganized Christianity. The woman represents a world-wide religious system which is based in Rome and claims to be Christian but which has its roots in Babel and Babylon. (Dave Hunt. *A Woman Rides the Beast*. pg. 65.)

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However, I must say, Mr. Hunt, that it is not at all certain that she represents a world-wide religious system which is based in Rome. Dr. Walvoord, in his discussion of this chapter, constantly uses the term “apostate church” to refer to the prostitute. This fixation on the false-Christian elements of the prostitute has brought about some forced interpretations. Perhaps there is more to the vision of the prostitute than the simple explanation that the “whore of Babylon” is Rome. This view has been held since the protestant reformation in one form or another, often by amillennialists.

Of course, it is not impossible that the prostitute *includes* paganized Christianity. It possibly does. But it seems unlikely that it is limited to that. We know that at the middle of the seventieth week the 1st Beast of Revelation 13 is represented by an image, and that that image becomes the enforced object of veneration and worship. It appears that the old religious forms are swept away, and perhaps incorporated into this new form. That they will include the false form of Christianity known as Roman Catholicism is very likely. But it will by no means be limited to the Roman Catholic Church.

Indeed, we must understand that the Roman Catholic Church is not the only false form of Christianity. Many who call themselves Christian belong to other false religious entities from Russia to Africa, from England to Asia. By no means are all of these false Christian groups Roman Catholic.

A much better interpretation is that the prostitute represents the later incarnation of the Babylonian religious cults centered in the *actual city of Babylon*. We must keep in mind that when the angel interprets who the prostitute is, he does not say that it is a false religious system. He says simply, “And the woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth.” The woman is a city, not a religion. In other words, the prostitute represents a political entity on a specific location on the earth. The idea of false religion comes exclusively from the concept of prostitution and the description given her.

It is true that some of the cultic practices that perhaps had their foundation in Babylon have found their way into the Roman Catholic Church, though not exclusively. The Greek and Russian Orthodox churches also contain some of the same error. A careful study might find that even non-Christian religions contain elements of that original Babylonian panoply of gods and false deities.

During the Old Testament time the various gods of the pagan world were forms of Babylonian deities adopted by the different nations of the ancient world. Primarily Ba'al,² who is a form of Tammuz, the Babylonian deity who is said to have been born from the “queen of heaven.” According to some, Nimrod, the founder of Babylon, had a wife who claimed to have a son who was conceived miraculously. The boy, Tammuz, was considered the savior of his people. However, no records actually name this woman, though some have jumped to the conclusion that she was Semiramis. But Semiramis is legendary, and it is impossible to associate her with a specific person. Certainly she did not appear on the scene until hundreds of years after Nimrod was dead.

Tammuz may have been a Sumerian shepherd-god, though this association is based on a similarity of names rather than direct statement.³ According to some, Tammuz was incorporated into the classical Greek god Adonis, who in turn, was a consort as well as son by virgin birth of the mother-goddess, who went by many names.⁴

Some believe that this same cult influenced the Roman Catholic Church, and the worship of Mary in the Roman Catholic Church is actually a derivation of this influence. This may or may not be so. It is not difficult to see other possible reasons for the Mary worship of the Roman Catholics.

The prophet Ezekiel presents God’s protests against the ceremony of “weeping for Tammuz” in Ezekiel 8:14. And Jeremiah mentions the pagan practice of making cakes for the queen of heaven

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(Jeremiah 7:18), and offering incense to the queen of heaven (Jeremiah 44:17-19, 25).⁵ Israel had prostituted itself in its acceptance of some of the Babylonian gods, even before the actual deportation in Jeremiah's day. And at the time of Ezekiel's writing during the deportation, it was still going on.

According to Walvoord, who gives no sources for his statements, the Babylonian cult eventually made its way to other cities including Pergamos, the site of one of the seven churches of Asia. The chief priests of the Babylonian cult wore crowns in the form of the head of a fish, in recognition of the god Dagon, the fish God of the Philistines. He had the title "*Keeper of the Bridge*," which was printed on these crowns. The Latin equivalent of the title is Pontifex Maximus, and was used by the Caesars, and was afterward adopted as the title for the Bishop of Rome. However, I have not been able to verify by independent sources that the Babylonian cult reached Pergamos,⁶ or that the chief priests had the title "Keeper of the Bridge." I'll keep looking!

However, the bishop of Rome got the designation not from the Babylonian cults, but from the secular authority of the Roman emperors. It was a way of extending the Roman Catholic Church into secular power, and had very little "religious" significance. Nor is the Roman Catholic religion an idea that John's readers in Asia would have understood. It is more likely that they would have understood the concept of the Babylonian deities having become the primary religion of the Roman Empire.

All in all, it seems best to relate the prostitute to forms of pagan worship, including those that have been incorporated into the various false forms of Christianity. It is highly likely, for instance, that Islam will be incorporated into this system. Perhaps the various forms of unbelieving Judaism will also find a home there. After all, biblically the original spiritual prostitute was Israel, as the book of Hosea makes clear. The first half of Daniel's 70th week will find many religious exercises combining into one that is characterized by faithfulness to the Babylonian cult religions. It simply cannot be sustained that the prostitute is the Roman Catholic Church! And we must never forget that the prostitute is a city, NOT A RELIGION! This must be our primary focus.

At the time of the abomination of desolation at the middle of the seventieth week, the man of sin will be worshiped as a god. It seems likely that the Babylonian cult religions will be destroyed at that time. But the city of Babylon continues as a political and commercial center as befits the capital of the empire. Babylon, then, is the prostitute.

The statement at the end of verse 1 that the prostitute *sits upon many waters* is interpreted for us in verse 15 as *peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues*. Again we must question the geographical location of these groups. Is this a global statement? It is generally taken to be so. But there are good reasons for limiting it to the Revived Roman Empire. We will discuss this in more detail in the comments on verse 3 below.

Verse 2 tells us that the prostitute is the one *with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication*. How far are we to take this statement? The kings of the earth are taken to be all the rulers of the globe by most expositors. But taking the word "kings" literally, we find that a difficult proposition to support. Not all rulers on the earth are kings, but the Revived Roman Empire will be governed again by kings. It is undoubtedly these kings who are in view. Indeed, the great majority of the population of that empire seem to be included in the statement that *they who dwell in the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication*. The false religion which that city promotes, in whatever form, will be that of the great majority of the peoples of the Empire.

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Verse 3

John is taken in a vision into the wilderness. In his day, as today, the site of Babylon had become a wilderness area. However, it was populated! That there were still people living in that area we know to be true, but the great city of Babylon had been destroyed. It appears that a smaller town or village had grown up at the old site, and was still referred to as Babylon. This is undoubtedly what Peter was referring to in 1 Peter 5:13.

Whereas verse 2 indicates the woman “sitting on many waters,” verse 3 shows her sitting upon a scarlet-colored beast. The identification of this beast is of extreme importance. She is, after all, being supported by it. It seems likely that this is the first beast of Revelation 13, which we previously identified with the Revived Roman Empire as personified in the man of sin. If this is accurate, then the identification of the prostitute is virtually certain. She is not secular power, but is a city being supported by secular power, perhaps (?) as some form of state religion.

Therefore, the people represented by the “many waters” upon which she sits are to be identified with the people of the Revived Roman Empire rather than the people of the entire globe.

The fact that the beast is “full of names of blasphemy” reminds us of the statements in Revelation 13:1-6 where that beast is also so described. There can be no doubt that both passages are describing the same beast.

Now this beast has seven heads and ten horns, as did the first beast of Revelation 13. At that time, we identified the ten horns as ten kings, and again we so identify them because of the statement in verse 12 below. They are the ten kings of the ten-toed image of Daniel 2, and the ten horns of Daniel 7. They will rule the Revived Roman Empire during the first half of the week of Daniel.

However, the seven heads are more closely identified here than they were in Revelation 13. As we shall see, they represent seven kings. We will reserve our comments on that peculiar arrangement until we discuss verses 9-14 below.

Verses 4-5

The apparel of the woman has elicited much comment. Dr. Walvoord’s statement is typical:

Her adornment is similar to that of religious trappings of ritualistic churches today. While purple, scarlet, gold, precious stones, and pearls can all represent beauty and glory in relation to the true faith, here they reveal a false religion that prostitutes the truth.⁷

Of course, the problem is that the readers in the seven churches in Asia knew nothing of religious apparel in the sense that Dr. Walvoord presents. Rather, the colorful adornment would have spoken of secular power. In fact, it was for that reason that the “princes of the church” adopted the religious raiment that they did. In fact, the political aspect of Babylon as presented in chapter 17 has been largely ignored. It is reserved for chapter 18. But the fact that the woman is said to represent a city, a political entity, and the fact that she is clothed like a secular ruler of great power, causes us to reevaluate that view.

If a religious element is included in this description, it is more likely found in *the golden cup* which she holds, and the *statement* written on her forehead. The golden cup contains “abominations.” These abominations appear to consist of “the unclean things of her fornication.”

The word *abominations* is the plural form of the same word that Jesus used when he referred to the *abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel* (Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14). While the Revelation is not referring to that abomination here, to the readers of both the Old and New Testaments of John’s day, the word carried a strong spiritual overtone. So it is probably best understood as referring to a

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religious element coming out of the city of Babylon. Furthermore, the idea of sexual immorality is continued by the description of the abominations. They are unclean things (τὰ ἀκάθαρτα), a neuter plural. The concept of spiritual uncleanness goes all the way back to the Old Testament, and is undoubtedly what is meant here. These are unclean things of her fornication, again a word that carried spiritual as well as sexual connotations. Verse 6a continues the description of the woman from the perspective of her religious excesses.

Verse 5 is a further description of the prostitute. Specifically, she has written on her forehead an inscription. A disagreement among expositors exists at this point. The most common view is that the word *mystery* is part of the inscription. Indeed, many versions, such as the NKJV, use all capital letters starting with the word *mystery* and continue through the total inscription.

However, some point out that the word *mystery* is more likely to be taken as the object of the verb written. This seems to be the better view, as the word μυστήριον deals with content of revelation, rather than a description of that content. The importance of that distinction is found in how one views the word *Babylon* here. Those who take the word μυστήριον to be part of the description tend to think of the word *Babylon* as referring to something other than literal Babylon, usually either the city of Rome or the Roman Catholic Church. Their argument is that since this is “mystery Babylon” it cannot be referring to historical Babylon, because historical Babylon was not a mystery.

But if the word *mystery* is a statement of the entirety of the inscription, that objection becomes moot. Here we have a new revelation about historical Babylon the Great. She is “the Mother of the Prostitutes and the Abominations of the Earth.” This carries a spiritual force that is not included in the regular thinking about literal Babylon. It emphasizes the spiritual degradation of the woman. Furthermore, this spiritual condition carries into the far future from John’s day. It is a new idea that the historical Babylon’s legacy goes on into the last days of the Roman Empire.

“Mother of Prostitutes” is a particularly strong statement. The woman is pictured as the ultimate source for spiritual prostitution. This is in keeping with the idea that she is the source for false religious ideas. She is also the mother of abominations, that is, of the substitution of a false faith for a true one.

“Of the earth” seems to be a generic designation, rather than a specific reference to the land of Israel. It must be remembered that the Revived Roman Empire is located on the earthly portion of the old Roman Empire.

Verse 6a

This statement clarifies the idea of the prostitute’s spiritual nature. Since the false religion coming out of her cannot stand in the light of truth, she persecutes believers in Christ. The “blood of the saints” clearly refers to her putting to death tribulation believers. The figure of drunkenness indicates her total obliviousness to that which is righteous. A drunk person cannot see beyond the getting of another drink. Babylon’s ultimate spiritual focus is to wipe out truth faith from the Empire. She can see little beyond that.

It appears her specific target consists of those who maintain the witness of Jesus. This most likely refers to Gentile believers, as it appears from the gospels that those Jews who act in a forthright manner in proclaiming Christ survive. But no such guarantee is given to the Gentile believers, and we know that a great multitude are killed for the witness of Jesus (Revelation 7:9ff).

b. The Interpretation (17:6b-18)

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As with many apocalyptic revelations, the vision of verses 1-6a is followed by an interpretation in 16b-18. However, in this case, the interpretation needs to be interpreted carefully. Much is assumed by commentators concerning the statements of the angel.

- 6b And when I saw her, I wondered with a great wonder.
- 7 And the angel said to me, Why did you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.
- 8 The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to ascend out of the abyss, and to go into perdition. And they who dwell on the earth shall wonder, they whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast, that he was, and is not, and shall arrive.
- 9-10 Here is the mind that has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sits, ¹⁰ and they are seven kings, the five are fallen, the one is, the other is not yet come, and when he comes, he must continue a little while.
- 11 And the beast that was, and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is of the seven, and he departs into perdition.
- 12 And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings, who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority as kings, with the beast, for one hour.
- 13 These have one intent, and they give their power and authority to the beast.
- 14 These shall war against the Lamb, and the Lamb shall conquer them, because he is Lord of lords, and King of kings, and they also shall conquer who are with him, called and chosen and faithful.
- 15 And he says to me, The waters which you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.
- 16 And the ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these shall hate the prostitute, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and shall burn her up with fire.
- 17 For God put in their hearts to do his intent, and to come to one intent, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God should be accomplished.
- 18 And the woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth.

Verse 6b-7

In John's experience, he was left wondering (θαυμάζω) "with a great wonder." The idiom seems to indicate a lack of understanding of the vision, and perhaps even some confusion, since the noun θαύμα (wonder) carries the idea of astonishment. The angel then asks a rhetorical question, "Why did you wonder?" In this case the rhetorical device is used to introduce the next statement.

The word *mystery* means here what it always does in the New Testament. It refers to the previously unrevealed information that is now to be revealed. This revelation will consider two elements: 1) the woman, and 2) the beast that carries her. In fact, the angel has quite a bit more to say about the beast at this point than he does about the woman.

Verse 8

The angel begins by explaining the mystery of the beast. The statement that the beast "was and is not, and is about to ascend out of the abyss" has caused great discussion among expositors, although some simply choose not to discuss it at all. Lehman Strauss fits into this category, as does Clarence Larkin.

Today, most premillennialist writers take the view of Walter Scott, who identifies it with the historical progression of the Roman Empire. "*Was*," he says, refers to the fact that "it existed in its imperial form in John's day, and on till its destruction in A.D. 476." "*And is not*" means that it has no present political existence. "*Is about to come up out of the abyss*" he says means that "Satan will revive the empire, and stamp his own character on it." (Walter Scott. *Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus*

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Christ, pages 348, 349.) This is the view that Theodore Epp also seems to hold, as does J. Vernon McGee.

Dr. Walvoord seems to also hold this view, though he does not explain himself in detail. He says,

The fact that the beast **was, now is not, and will come up** in the future is another indication of what was introduced in Rev 13:3. The supernatural survival and revival of both the world ruler and his empire will impress the world as being supernatural and will lead to worship of the beast and Satan. (BKC)

With reference to the statement “about to come up out of the abyss” I agree with these scholars, though not necessarily the view that some take concerning the abyss being the home of Satan, which is based on the interpretation that the angel of the abyss of Revelation 9:11 is Satan. I have taken the view that Satan is the one who has the keys to the abyss, and the king of the abyss is a spirit being.

There is a major problem with the rest of Scott’s approach, however. The tenses of the verbs, particularly the first two, do not fit well with his interpretation. Remember that the angel was speaking to John (you), and that John was, in fact, living during the time of the historical Roman Empire. To John, the “was” could not refer to his present, which is necessary if “was” refers to Rome’s “imperial form in John’s day.” Furthermore, “is not” is present tense, and is best interpreted as being during John’s day. Clearly “about to come up out of the abyss” is future from John’s day.

So Scott’s interpretation is not taken from the original perspective of John, but from the perspective of the modern interpreter. Now, this is a dangerous approach to take. It robs the verb tenses of their normal meaning when written. It also places the interpreter on the slippery slope of taking the meaning of a Biblical text from a modern, rather than a historical/grammatical point of view.

But there is another possibility. While the beast certainly refers to the Revived Roman Empire, there may be another element within it that has been overlooked that fits the description better. In order to explain this possibility, let us review Daniel’s prophecy in Daniel 2:44-45:

And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. ⁴⁵ Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold -- the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure.

The stone cut out of the mountain refers to the future kingdom of God. Note that it does not destroy the future Roman Empire, per se. Actually it destroys “the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold.” Now we know that the various metals refer to a *succession* of empires. But there is a sense in which all these empires continue to exist, even after the next one comes along. It is the fact of empire in view in this vision, not simply the succession of specific governments. In prophetic terms, it is the rule of the gentile world power that is at stake, not any given empire. This is undoubtedly what Paul was referring to when he referred to “the fullness of the Gentiles” (Romans 11:25). The domination of the Gentile program over Israel will come to an end. It is the entire prophetic Gentile system that the stone breaks.

This may also, at least partially, explain the statements in Daniel 7:11-12,

I watched then because of the sound of the pompous words which the horn was speaking; I watched till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame. ¹² As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.

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The prolonging of the lives of the three previous beasts may refer to the fact that they were assimilated into the fourth beast, at least prophetically. Each, in turn, had its dominion removed, but certain element remained, the fact of empire. And it was only the first beast, the head of gold of Daniel 2, that was characterized by absolute autocracy. By the time of the Medo-Persian Empire, the ruler had less authority. Once a law was made, he could not change it, even though it was decreed by him. By the time of the Roman Empire, the power of the ruler was quite limited, at least legally. Not even Octavius, the first Emperor called Caesar Augustus, was without restraint. But the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar was an absolute monarch.

Remember that the prostitute of Revelation 17 is a city. We have defined it as the city of Babylon that will also be “revived.” But when the Roman Empire is revived, in a sense, the entire Gentile imperial image of Daniel 2 is revived in its final form. So the empire consists of the other empires as well, including Babylon. The beast of Revelation 17 is better understood as the revival of the Babylonian Empire as part of the Gentile empire program embodied in the Revived Roman Empire. Or perhaps, even a revival of the Medo-Persian, Greek, and Babylonian empires collectively.

This fits the terminology of 17:8 much better than making the terms refer strictly to the historical progress of Rome. It is the political entity of the Gentiles empire program as it exercises specific political power over Israel that is to be revived under a Babylonian perspective. This political domination was, and is not in John’s day, as the Babylonian Empire had already ceased to exist. But like Rome, and under its auspices, its coming again. It will not be a separate empire, but the man of sin will exercise the same kind of power that the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar did. His was the only absolute autocratic system, which was weakened by the succeeding empires. But it will return in the guise of the man of sin.

This view explains the further statement in verse 8, “*And they who dwell on the earth shall wonder, they whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast, that he was, and is not, and shall arrive.*” Whether “they who dwell on the earth” refers to the entire global population, or only those living in the Revived Roman Empire area prior to or during the first half of the week is problematical. But when the Roman Empire revives, it will not be a “republic” in any sense. The man of sin will have total autocratic rule, and unbelieving men, men whose names are not written in the book of life, will marvel in amazement.

Verses 9-10

Verse 9 starts with what is essentially a warning. “Here is the mind that has wisdom” seems to indicate that that which follows is difficult to discern. With that we can certainly relate. There are as many interpretations of the various elements of the next few verses as there are different politicians. We will attempt to maintain a careful, biblical perspective in our approach, while maintaining a normal interpretive approach. Our guiding light will be to interpret the material as John would have when he received it, and which his original audience would have in their Asian assemblies.

The first view that we must consider has to do with the identity of the seven heads. The idea that the city of Rome is in view, which is held by many, is partly taken from the statement in verse 9 that the seven heads are seven mountains upon which the woman sits. This statement is conflated with that of verse 18, “*And the woman whom you saw is the great city.*”

These “seven mountains” are taken to refer to the so-called “City on the Seven Hills,” that is, the city of Rome. According to verse 9, the seven horns are seven mountains, or high places. Some commentators refer these to the hills of ancient Rome. Originally Rome was built completely on the left bank of the Tiber River on seven hills, named *Palatine, Aventine, Caelian, Esquiline, Viminal,*

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Quirinal, and *Capitoline*. These are usually listed as the seven hills. But, as Rome grew, *Janiculum* on the other bank of the Tiber was often included, and also a hill to the north called *Pincian*. *Janiculum* was incorporated into the city some six hundred years before the coming of Christ by the fourth king of Rome, Ancius Marcius. So there were at least eight hills upon which the city of Rome sat in John's day. Furthermore the Pincian hill, though not surrounded by the walls of Rome until the third century a.d., had already become the residences of several important personages in Rome by the writing of the New Testament. So there were at least eight, and perhaps nine, hills on which Rome sat during the time of the writing of the Revelation.

It is very unlikely that the Revelation is referring to the city of Rome by the mention of seven mountains. These seven hills are by no means mountains. In fact, as we have said before, the term mountain is used in the Bible as indicative of political power. See Psa. 30:7, of David's kingdom; Jeremiah 51:25 of Babylon's power; and Daniel 2:35 of the future kingdom of God on earth.

J. A. Seiss, the noted Luthern premillennialist, goes to great lengths to refute the "seven hills of Rome" idea, especially as promoted by Albert Barnes. Seiss holds, correctly, I think, that the term *mountain* in prophetic writing is usually used of governmental authority. He says,

So the kingdom of the Messiah is likened to "a stone, which became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth." (Dan. 2:35.) And this is exactly the sense in which the angel uses the word here, as he himself tells us. He does not say "the seven heads are seven mountains, where the Woman sitteth upon them," and there leave off; but he adds immediately, "and they are seven kings," or personified kingdoms. The mountains, then, are not piles of material rocks and earth at all, but royal or imperial powers, declared to be such by the angel himself. The description, therefore, so far from fixing the application to the Papacy, or to the city of Rome, decisively settles that it cannot be to either, for neither has seven such mountains. The late Albert Barnes has written in his *Notes* that "all respectable interpreters agree that it refers to Rome; either Pagan, Christian or Papal." Of course he is one of the "respectable interpreters," but then he should be able to tell which of the objects he names is it, for it cannot be all three. Most people assign Dr. E. W. Hengstenberg, the great Berlin professor, a place among "respectable interpreters," but Hengstenberg says Rome cannot possibly be meant by these seven heads.

Seiss goes on at length to show that Rome cannot be meant, and we will not repeat it here. But his last statement in that long paragraph is worth repeating. He says,

And when men once get over their "respectability," and rise to the height and range of the interpreting angel's view of things, they will have no difficulty in identifying the mountains, or the times to which they belong.

Seiss is correct in this statement. We are told in the context what these seven mountains are: They are seven kings, not literal mountains. Some see a dual reference here, both to mountains and kings. The statement in the Greek precludes this interpretation. The sentences continues with the statement, "and they are seven kings." The placement of "and" (Greek=*kai*) makes it impossible to translate the Greek word *kai* as "also" as the NKJV does. Much more likely would be to translate the *kai* as "even," indicating that the word *mountain* is used in its political sense as a person of governmental authority.

At this point, however, we must part from Seiss,⁸ as he interprets the statement "they are seven kings, the five are fallen, the one is, the other is not yet come, and when he comes, he must continue a little while" as seven empires. The one *who is* he identifies as the sixth empire, the then current Roman

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Empire. The five who are fallen, he says are in reverse chronological order Greece, Persia, Babylon, Assyria, and Egypt. He says that unlike Daniel, who started in his own day with Babylon, the scarlet beast looks back to all world powers prior to Rome, which would then include Assyria and Egypt. However, Seiss does not answer two burning questions. The first is, Who is the seventh king? Presumably he understands it to be the Revived Roman Empire. But just as importantly, a second question must be asked. Who is the eighth king mentioned in the next verse? Seiss makes no comment here.

But, perhaps, the seven kings are *not* seven empires, but are, in fact, seven individual kings as the angel states.⁹ Perhaps they are seven kings, not simply of the beast *that was and is not*, but of the beast who comes out of the abyss in the future. Just because the scarlet beast existed prior to John's day does not mean that the seven kings existed then. Perhaps they are seven kings of Gentile dominance over Israel in its Roman/Babylonian guise and exist only during the 70th week of Daniel. Prophetically that makes much more sense, especially, as we shall see, in light of verse 11 where the scarlet beast is identified as an eighth king, who is "of the seven."

The question arises, is there any other place in prophetic literature where seven kings are identified, especially with reference to the Gentile dominance over Israel? Furthermore, is there any place with reference to this dominance that an eighth king is mentioned? The student of Daniel's prophecy will immediately answer, "Yes, there is. They are found in Daniel 7:7-8."

After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. ⁸ I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words.

Premillennial scholars, taking a normal interpretive view, identify the ten horns as ten kings, and generally that the ten horns correspond to the ten toes of the image of Daniel 2. And those ten toes are identified as kings. It seems inconceivable that seven kings could be viewed in two visions of Gentile dominance over Israel, with an eighth mentioned in the same context, and they not refer to the same kings.

The "little horn" of Daniel 7 is regularly interpreted as being the man of sin, the same individual as "the prince who shall come" who makes a covenant with Israel for "one week" in Daniel 9:26, 27. This man, mistakenly called the antichrist, will take down three of the ten kings in some manner. This does not mean that he kills them as some think. It means that their authority is given to him. They will probably exist right to the end of the 70th week, and perhaps beyond. Evidently later, he removes two more from direct power as well. Presumably the five who remain are not a problem. It seems to be his method to complete autocratic power to subdue political figures that get in his way. They must be subdued before he is able to assume the "Babylonian character" of the Nebuchadnezzar-like authority figure.

Verse 11

The beast we have identified as the Revived Roman Empire in its Babylonian guise. But here we find the beast as identified as an eighth king. These two are not incompatible. As far back as Daniel 2, the dictatorship of Nebuchadnezzar identifies his person with his empire. Daniel states in Daniel 2:37-40,

You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; ³⁸ and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all -- you are this head of gold. ³⁹

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But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. ⁴⁰ And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others.

As the metals of the image degrade in value, so does the authority of its leadership. Nebuchadnezzar is the head of gold, because he, and he alone, of all the leaders of Gentile dominion, had complete control of his empire. They are virtually synonymous. Likewise, the man of sin will be in complete control, once he subdues five of the original ten kings. Herein is added information, part of the mystery of the beast previously unrevealed. In Daniel 7 we see only three kings removed. In Revelation 17 we see two more removed, with a total of five left.

This is supported by the fact that the eighth king is “of the seven.” The similarity of these kings is pronounced, in that they are all related as kings over parts of the same empire. It appears that the eighth king of Daniel 7, that is, the little horn, the man of sin, exercises authority *that the original ten do not*. And in order to do so, he must remove his competitor kings. As we will see in our discussion of verse 12, one of the arguments used is that the seven kings appear to be a progressive chronological order (five, then seven) while the ten kings are viewed as existing simultaneously. Walvoord makes this statement,

While the 7 heads may be chronologically successive rulers of the Roman Empire who are singled out as prominent, the 10 horns by contrast are contemporaneous with each other, and as the text indicates they will receive political power for a brief time. (BKC)

However, the ten kings are clearly presented in non-simultaneous existence in Daniel 7. First there are ten, then three are “plucked out by the roots” by the little horn (Daniel 7:8). If the ten kings of verse 12 are the same ten kings as those of Daniel 2 and 7, then the argument cannot be sustained that they are all contemporaneous with each other, and Dr. Walvoord’s statement holds no water.

Verses 12-13

Verse 12 speaks of ten kings. The general interpretation of these ten kings is that, since they are a different number than the seven kings, they have no relationship to them. Furthermore, as presented above, some take the idea that the seven kings are successive while the ten kings are not. Many interpreters take this approach because they cannot conceive of such a redundancy as the same set of kings viewed in two different ways. It is perhaps because of this inability that Seiss and others make the seven kings to be empires rather than individual persons.

However, it seems to me that such a distinction is not necessary. The view here may be that the complete set of ten kings as presented in Daniel 2 and 7 can also be viewed in relationship to the man of sin as seven kings. There is no insurmountable evidence that this cannot be so. Also, if they are the same set of kings viewed differently, the purpose of such distinction becomes obvious. The future historical process is viewed by the vision of the seven kings, especially in relationship to the eighth, while the kings are viewed as a body who ultimately give up their power. Much is made of the idea that the seven kings are presented “in succession” while the ten kings co-exist. However, such an assumption is meaningless. Nothing is said about the ten kings being in existence simultaneously throughout the 70th week of Daniel. Only that they are all in existence at the end of the week.

If we take the statement that these kings “have received no kingdom as yet” normally, it simply means that in John’s day they had not yet assumed any kingly authority. That is for the future when they receive authority as kings with the beast.

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The phrase “for one hour” has elicited much comment. The most common view is that the word “hour” is to be taken metaphorically as a short period of time in order to complete a purpose. Jesus seems to use the word that way in Matthew 24:36. Mark 13:35 seems to contain a similar use where Jesus prayed that “the hour might pass from him.”

If this is true, the ten actual reigns will be short, and eventually all ten will give up to the beast their kingly “power and authority,” though not necessarily all at once. These ten have “one mind” or intent. How they are persuaded to turn over their power and authority to the beast is not stated. However it happens, they become subservient to him.

The progression seems clear, and it does not appear to be chronological in either the case of the seven kings nor of the ten kings. The ultimate intention is to show that the man of sin will have ultimate Nebuchadnezzar-like power by the end of the 70th week. He will become the true emperor, and while they ten kings will continue to exist in support of him, their authority will be given to the man of sin.

Verse 14

The word “these” in verse 14 refers to the ten kings and the beast. The chronology seems to have shifted to the actual time of the second coming and beyond. No longer is the beast fighting against other kings from the various parts of the earth, but he is warring against the Lamb.

The final battle against the man of sin and his followers cannot take place during the 70th week. The Lord returns “after the tribulation of those days” (Matthew 24:29).

The phrases “Lord of lords” and “King of kings” are used only three times in the New Testament. The first is 1 Timothy 6:13-15,

I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, ¹⁴ that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing, ¹⁵ which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords...

The context is clearly future, as Paul refers to the future appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. Likewise, the other two times the phrases occur are in passages that are future. They are found in Revelation 17:14 and 19:16. The phrases refer to the Lord Jesus Christ only after He has assumed His earthly throne, and are not rightly yet used of Him in His present position, except with a view to His future kingdom.

Strangely, the expression, “and they also shall conquer who are with him, called and chosen and faithful” has provoked very little comment among expositors. Even those who do comment make only general reference to “His people,” meaning the people of the Lamb.¹⁰ But we must ask, are they angels or are they all believers from all time, or are they limited to a certain group, especially the body of Christ?

Certainly, Paul says that the angels will return with Christ at His coming. See 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8:

...and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, ⁸ in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

However, the idea that Revelation speaks of angels does not seem to fit the description, “called and chosen and faithful,” a set of terms that more easily refers to human beings. While angels are called “chosen” or “elect,” it seems incongruous that they would be “called” in the New Testament sense. See my comments below on God’s calling.

The view that they are all the saints without distinction seems unlikely. First, at the second coming of Christ only one group of saints has yet been resurrected, the body of Christ. It seems unlikely that

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disembodied saints can be referred to here, as the battle is physical. Also, there is no other statement that all the saints are so distinguished. It seems more likely that the statement refers to a certain group of believers. But who?

Two possibilities arise. They could be those believers on the earth at the time of the second coming who rally to Christ's side and fight with Him. Since they are in human bodies, they do not need to be resurrected. This is problematical, however, as no other statement in Scripture confirms this view. That is not fatal, but it does cause us to look elsewhere.

It is most likely that this refers to the body of Christ. The church will already have been resurrected, and Revelation 3:21 makes it clear that church saints will sit with Christ on His throne, that is, upon the Davidic throne, as He currently sits with the Father on His throne. If church saints are going to rule with Christ during His earthly kingdom, it seems likely that they will return with Him to do so.

The three-fold description is instructive. These individuals are "called and chosen and faithful." "Called" refers to the calling of God, a doctrine that is taught extensively in the New Testament. It refers to an aspect of the doctrine of salvation that relates to the application of the gospel in the life of the unbeliever. When an unbeliever gets saved, it is because he has been called.. See Romans 8:30, Galatians 1:6.

Verse 15

This is, of course, a reference to the original statement of the angel in verse one of this chapter. Originally the angel made a statement, and in the vision the waters are not mentioned. Here the words "which you saw" indicate that the waters were part of the original vision.

The *interpretation* of this statement is straightforward. the waters represent humanity in diversity. The *significance* of the statement is also clear. The prostitute and the beast indicate not a single nation, but an empire. While a single nation can contain various ethnic and language groups it is not a requirement; however, it is part of the nature of an empire that it must do so, as several nations otherwise construed must have various groups of people. This is consistent also with the fact that the original form of the Revived Roman/Babylonian Empire has ten kings.

Verse 16

The nature of the prostitute becomes clear. If indeed she is a city, and the city of Babylon revived, then this statement makes perfect sense. Babylon gathers so much power that it is intolerable for the ten horns and for the beast.¹¹ They come to hate the prostitute, that is, the city of Babylon. If the beast represents both the man of sin as well as the empire, then the issue becomes clear. The woman is gathering too much power or prestige.

Now, if the prostitute only represents religion, the interpretation becomes problematical. In the middle of the week, all religions except that which worships the image of the beast are eliminated or absorbed into the new religious system. And religion cannot be simply destroyed by violence. But if the prostitute is the city of Babylon which is the seat of the false religious system during much of the tribulation period, it makes perfect sense for her to be destroyed. Her spiritual prostitution is destroyed by her becoming "desolate and naked." The ten kings "shall eat of her flesh," perhaps referring to the usurpation of her spiritual dominance.

We can then take the words "and shall burn her up with fire" literally. (See comments on verse 18 below.) Destroying the city by fire will have the affect of cutting the head from the false religious system that may very well be in competition with the worship of the image of the beast.

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Verse 17

The control of the events of these future times is not in the hands of man, but with God. He is directing the events. The single event which culminates the process is the giving of each of the ten king's kingdom to the beast. He then becomes the single autocrat, the dictator in the Nebuchadnezzar/Babylonian sense. In order to do so, the city of Babylon must be destroyed. And the ten kings must be willing to give over their authority to the man of sin.

It is most revealing that the time process is indicated in this sentence. "Until the words of God should be accomplished" (ἄχρι τελεσθῶσιν οἱ λόγοι τοῦ θεοῦ). This single truth, that God's words will be brought to completion, indicates that the smallest details of this future time were planned and executed by God. They are as certain as past events, for God controls the intents of the ten kings. He puts it into their minds (hearts) to turn over their kingdoms to the beast.

Once again we see that evil men, attempting to accomplish their own end, are being manipulated by God Himself. They believe they are freely acting, but they are under compulsion. No doubt can be attached that when it comes to the "free will of man" verses the "sovereignty of God" it is the "sovereignty of God" that wins.

Verse 18

The only interpretation given to the woman specifically is found in verse 18. She is the great city. We have already discussed the fact that this must refer to the revived city of Babylon.

Here we learn something new, however. She "reigns over the kings of the earth." In other words, at some point, this city becomes the capital city of the Revived Roman Empire. This may encompass the entire first half of the week of Daniel. If, as seems likely, the "little horn" subdues at least three of the original ten kings before the beginning of the week, then he may very well establish his capital in Babylon.

However, Babylon is ultimately destroyed. The time table is difficult, but by the middle of the week, the man of sin is sitting on the throne of God in Jerusalem proclaiming that he is God (2 Thessalonians 2:4). It is quite possible that he moves his capital from Babylon to Jerusalem, and that signals the events that lead up to the final destruction of the city of Babylon along with its religious and commercial system.

The "kings of the earth" probably are distinct from the ten kings of previous mention, although some attempt to make them identical. It seems unlikely that an empire as big as the Revived Roman Empire will become has only ten kings. Perhaps the Empire will have many kings, only ten of whom are in a superior position. These kings may give their allegiance not primarily to the beast, but to the city of Babylon as his capital.

However, another view that seems quite possible to me is that these are political princes outside the Revived Roman Empire. It's possible to think of them as allies who have ridden the coat tails of the city of Babylon as she begins to gain influence. Other geographically contiguous nations would be highly influenced by what is happening in Empire, and may well be the ones who are considered to have "committed fornication" with Babylon.

Endnotes

- ¹ The “city on the seven hills” argument is based on an interpretation of the “seven mountains” of verse 9. As we shall see, making this the city of Rome is impossible.
- ² The word “ba’al” does not refer to a specific pagan deity, at least not regularly, in the Bible. The word means “lord,” and was used of many different deities. To combine them into one, as some, such as Hislop do, is to add confusion to complexity.
- ³ Dumuzid of the Sumerians is said to be the source of Tammuz, a transliteration of the Hebrew name found in Ezekiel. It is likely that the Akkadian Temmuz is the same god as the Hebrew Tammuz, though even that cannot be proven. At this time, further work needs to be done to show that Dumuzid morphed into Tammuz.
- ⁴ Joseph Campbell, *Oriental Mythology, The Masks of the Gods*.
- ⁵ The “queen of heaven” in this passage is not Semiramis, as some suggest. More likely she is Ishtar. The idea that Ishtar and Semiramis are the same individual is wishful thinking, as no historical documents associate the two. False associations bedevil the study of these subjects, and works such as *The Two Babylons* by Alexander Hislop have not only caused confusion, but have promoted a false historical method, as well as brought into disrepute the Old Testament documents by those looking to discount them on historical grounds. Even Walvoord perpetuates the myth that Semiramis was the wife of Nimrod and her child was Tammuz (see his comments on Revelation 17:3 in the *Bible Knowledge Commentary*).
- ⁶ See my notes on Pergamos in Chapter 2:12ff.
- ⁷ *BKC*, electronic edition.
- ⁸ Walvoord seems to accept Seiss’s interpretation totally. He quotes the entire passage from Seiss’s commentary without comment. See Walvoord’s commentary, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pages 251-254. Many seem to follow this same approach.
- ⁹ A common interpretation is that the seven heads are both the city of Rome and seven Roman kings. Strauss, for instance, after expressing the “seven hills of Rome view, says the five kings are in order, “Julius Caesar, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero.” He continues, “The angel then said to John, ‘and one is,’ meaning, I take it, Domitian, the last of the Caesars who was alive when John wrote.” The eighth king of the next verse he takes to be “the Antichrist.” (Lehman Strauss, *Revelation*, pg. 301) So he shifts from an historical to an eschatological interpretation in one verse without any explanation as to why.
- ¹⁰ *Lange’s Commentary* is one which does discuss this group, though only in general terms. Who they are specifically is not stated, but it appears from a cursory reading that the commentator means to refer to all saints of all time. Even among premillennialists, a strong distinction between various peoples of God is not always maintained.
- ¹¹ A textual problem exists here. The TR reads “upon the beast” whereas virtually all other manuscripts read “and the beast.” Even the Farstad-Hodges majority text accepts “and” rather than “on.” Indeed, there seems little evidence at all for the reading “on.” Nevertheless, the NKJV followed the King James Version by saying “on the beast.”

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Chapter Eighteen

2. Commercial Babylon (18:1-24)

The 18th chapter speaks of Babylon from its commercial perspective, though not exclusively. It is a mistake to divorce the commercial from the religious aspect of the city to the extent that some do. It is a single city with two intermingled elements. The first eight verses especially reflect the spiritual decadence of the city and continue the fact presented in 17:16 that the ten kings destroy the city with fire.

a. The Angel's Proclamation (18:1-8)

- 1 **After these things I saw another angel descending out of heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory.**
- 2-3 **And he cried with a mighty voice, saying, Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, and has become the habitation of demons, and the fortification of every unclean spirit, and the fortification of every unclean and hated bird, ³ because by the wine of the wrath of her fornication all the nations have fallen, and the kings of the earth committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth became rich by the power of her luxury.**
- 4-5 **And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come forth, my people, out of her, lest you participate in her sins, and in order that you receive not of her plagues, ⁵ because her sins have piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her wrongs.**
- 6 **Render to her even as she rendered, and double to her the double according to her works, in the cup which she poured, pour to her double.**
- 7 **As much as she glorified herself, and lived in luxury, give her so much torment and mourning, because she says in her heart, I am sitting as queen, and am no widow, and shall in no way see mourning.**
- 8 **Therefore in one day shall her plagues come, death, and mourning, and famine, and she shall be utterly burned with fire, because strong is the Lord God who judged her.**

Verse 1

Some see the events of chapter 18 as a different vision from those of chapter 17, mainly based on the phrase "after these things." However, the phrase does not go with the vision of the city, but with John seeing another angel descending out of heaven. After the great city is destroyed, a new messenger appears, an angel having "great authority." It is possible that this is Michael, but that is by no means certain. But he's of a rank that the earth (land under consideration in the vision) was illuminated with his glory. Here the word glory carries its characteristic meaning of a glow of light.

However, the events following are a continuation and amplification of the destruction of the great city, not a new vision that speaks of a different element. Commercial Babylon is the same city as "religious" Babylon, and at the opening of chapter 18, it has already been destroyed.

Verses 2 & 3

Now here we enter a great controversy. Do verses 2 and 3 reflect the same events as the destruction in chapter 17 or are they a different destruction. Dr. Walvoord thinks they are different destructions.

The question has been raised as to whether or not this is another view of the same destruction mentioned in Rev 17:16-17. A comparison of Rev 17:1-18 and Rev 18:1-24 reveals that these are different events. The woman in Rev 17:1-18 was associated with the political power but was not the political power itself, and her destruction apparently brought no mourning from the earth. By contrast the destruction of Babylon in Rev 18:1-24 brings loud lamentation from the earth's political and economic powers. Instead of being destroyed and consumed by the 10 kings, here the destruction seems to come from an earthquake, and

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it is probable that this is an enlarged explanation of what was described in Rev 16:19-21.
(*BKC*, electronic edition.)

However, when one reads chapters 17 and 18 together, one gets the definite impression that chapter 18 is subsequent to and a continuation of chapter 17, and that this new angel is announcing a given fact from his point of view in time. The repeated word “fallen” is actually *epesen* (ἐπεσεν), the aorist active indicative third person singular of *pipto* (πίπτω). A more accurate translation is “Babylon the great fell, it fell.” Surely, it has already happened.

Also, the term Babylon the great is used in both chapters in an identical phrase. Furthermore, in Revelation 14:8 and 16:19 the word “great” is used of Babylon as well as here in 18:2, 10, and 21. Since the verb “fell” is past from the angel’s announcement, it most likely refers to the fall of Babylon the great in chapter 17. Such does the pesky process of normal interpretive procedure defy the conclusions of slipshod analysis.

The distinction that Dr. Walvoord is making between this Babylon the Great and the previous one is strained, to say the least. That the previous Babylon was not a political power is disputable. She is called the great city, a political designation. That she rides on the back of another political power, the scarlet beast, does not mean that she is not one, herself. Indeed, the only interpretation given to the woman in chapter 17 is that she is, in fact, a political entity, a city. Dr. Walvoord makes altogether too much of the idea that she is a religious movement exclusively. Such is not the case in chapter 17.

The fact that no mourning is mentioned in chapter 17 is an argument from silence. That she is mourned by “earth’s political and economic powers” in chapter 18 does not prove that this is a different Babylon. It is true that the 10 kings, who are indeed political powers, see to her destruction, but they are not the “kings of the earth” mentioned in 18:9.

Why Dr. Walvoord thinks that the destruction of Babylon in chapter 18 “seems to come from an earthquake, and it is probable that this is an enlarged explanation of what was described in Rev 16:19-21” he does not say. The chapter mentions no earthquake. He probably understands the word “fallen” to refer to the buildings of the physical city rather than to the power and might of the city, certainly a possible explanation of the word. Or perhaps he understands it from the statement that Babylon “has become the habitation of demons, and the fortification of every unclean spirit, and the fortification of every unclean and hated bird.” But neither of these ideas imply an earthquake, so it is impossible to know why Dr. Walvoord comes to the idea of one. His referring to Revelation 16:19-21, where nothing is said about Babylon falling, is ill conceived at best. It is to be remembered that the “great city” of chapter 16 is not Babylon, as Walvoord supposes, but Jerusalem. It seems to me that he is grasping at straws to attempt to make the Babylon of chapter 17 different than the one of chapter 18.

In 17:16, the ten kings burn the city of Babylon with fire. That is what causes the physical devastation of the city, not an earthquake. The result of their destruction is in fulfillment of Isaiah 13:19-22:

And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, The beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, Will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. ²⁰ It will never be inhabited, Nor will it be settled from generation to generation; Nor will the Arabian pitch tents there, Nor will the shepherds make their sheepfolds there. ²¹ But wild beasts of the desert will lie there, And their houses will be full of owls; Ostriches will dwell there, And wild goats will caper there. ²² The hyenas will howl in their citadels, And jackals in their pleasant palaces. Her time is near to come, And her days will not be prolonged. (NKJV)

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In fact, chapter 18:1-8 seems to be a further description of the same destruction first mentioned in chapter 17. Note that verse 8 again refers to her future burning with fire. Surely, this cannot be a different burning than in chapter 17.

The result of this destruction is three-fold. Babylon has become 1) the habitation of demons, and 2) the fortification of every unclean spirit, and 3) the fortification of every unclean and hated bird. We must examine these future Babylonian inhabitants individually.

1. Demons will inhabit the fallen city. It must be remembered that the city has not become deserted of human beings. The only reason for demons to be occupying that particular piece of real estate is to influence humanity. Demonic activity will thrive in the chaos of the city's destruction.
2. There is quite some discussion among scholars about the difference between a demon and an unclean spirit. Are they identical? Certainly the same words are used of the same supernatural evil. It is probably best to think of unclean spirit referring to the quality of the fallen spirit being, while demon refers to their activity. The fortification of every unclean spirit does not necessarily mean the same thing as the habitation of demons. A fortification can be a place of imprisonment, a jail, as well as a lair. It's possible that the Lord here means that there are unclean spirits imprisoned there, but it is more likely that it means they are laying in wait. This is particularly true because of the next statement.
3. Babylon has become the fortification of every unclean and hated bird. This probably refers to the scavengers of the earth. Birds eat dead things, and there will undoubtedly be many dead bodies in the place.

Verse 3 states concerning Babylon, "...because by the wine of the wrath of her fornication all the nations have fallen, and the kings of the earth committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth became rich by the power of her luxury."

The word "fornication" takes us back to the description of the prostitute in chapter 17. Those nations that fornicated with her have fallen as well. Again the "kings of the earth" are mentioned. It may well be that this refers to those political/economic powers that relied on the spiritual/economic benefits of being associated with her. For the first time in verse 3 we have the merchants of the earth mentioned, and they are in a parallel construction with the kings of the earth and all the nations.

These merchants became rich by the power of her luxury. That is, they were dependent on the trade made possible by their association with the city of Babylon.

Verses 4 & 5

Verses 4 and 5 are taken by some to be an encouragement by another angel to believers in the city before her destruction. Or it may be that these believers are survivors of her destruction, a somewhat more likely interpretation. They are in danger because there will be "plagues" visited upon her. What these plagues will be is not mentioned, but the reason is clear. "Her sins have piled up to heaven," probably an allusion to the tower of Babel in Genesis 11. As a result God has remembered her "wrongs." The Greek word (ἀδικημα) is used in the sense of wrong-doing or even of crimes. Babylon cannot go unpunished because of her violation of God's righteous requirements.

Verse 6

Verse 6 is in the form of a curse. The verb translated "render" (ἀποδίδωμι) carries both the idea of payment in the positive sense, and pay back in the negative sense. The clause may be translated "Pay back to her even as she paid..."

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“Double” means a double amount. It speaks of the intensity of the curse. Because of the evil works, double the evil done upon her. As she harmed people (the cup which she poured) the harm is to be doubled to her.

Verse 7

The curse continues in verse 7. Babylon’s self-glorification and luxury are contrasted with the torment and mourning which she will receive. She viewed herself as a queen, never a widow who lost a husband, and who saw mourning. The results of this false attitude are found in verse 8.

Verse 8

The complete judgment of the city of Babylon is summarized. In one day she will be destroyed. All the previous ills mentioned are repeated: plagues, death, mourning, famine, being burned with fire.

The reason for all these forms of judgment is because the Lord God who judged her is strong.

b. The Leaders’ Devastation (18:9-24)

If one accepts the idea that Babylon is a literal city with both spiritual and economic associations, 18:9-24 is rather straightforward in meaning. Otherwise, interpretation becomes somewhat jumbled, and there are several different ideas that have been presented. It seems best to stick with a straightforward normal interpretation

- 9-10 **And the kings of the earth, who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her, shall weep and lament over her, when they see the smoke of her burning, ¹⁰ standing far away for the fear of her torment, saying, Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city, because in one hour your judgment came.**
- 11-13 **And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, because no man buys their merchandise any longer, ¹² merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stone, and pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all citron wood, and every vessel of ivory, and every vessel made of most precious wood, and of bronze, and iron, and marble, ¹³ and cinnamon, and spice, and incense, and ointment, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and cattle, and sheep, and merchandise of horses and chariots, and bodies and souls of men.**
- 14 **And the fruit of your soul’s lust has departed from you, and all things that were costly and bright have perished from you, and men shall find them no longer at all.**
- 15-17a **The merchants of these things, who were made rich by her, shall stand far away for the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning, ¹⁶ saying, Woe, woe, the great city, the one who was arrayed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stone and pearl, ¹⁷ because in an hour so great riches is made desolate.**
- 17b-18 **And every shipmaster, and every one that sails any place, and mariners, and as many as gain their living by sea, stood far away, ¹⁸ and were crying out as they looked upon the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like the great city?**
- 19 **And they threw dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and mourning, saying, Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had their ships in the sea were made rich from her abundance, because in one hour is she made desolate.**
- 20 **Celebrate over her, heaven, and saints, and apostles, and prophets, because God has judged your judgment on her.**
- 21 **And a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall Babylon, the great city, be thrown down, and shall be found no longer at all.**
- 22-23 **And the sound of harpers and minstrels and flute-players and trumpeters shall be heard no more at all in you, and no craftsman, of any craft, shall be found any more at all in you, and the sound of a mill shall be heard no more at all in you, ²³ and the light of a lamp shall shine no longer at all in you, and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in you, because your merchants were the princes of the earth, because with your sorcery were all the nations deceived.**

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24 **And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain upon the earth.**

Verses 9-10

The lamentation of the kings of the earth must refer to the kings other than the ten kings who caused Babylon's destruction. As stated previously, these may indeed be kings from nations outside the Revived Roman Empire. The idea that the kings committed fornication with Babylon probably refers to their acceptance of her spiritual or religious values. That they lived luxuriously with her speaks of their gaining wealth by association and merchandising with her.

The strong political overtones of verses 9 and 10 must not be overlooked. Some have thought that Babylon will be the capitol of the Revived Roman Empire. Some who see this as Rome contend that the ecclesiastical and political power will be concentrated in the Roman Catholic Church. Others, such as Walvoord, think that perhaps Rome will be the capitol of the Empire during the first half of the week and then it will shift to Babylon the second half of the week.

However, if Babylon is to be rebuilt, which seems to be the normal meaning not only of the book of Revelation, but of the Old Testament passages that predict its destruction, there is no reason not to make it the capitol of the Empire for the entire 70th week.

Weeping and lamentation by the kings of the earth are caused when "when they see the smoke of her burning." The ten kings burn her with fire, so that the others recognize the destruction. But the statement tells us that they are "standing far away" from fear. Perhaps the idea is that if they were geographically closer they might get caught up in the destruction themselves.

The sentence that begins with the two "woes" spoken by the kings. This consists of their lament, a word that carries vocal meaning. Note the strong emphasis in their lament. Two woes, followed by directly addressing the city as "the great city, Babylon, the strong city." The Greek is even more forceful, "the city the great, Babylon, the city, the mighty." Nothing could be clearer. A great, or perhaps large, city is destroyed. It was a city that one would not expect to be destroyed because it is a mighty city that one would expect could protect herself.

Herein, lies the correct understanding of the kings of the earth. They realize that she is being judged by God, perhaps because no one else could have even attempted such a feat.

Verses 11-13

The scene shifts from kings to merchants. Here the issue is purely mercantile. No one is buying the merchants of the earth's goods any longer. The clear indication of the statement is that the economic control of the area is controlled from Babylon. Again, we need not read a world-wide affect here, though such is possible. But certainly the economics of the nations geographically connected to Babylon will be devastated by her destruction.

The detail of the merchandise is important. It shows that virtually every valuable commodity available is no longer available in the areas affected. Valuable metals and precious stones and pearls lead the parade, as we might expect, because even in NT times they were the means of merchandising. One supposes that Babylon will be a banking center.

Then come valuable materials which, at the time, only the wealthy could afford. The same is true of citron wood, a citrus, an odoriferous North African tree used as incense, prized by the ancient Greeks and Romans on account of the beauty of its wood for various ornamental purposes. Associated with it

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are vessels of ivory, precious wood, bronze, iron and marble. The finest of vessels are mentioned, again those only the wealthy could afford.

Cinnamon, a word still in use today, was borrowed from the Phoenicians, who were merchants in ancient times. It is found only in the far east, especially China, and was extremely valuable in biblical times. The word translated “spice” (or “incense” in some versions) refers to “a fragrant plant of India, having the foliage of the white vine...and seed, in clusters like grapes, from which ointment, was made” (Thayer). Again, a very expensive commodity. The word we have translated “incense” is just that. It refers to anything that is aromatic when burned. “The word translated “ointment” in the New Testament is *múron*, “myrrh.” This would indicate that myrrh, an aromatic gum resin, was the substance commonly added to the oil to give it odor” (ISBE). Frankincense is also an incense derived from the bark of trees that grow in Arabia and Africa.

“Wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and cattle, and sheep” all refer to food stuffs, and indicate that such elements will become in short supply with the judgment of Babylon.

The “merchandise of horses and chariots” refers to the means of transportation of the rich in John’s day. Some have speculated that people will return to that mode of transportation in the future, perhaps as a politically correct way of avoiding internal combustion engines. Perhaps, or perhaps it simply means that luxury autos will no longer be available.

Of particular interest is the final statement that the merchandise includes “the bodies and souls of men.” Most expositors agree that this refers to slaves. Slaves will exist in the future Revived Roman Empire, and Babylon will be a center for the buying and selling of them, but again, they will undoubtedly be reserved for the rich.

Verse 14

Verse 14 contains a summary statement of the results of the Babylonian judgment. Evidently this is the voice from heaven mentioned in verse 4 still speaking. The recipients of the message are the merchants of the earth. Their lust will no longer be assuaged. The word “costly” rightly refers to things that have been oiled, but by the NT times came to refer to things that were brilliant or expensive. The description is continued by calling them “bright,” that is shinning. This again indicates that Babylon will be a city of the most sumptuous and costly items that will cease to be available. “Men shall find them no longer.”

Verses 15-17a

Like the kings of the earth before them, the merchants will “stand far away for the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning...” Their materialistic concerns cause them also to pronounce a woe. They too see Babylon as “the great city.” But they see her in the light of their own prejudicial desires, as arrayed in the most expensive garments, and decked out with expensive jewelry. For them, no greater calamity could befall the city “because in an hour so great riches is made desolate.”

Verses 17b-18

The scene shifts from the merchants, to the ones who have grown rich transporting goods. We are used to seeing great container ships deliver goods all over the world, but Babylon will no longer be able to participate in that kind of material movement. The shipmasters and “mariners” (probably a reference to sailors) will realize how difficult it will be to make a living by sea, for there is no city “like the great city.”

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Verse 19

For the third time in this passages we have a woe pronounced. Throwing dust on one's head was an ancient way of showing sadness and mourning. The wealth that they gained from shipping goods is now at an end. Babylon is desolate.

Verse 20

The voice from heaven continues, but now addresses “heaven, and saints, and apostles, and prophets.” The word heaven is the “head word” and the rest of the ones designated are those who inhabit heaven. They are given a command to “celebrate.” The Greek word (*euphraino*) is sometimes translated rejoice, but is stronger than the normal word for rejoice (*chairo*). English has no exact equivalent, for this word is in the passive voice. Some have translated it “be glad” to reflect the passive nature, but that seems altogether too weak, so I have chosen to retain the old ASV translation of “celebrate.” God's judgment on Babylon should be an occasion for celebration by God's people in heaven in contrast to those on the earth or lament and pronounce woe. God's people will realize without pity that justice has come at last to the ones who ignore God and His program of righteousness on the earth.

“God has judged your judgment on her” indicates that Babylon gets righteous judgment because of how she has treated God's people throughout time. Future Babylon will pay the penalty for years of destruction upon the righteous that began over six hundred years before Christ.

Verse 21

Verses 21-24 contain the pronouncement of a strong angel who begins with a visual object lesson. The stone “like a great millstone” is cast into the sea, that is into the Mediterranean. It is a symbolic gesture, indicating the utter destruction of Babylon. Read Jeremiah 51:61-64

And Jeremiah said to Seraiah, When you arrive in Babylon and see it, and read all these words, ⁶² then you shall say, O LORD, You have spoken against this place to cut it off, so that none shall remain in it, neither man nor beast, but it shall be desolate forever. ⁶³ Now it shall be, when you have finished reading this book, that you shall tie a stone to it and throw it out into the Euphrates. ⁶⁴ Then you shall say, Thus Babylon shall sink and not rise from the catastrophe that I will bring upon her. And they shall be weary. Thus far are the words of Jeremiah.

Seraiah was King Zedekiah's chamberlain,¹ a high official in his court, who went into Babylonian exile with him. He was also the brother of Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe. We see that the angel is announcing the fulfillment of the prophecy made by Jeremiah some six hundred years B.C.

Verses 22-23

The angel engages in a common literary tactic that emphasizes the totality of Babylon's judgment. Such a recitation of specifics “brings home” how complete the destruction will be. No music, no craft, no grinding of a mill, no lamp, no voice of bride or bridegroom, will be heard

Babylon's merchants are called “the princes of the earth.” They controlled financial and commercial dealings of Babylon. But it was not legitimate trade. “With your sorcery were all the nations deceived.” Babylon's merchants will be the greatest con artists in history, and will deceive their trading partners.

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Verse 24

The final statement by the angel puts the capstone on the destruction of Babylon. When all is said and done, it was the blood of the prophets and saints that is avenged by God. “All those who have been slain upon the earth” correctly refers back to the prophets and saints. It is because of these deaths that Babylon’s final destruction is so violent a judgment.

From a literary perspective, the judgments of the book of Revelation are climaxing. With the judgment of Babylon, which is summarized in the next scene, the way is open to bring the book to its conclusion. Everything has been leading up to the climax of the book found in chapter 19. Everything after chapter 19 is anti-climactic, and devolves from this single event that is described in chapter 19, the second coming of Christ.

Endnotes

- ¹ See Jeremiah 51:59. The Hebrew word translated *prince* in the KJV is *sar*, referring to a high official. It occurs some 421 times. It did not necessarily indicate royalty, but service. In Genesis 40 this word is translated chief, and is used of Pharoah's butler and baker.

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M. The Second Coming of Christ (19:1-21)

SCOPE: CHAPTER 19 DEALS WITH EVENTS FROM THE BEGINNING THROUGH THE END OF THE MILLENNIAL PERIOD.

1. The Heavenly Scene (19:1-10)

- 1-2 After these things I heard as it were a great voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, Hallelujah, salvation, and glory, and power, belong to our God, ² because true and righteous are his judgments, because he has judged the great prostitute, she who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and he has avenged the blood of his bond-servants at her hand.
- 3 And a second time they say, Hallelujah. And her smoke ascends for ever and ever.
- 4 And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne, saying, Amen, Hallelujah.
- 5 And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all you his bond-servants, the ones who fear him, the small and the great.
- 6 And I heard the voice as of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Hallelujah, because the Lord our God, the Almighty, has begun to reign.
- 7 Let us rejoice and be exceeding glad, and let us give the glory to him, because the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his wife has prepared herself.
- 8 And it was given to her that she should array herself in fine linen, bright and clean. For the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.
- 9 And he says to me, Write, Blessed are they who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he says to me, These are true words of God.
- 10 And I fell down before his feet to worship him. And he says to me, Look, no! I am a co-bond-servant with you and with your brothers who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God, for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of the prophecy.

Verses 1-2

“After these things” indicates that the series of events chronicled in chapter 18 are completed. Indeed, we have left the 70th week of Daniel, and are into the gap between the tribulation and the Kingdom leading up to the second coming of Christ.

John hears a “great (loud) voice.” The Greek word *phōnē* occurs 55 times in Revelation. Often it means simply a noise, as here. The source of the noise is a great (large) multitude in heaven. This multitude probably consists of all the unfallen spirit beings. Some take the multitude as those killed in the tribulation because of the similarity of phrasing found in Revelation 7:9 (Walvoord). See our notes on that passage to see why that seems unlikely. This multitude is in heaven. At any rate, it does not seem to include either the church or the four living creatures. See notes on verse 5.

Their statement consists of two praises (vss. 1 & 3). The word Hallelujah is the Hebrew imperative clause, “Praise the Lord.” The multitude commences to do just that. A praise indicates an accurate presentation of God, His character, and His actions. In so praising, the multitude indicates three elements (the TR has a fourth, honor, that was clearly added much later) that belong to God: 1) Salvation (*soteria*) refers to the physical deliverance of mankind from evil of the prostitute, 2) glory (*doxa*) indicates that God’s actions are consistent with who He actually is, that is, His actions reflect His character, and 3) power (*dunamis*) referring to God’s inherent ability to use His might.

The character of God’s judgments as being true and righteous are proven by the fact that He judged the great prostitute, that is, the city of Babylon. Again we see that her influence in corrupting the

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earth with her fornication is brought forth. Her pervading influence throughout not only the Revived Roman Empire, but the nations around her, called for swift and complete judgment.

The final element of the first praise indicates that God has “avenged the blood of his bond-servants at her hand.” The terrible history of persecution of believers throughout time is in view here. Though many participated in this evil-doing, its ultimate source and methods are attributable to Babylon and its evil empire.

Verse 3

A second brief praise begins again with the Hebrew imperative, Praise the Lord. Some see the statement that Babylon’s smoke ascends “for ever and ever” as purely figurative, that is, a hyperbole. If so, it refers to the complete and permanent destruction of Babylon. Others see it as referring to “eternal judgment” of the wicked (Walvoord.) By that is meant the final judgment of the great white throne, presumably. This seems unlikely, as here the judgment is upon Babylon alone, and is a reference to the city, not just the people in it. All in all, the hyperbolic view seems preferable.

Verse 4

Here we have another praise, but it is specifically attributed to the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures, who are distinguished from the great multitude of the first two praise statements. Their statement is preceded by an act of pure worship. They prostrate themselves in the actual presence of God the Father Who sits on the throne. Their simple statement, Amen, Hallelujah, consists of two Hebrew words that were transliterated first into Greek, then into English. The first, Amen, refers to truth, and is a way of stating the veracity of God. Again we have hallelujah, the command to praise the Lord.

Verse 5

This voice is probably not the voice of God, as it refers to Him in the third person. The one speaking is not identified until verse 10, q.v. The command to praise is directed to “all you his bond-servants.” This group is to be distinguished from all others. It probably refers to all of the other believers of mankind who await the coming resurrection. The response to this command is found in verses 6-7 below. Many commentators, Walvoord included, disconnect verse 5 from the following two verses, but this seems highly unwarranted. As we shall see, the response relates to Israelites.

Verse 6

Again John hears the sound of a large gathering, but this multitude seems to be distinct from the others. He describes it as the voice of many waters, emphasizing its loudness. This is also emphasized by the statement that the sound is like “the voice of mighty thunders.” The statement of this multitude is clear. “Praise the Lord because the reign of Christ, the Lord our God, the Almighty One, has begun to reign.” Who, then, is this multitude.

Many ignore the question, because it interferes with their interpretation of the next few verses. If they maintain their consistent distinctions, then this multitude cannot be the church, though many assume that it is because of their desire to make the church the recipient of the marriage of the Lamb. Others make this large multitude the tribulation saints who have been killed. This is possible, they say, because of the statement in Revelation 7:9. But those who make the great multitude of 7:9 the same people as 19:1 recognize a problem. It appears that there are two multitudes in this passage, because *that* multitude speaks out of heaven.

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Perhaps this multitude is, in fact, a multitude of individuals who are in the earthly kingdom. Their statement (see below) indicates that the kingdom has already begun at the time of their appearance. If so, it is very unlikely that they are in heaven, but rather that they are upon the earth.

From the perspective of John's visions, their statement moves forward into the kingdom period past the actual second coming of Christ. The verb translated "has begun to reign" is the simple ingressive aorist of βασιλεύω and refers to the fact that the reign has already begun. In other words, we are now into the first phase of the kingdom of God on earth, that is, into the millennial period.

Taking these facts, it seems evident that the great multitude consists of those who have been resurrected in the first resurrection, and perhaps survivors of the tribulation period who are upon the earth during the millennial period. This includes all believers of all time except for the church, Christ's body.

Verse 7

The multitude expresses its joy by encouraging glory be given to God. The reason is that the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has prepared herself.¹ The great question of this passage, of course, is who is the Lamb's wife?²

Dr. Walvoord goes to great lengths to show that it cannot be Israel. His primary approach is to indicate that in the Old Testament Israel was viewed as a faithless wife, while in the New Testament the church is viewed as Christ's virgin bride. Note the following statement:

In Scripture, marriage is often used to describe the relationship of saints to God. In the Old Testament Israel is pictured, as in Hosea, as the unfaithful wife of Yahweh who is destined to be restored in the future kingdom. In the New Testament, marriage is also used to describe the relationship between Christ and the church, but the illustration contrasts with the Old Testament, for the church is regarded as a virgin bride waiting the coming of her heavenly bridegroom (2Co 11:2).

However, he ignores the fact that Christ is presented as a bridegroom coming for His betrothed in the gospels. *And there the betrothed cannot be the church.* Note, for instance, the parable of the virgins beginning in Matthew 25:1. All accept the idea that the bridegroom is none other than Christ. Who, then, is the bride? It cannot be the church. Indeed, Jesus refers to Himself as a bridegroom in Luke 5:34, 35. Some will argue that the gospel passages are parabolic or figurative. That is no argument, since 2 Corinthians 11:2 is also figurative. We must insist that the wedding feast of Matthew 25:1-13 is the same as the one presented here, and that it takes place immediately after the coming of Jesus Christ the second time, not after the rapture of the church.

It seems to me that the knee jerk assumption that the "bride of Christ" is the church is based on a false church-centered eschatology. It is much more likely that in a kingdom scene, Israel is the bride, rather than the church. But the church has been called the bride of Christ for so long, people almost instinctively look at horror upon the possibility of another view. That Israel is the bride is supported in the following sentences.³

Verse 8

Verse 8 indicates the way in which the bride prepared herself, as stated in verse 7. "Prepared herself" is a reflexive idea, and the actual Greek reflexive pronoun "herself" is used. This is in direct contrast to the statement, the only statement, that says that the church will be the bride of Christ. Dr. Walvoord refers to 2 Corinthians 11:2, which says,

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For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

This is the only place where the word “virgin” is used to represent the Christian believers. From this verse, and this verse alone, theologians have concluded that the church is the bride of Christ in Revelation 19. However, Paul is not talking about eschatology here in 2 Corinthians. He’s referring to his own ministry in time. He is the one who desires to present the believers in Corinth as a chaste virgin to Christ. Paul says nothing about the virgin preparing herself for a wedding feast, nor is there any indication in the context that Paul is looking toward an eschatological development in the far future.

Note that Revelation 19:8 says that “it was given to her” that is, to the bride, “that she should array herself.” If the donning of the wedding garments represents a metaphorical preparation, then the bride does it to herself, again a reflexive idea. She arrays herself in “fine linen, bright and clean.” John tells us the symbolical meaning here. The fine linen is the *righteous acts* of the saints (τὰ δικαιώματα τῶν ἁγίων). This is not a grace statement, my friends. It is a statement of works righteousness, and fits perfectly with believing Israel, but not at all with the program of the body of Christ. The church will be presented blameless before Christ, not based on its own works, but upon the imputation of His righteousness.

Verse 9

Once again we approach this passage from a literal, grammatical, historical position. John is instructed to write something, not about the bride or the bridegroom, but about those who are called to the marriage supper. They are said to be blessed, or happy. Some, evidently, will not be called to this marriage supper.

The marriage supper was the culminating event of a series of events that made up a wedding at the time of John’s writing. Those events were:

1. The parents of the parties involved agreed to the marriage, with the provision of a dowry by the bride’s parents.
2. On the appointed day, the bridegroom travels to the bride’s parent’s house and collects her. He returns with her and her virgin friends to the wedding chamber where the wedding is consummated by the sexual act. This act was to be witnessed by the virgins as legal proof that the marriage was a fact.
3. The party then went to the marriage supper, an event that might go on for several days. It is this marriage supper to which guests were invited. They needed to be dressed appropriately, else they could not enter.

Dr. Walvoord, and others, goes to great lengths to apply this to the church.

In fulfilling the symbol, Christ is completing phase 1 in the Church Age as individuals are saved. Phase 2 will be accomplished at the Rapture of the church, when Christ takes His bride to heaven, the Father’s house (Joh 14:1-3). Accordingly it would seem that the beginning of the Millennium itself will fulfill the symbolism of the wedding supper (*gamos*). (Walvoord, *BKC*, Electronic edition.)

Forget the fact that the rapture is not in view, but the events following the second coming of Christ. Does it not seem more likely that the second coming of Christ accomplishes “phase 2” rather than the rapture? It seems almost beyond belief that this could be applied to the church, given the context of the book of Revelation, and everything that has gone before.

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Dr. Walvoord is correct in his statements concerning the idea that the guests at the wedding are distinct from the bride. But if the bride is Israel, as a direct contextual interpretation would indicate, then who are the guests? Since the scene is earthly, it seems that the most likely participants will be the righteous Gentiles who enter into the kingdom either in natural bodies or in a resurrection state.

But what of the church? Nothing is actually said about her. The most likely association is that she is part of the groom's party, but that is stretching the metaphor quite a bit. Since the church is not in view in this passage, it is useless to speculate.

Verse 10

It seems that the voice mentioned earlier "out of the throne" is that of a spirit being, perhaps an angel, one of God's messengers. At any rate, John prostrates himself to worship him as God, but is forbidden. His response is understandable, as the scene must have been overwhelming. However, the one John is attempting to worship is but a created being, a co-bond-servant with John and his brothers, who are other believers, since they "have the testimony of Jesus." This does not mean that they testify about Jesus, but that they have the book of Revelation, which testifies about Him.

The command is clear. Worship God. The reason is "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of the prophecy." By this the spirit being means that the prophecy contained in the book of Revelation is a testimony concerning Jesus.

2. *The King of Kings (19:11-16)*

- 11 **And I saw the heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and the one who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.**
- 12 **And his eyes are a flame of fire, and upon his head are many diadems, and he has a name written which no one knows except himself.**
- 13 **And he is arrayed in a garment dipped in blood, and his name is called The Word of God.**
- 14 **And the armies which are in heaven were following him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and pure.**
- 15 **And out of his mouth proceeds a sharp sword, in order that with it he should smite the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, and he treads the winepress of the anger of the wrath of God, the Almighty.**
- 16 **And he has on his garment and on his thigh a name written, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.**

INTRODUCTION

Here we come to the vision dealing with the second coming of Christ, though the actual coming is not presented. For that, we must view a different passage. However, before we proceed, it may be helpful to place the second coming of Christ into the overall chronology of biblical prophecy. To do this, we must make a short excursion into the prophecy of Daniel.

In chapter 12 of Daniel, two questions are asked and answered. In answering these questions, God gives specific details dealing with the order of events associated with the resurrection of Old Testament believers.

The First Question

Daniel 12:5-6

Then I, Daniel, looked; and there stood two others, one on this riverbank and the other on that riverbank. And one said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, How long shall the fulfillment of these wonders be?

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Who are the “two others” on the two sides of the river who speak to the man clothed in linen? They are probably angels who are provided to dramatize this final revelation as a conversation between themselves and the first angel.

This first angel seems to hover over the river, while the spirit beings are on either bank. Much speculation has arisen as to the purpose of this sight which Daniel beheld. The best answer is simply that Daniel sees the angel in control of the river, undoubtedly the Tigris, which was the river which flowed through the land of Persia, and sustained its existence. Thus Daniel has indication that God’s program for Israel will eventually include domination of the land of Persia.

The wonders mentioned in verses 5-6 refer to the entire set of contextual events going back into the 11th chapter of Daniel. It is clear from the later context that the question is not limited to the resurrections mentioned, but goes back to the beginning of the time of trouble mentioned in Daniel 12:1.

The First Answer

Daniel 12:7

Then I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever, that it shall be for a time, times, and half a time; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered,⁴ all these things shall be finished.

By raising both hands, the spirit being indicates the strength of his statement, as though it were an oath. Normally a person raised only the right hand when promising or swearing.

“This solemn form of swearing shows that the question and answer must refer not to the duration of the period of the persecution under Antiochus, but to that under the last enemy, the Antichrist.”⁵

The term “time, times and half a time” is universally understood by pre-tribulation scholars (and even some liberals) to refer to the second three and one half years of the 70th week of Daniel. Dr. Walvoord states,

What is the meaning of the phrase *a time, times, and an half*. This expression, also occurring in Daniel 7:25, apparently refers to the last period preceding the second coming of Christ which brings conclusion to the time of the end. Montgomery, although a liberal scholar, correctly stated the meaning when he wrote, ‘Here, v. 7, it is in the terms of 7:25, with the Hebrews equivalent of the Aram. there; i.e., three and a half years.’ In other words, it is the last half of the seven-year period of Daniel 9:27 which culminates in the second advent. The expression *time*, is considered a single unit; *times*, as equivalent to two units, and *an half*, a half unit. Adding these units amounts to three and one half.⁶

See also Daniel 7:25 and Daniel 12:7, where this phrase occurs.

The actual number of days is 1,260, which corresponds to the 3 ½ years of the 2nd half of Daniel’s 70th week as referenced in Revelation 12:6. This is the same time period mentioned in Revelation 12:14.

The holy people refer to Israel during the second half of the tribulation week. Israel will be scattered during that time. At that time “the wonders will be finished.” In other words, the entirety of the second half of the week, the final three and one half years, plus the resurrection of the righteous will find culmination.

The Second Question

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Daniel 12:8

Although I heard, I did not understand. Then I said, My lord, what shall be the end of these things?

The one asking this question is none other than Daniel himself because of his lack of understanding. Daniel knew only of the 70th week divided into two parts, but did not have any details of the second half of the week and the 75 day period afterward. So Daniel was somewhat confused about the previous interchange between the spirit beings. He desired more details so he could fully understand the chronology.

The answer to Daniel's question is given in verses 9-13, and is presented in a four-fold set of statements.

The Second Answer is presented in Daniel 12:9-13

The Timeframe

Daniel 12:9

And he said, Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.

This part of angel's answer is only understandable if one realizes that it is Daniel who is asking the question. Daniel did not comprehend fully the events being discussed. Because of the nature of the response, it seems evident that Daniel wanted more details. But only a limited amount of detail would be forth coming. Much information (words) are closed up and sealed. This probably means that only a limited amount of information will be revealed to Daniel.

The time of the end is best understood as a reference to the last part of the tribulation period extending, as we shall see, into the 75 day gap beyond.

The Two Groups

Daniel 12:10

Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand.

The two groups of verse 10 are to be identified with the two groups found in the parables of Matthew 24 and 25. They consist of two groups of Israelites who survive the actual time of trouble, but are not yet in the kingdom. Like the unfaithful slave, unwise virgins, etc., "none of the wicked shall understand." Like the faithful slave, the wise virgins, etc. "the wise shall understand."

"Purified, made white, and refined" are a metaphorical statement as to the condition and therefore the practice of the believer at that time. The unbeliever shall do wickedly, and will not understand. The understanding which the wise have is undoubtedly in reference to the spiritual situation of that final time when the wise will be looking forward to the coming of Messiah.

The First Duration

Daniel 12:11

And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days.

The time period begins at the time the daily sacrifice is taken away. This corresponds to the event mentioned in Daniel 9:27 when the sacrifice and offering will cease. From that event there will be 1,260 days until the end of the 70th week.

Therefore, the period before us of 1,290 days extends 30 days after the end of the 70th week during which faithful Israelites will be expecting the coming of Messiah and the unfaithful will be continuing acting in their unbelief. Undoubtedly during this period of time Messiah returns to earth to

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deliver faithful Israel and to bring the various aspects of judgment that will culminate this period. Dr. Northrup says:

The answer now continues, revealing that from the middle of the seven year period (and the abomination) until the purification of living Israel (and the separation of the obstinately wicked in Israel) in Israel's judgment would be accomplished in 1290 days, i.e. within the month after the end of the period of trials.

Remnant Israel returns from captivity virtually instantaneously after the 70th week is over. Circumstances quickly return to the culture that was true during the days of Noah when people were marrying and giving in marriage. The three parables of the Olivet Discourse fit into this thirty-day period.

The Second Duration

Daniel 12:12-13

Blessed is he who waits, and comes to the one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days. But you, go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days.

The 1,335 days is also to be counted from the middle of the 70th week. The total period of time then is 1,260 days until the end of the 70th week, plus 30 days waiting for the coming of Messiah, plus 45 days until the establishment of blessing.

The second period that consists of 1,335 days relates to the statements of Daniel 12:2, "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt." Those who are alive at the time of this resurrection are said to be "blessed." This is consistent with the OT concept that the final generation who enter into the Kingdom of God in natural bodies will enjoy a blessing that other generations of believing Israelites, that is, those who are resurrected, will not enjoy.

Several events occur at the end of this 75 day period:

1. for those believing Israelites who are alive, great blessing will attain;
2. this is undoubtedly due to the establishment of the Kingdom of God in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy;
3. the resurrection of Daniel who will rise and stand in his allotted portion of land upon the culmination of this period, along with OT believing Israelites;
4. the resurrection of all other *believers* (not unbelievers) with the exception of the church, which will have already been resurrected;
5. the judgment of the gentile nations discussed in Matthew 25:31-46 will take place, probably right at the end of the period, or immediately after the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

Thus we understand that the Kingdom of God and the first resurrection of Revelation 20 take place 1,335 days after the abomination of desolation. Other events of judgment, including the various campaigns that Messiah undertakes to bring physical judgment on unbelieving nations will undoubtedly take place during this period as well. It may well be that the scene of Matthew 25:31-46 is the final resultant event of the military campaigns of Messiah during the gap.

Concerning this issue, Dr. Northrup states,

Thirdly, a period of 75 days beyond the end of the tribulation (i.e. 1335 days) is the conclusion of the question, "How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?" Here Daniel is told exactly when he would be resurrected. He was to "REST" (cf Rev. 6:11 concerning

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tribulation saints) until the end of the days (i.e. 75 days after the tribulation) and then stand “IN THY LOT.” What was Daniel’s lot? It was the promise of resurrection and entry into the earthly Messianic Kingdom:

1. With the pre-Israelite saints when the redeemer would stand on the earth (Job 19:25-27)
2. With tribulation saints after the little season when their brethren were yet being killed (cf. Rev. 6:11)
3. And with the rest of the Old Testament saints when earth casts forth its (saved) dead (Isaiah 26:19) to worship with the returned outcasts at Jerusalem (Isaiah 27:13).

It is this gap of 75 days during which the Lord Jesus Christ returns to earth. Those Israelites who are joyously looking forward to His return will be ready for Him, but those who are only nominal will be disappointed (Matthew 25:1ff.

Why place the 2nd Coming of Christ During the Gap?

First, Jesus states that His coming will be immediately “after the tribulation of those days.” See Matthew 24:29-30:

Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ³⁰ Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Contextually, this passage deals with the second half of Daniel’s 70th week, as a thorough investigation of Matthew 24 will show.

Second, Israel is waiting for the coming of Christ, as presented in the parable of the ten virgins of Matthew 25:1-13. The virgins await the coming of the bridegroom for Israel, Christ. They represent believing and unbelieving Israelites. Some will be disappointed and will not enter into the wedding feast. This event pictures the beginning of the kingdom period where the wedding feast will take place, not the tribulation. This is the same feast as pictured in Revelation 19:7-9.

Verse 11

In verses 8 and 9 above, the scene was on the earth after the second coming of Christ during the millennial period. But with verse 11, we go back in time to just prior to the actual second coming itself.

John continues his “I saw” statements with an opening glimpse of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is still in heaven as John sees Him. The scene is a preparatory one. Note that the interesting perspective of John. He does not mention Christ, but the horse first. The white horse, the victor’s horse according to custom, indicates preparation for moving. The rider, the Lord Himself, is called by two names: Faithful and True (πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός). It is only right that the Lord should bear these words as names.

Faithful refers to His trustworthy character. When Christ comes He will do exactly what Scripture says He will do. True refers to His veracity. He represents all things accurately and without any error, either intended or unintended.

The next compound clause contains two verbs modified by a single prepositional phrase, “in righteousness.” Because of the nature of these two verbs, absolute righteousness of character is expressed. Christ will judge in righteousness and will make war in righteousness.

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The second coming of Christ is an act of judgment in righteousness. There is no grace or mercy at this point. Those qualities have been expended and are not going to be part of His mission. This act of arrival by Christ begins the final set of judgments, culminating in the great white throne.

The second coming of Christ is an act of war in righteousness. Man cannot truly wage righteous war, but Christ can, and will at this future date. He and those who follow Him (verse 14) will act righteously in every act of war they commit.

Verse 12

Verses 12 and 13 provide a striking description of the Lord in John's vision. This is not how Christ will actually appear when He returns, but the representative language give insight into the act of His coming.

First, we read that Christ's eyes are a flame of fire. This description was used previously in Revelation 1:14 and 2:18, though in those two places a simile using "like" or "as" was used. Here the statement is direct. If a figure of speech is meant, then it is a metaphor, but it is more likely that this was the actual vision that John saw. Christ's eyes were actually fire, and are therefore symbolical rather than figurative. What do they symbolize. Whereas in the earlier simile representation of His eyes "as fire" the meaning probably indicated Christ's all seeing presence, here the context is one of judgment. Therefore, the fire-eyes symbolize His righteous judgment. He sees things accurately and judges accurately. The description reminds us of the statement of Paul in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9:

...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, ⁸ in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power...

Again we see no mercy, but vengeance at the second coming of Christ.

Second, John notes that there are upon Christ's head "many diadems." The significance of the diadems is clear. It was the kind of crown worn by rulers, and Christ is coming as king (verse 16). That there are many crowns indicates that His is the ultimate kingship; there are no kings superior to Him. He will truly, at that time, be the King of Kings.

Third, the name (ὄνομα) which no one knows is written, but we are given no details. Ironside believes that this speaks of Christ's essential glory (*Lectures in Revelation*, pg. 326). A better understanding is that the unknown name speaks of those elements of His person that are beyond human understanding. A name reflects qualities, and there are qualities that man cannot know about Christ in His deity or His perfect humanity.

Verse 13

Verse 13 continues the description begun in verse 12.

Fourth, He is dressed in a garment dipped in blood. See Isaiah 63:2-3. This is probably to be understood as the cloak of a senior military commander. It was an outer garment that signified leadership, and was often white, though other colors appear to have been used. Clearly its being dipped in blood looks forward to the shedding of blood that will take place during the war coming. He will be responsible for this righteous blood-shedding, hence He is pictured wear bloody clothing.

Fifth, His name is called the Word of God. This is the second time the actual word "name" occurs in Revelation 19. It will occur one more time. Again it represents an aspect of Christ's character. John uses the same word, *logos*, as in John 1:1, with undoubtedly the same force. The best explanation of this expression is that the Lord Jesus, in His deity, communicates the truth of the Trinitarian God, for

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this is one of the major meanings of *logos*. It means an act of communication. Here, unlike John 1, *logos* is followed by the prepositional phrase “of God.” Now, the question arises, does this mean that the communication is “from God,” a subjective genitive, or is the word “about God,” an objective genitive?

The best answer is found in John 1. In the first part of the chapter, the Logos is represented as the creator God. But later, He is presented as the communicator. Note John 1:18,

No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

It is best, then, to think of the “Word of God” as referring to Christ’s declaration concerning God. God the Father is the object of God’ the Son’s communication to mankind. In this instance, the second coming of Christ represents the communication of Christ concerning God’s righteousness applied to the evil of unbelieving man.

Verse 14

Again we see that the scene is heavenly. Now we view the armies which are in heaven. Who are these armies? As always, some, such as William Newell, ignore the question. Others attempt to limit this fighting group to the body of Christ because it is clothed in “fine linen, pure and white.” J. B. Smith olds that view. However, this seems unlikely. Paul identified one group of beings who will come to earth with Christ in 2 Thessalonians 1:7, “...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels...” Will there be others in these armies? Lehman Strauss makes this interesting observation,

The plural “armies” suggests more than one company. It is quite possible that they include the Old Testament saints, the Church, and the saints of the tribulation. (Strauss, *Revelation*, pg. 324.)

He goes on to say that their clothing suggests that they are all “saved people.” This is an overstatement, as righteous spirit beings are also presented in white linen in Scripture.

One can readily believe that the Church will return to earth with Christ at His coming in judgment. It is, after all, in a resurrected state. However, in order for Old Testament saints and saints of the tribulation to return to earth, they must have been resurrected. One can hardly see disembodied humans returning to earth. They would be invisible to the earth dwellers. And the first resurrection of Revelation 20:5 does not occur until the thousand year period has begun. It seems best to limit the armies of Christ in heaven to angels and the church.

Verse 15

Verse 15 contains a further description of Christ on His white horse. The sword which proceeds out of Christ’s mouth refers to the long, Thracian sword, which was quite long, and was sometimes used as a spear or javelin. Its only purpose was to kill and maim. Some, such as Strauss, see this as a symbol of the word of God, but such cannot be the case here. For one thing, he is confusing the sword of Hebrew 4:12 with this sword. The two Greek words are different, and the sword of Hebrews 4:12 is the short, dagger-like sword of that time. Furthermore, the contexts are totally distinct. No, this sword in Revelation is the sword of warfare, the sword of massive blood-letting.

Against whom is Christ to war? The statement is that with His sword He will “smite the nations.” At His second coming, Christ will bring the domination of the Gentile nations over Israel to an end. Paul understood this truth and expressed it in Romans 11:25-26:

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For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶ And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob....

The phrase “fullness of the Gentiles” refers to the completion (fullness) of the Gentile program prophetically. This occurs when “The Deliverer” comes “out of Zion,” that is, at the second coming of Christ (Isaiah 59:20-21; 27:9). Some Israelites understand that, but “blindness in part” refers to that great majority of God’s earthly people who do not understand that Jesus came as their Messiah.

Not only will Christ “smite the nations,” He will “rule them with a rod of iron.” This is an allusion to Psalm 2:9, and was already stated in Revelation 2:27. The ultimate destiny of the Gentile nations is to be ruled by the Lord Jesus Christ directly. This will be a total dictatorship of the Righteous One. Unlike other dictatorships on the earth, perfect justice will be found for all who violate God’s word.

Again, Revelation 19:15 expresses the horrible nature of Christ’s judgment at His coming with the words, “and he treads the winepress of the anger of the wrath of God, the Almighty.” The treading of grapes in a winepress is a metaphor for the great shedding of blood which will flow like grape juice. This treading is said to be “of the anger of the wrath of God.” It is probably a statement of result, meaning, “as a result of the anger that produces the wrath that comes from God.” In this place, the word *anger* (θυμός) refers to God’s righteous attitude, while *wrath* (ὀργή) refers to the act of striking out as a product of that attitude of anger.

At this point, Dr. Walvoord makes a cogent remark. He states,

The scene of awful judgment which comes from this background is in flat contradiction of the modern point of view that God is dominated entirely by His attribute of love.

We agree. Because God has been longsuffering, some have concluded that He will never judge evil. But the word of God is clear. The day of God’s wrath is coming.

Verse 16

The peculiar statement that the Lord Jesus has a name written on both his garment and on His thigh has elicited much comment. This is the same garment that was dipped in blood, that is, the white outer cloak and it is through the shedding of the blood of the nations that Christ will assume the title King of Kings and Lord of Lords. But what of the thigh? The Roman commander wore his armor and other military clothing, such as his tunic beneath the cloak. If the cloak were drawn back, the outer leg could be seen clothed in this other material. It is undoubtedly that to which this passage refers. If the cloak is not visible, then the thigh will be.

The phrase “King of Kings” rightly means the King who is over all other kings. That there will be other political kings in the kingdom of God is certain. But they will owe allegiance to the King of Kings. Likewise, other political Lords will exist, but Christ will be Lord over all other Lords. The purpose of the combined title is to indicate the absolute authority and power that the Lord Jesus Christ will have on earth after the second coming.

It is best not to think of the Lord Jesus as King of Kings today. His earthly kingship awaits His return. Today He shares God the Father’s kingship over the universe, but it is not to that kingship that this title refers, but to His messianic kingship.

3. *The Final Battle at the 2nd Coming (19:17-19)*

17-18 And I saw one angel standing in the sun, and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in mid heaven, Come and be gathered together to the great supper of God, ¹⁸ in order that you may eat

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the flesh⁷ of kings, and the flesh of tribunes, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses and of the ones who sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, and small and great.

19 And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against the one who sat upon the horse, and against his army.

Verses 17-18

In fact, verses 17-18 do not describe the actual battle, but the prologue to it. Indeed, that battle is not described in Revelation at all, only the preparation for it in these verses, and the results of it in verses 20-21.

John saw “one angel” standing in the sun. This probably means that he was standing in bright sunlight, not that he was standing on the sun itself, as some have supposed (see Barnes’ Notes on this passage). He is, therefore, distinct, and easily seen, and he is not in heaven, but on the earth, apparently standing where the bodies of the dead are strewn. Hence he calls with a loud voice “come,” indicating that the birds are to come to where he is. The command “come” is used to invite two or more to a place. Not only here, but in Matthew 24:28, birds are the mechanism for the removal of the dead.

The description of the dead is striking. It includes from the lowest to the highest, from kings to slaves, all men who were caught up in the final battle, as well as the horses on which they rode.

This event is not to be confused with the seven months of cleanup predicted in Ezekiel 39:9-16:

Then those who dwell in the cities of Israel will go out and set on fire and burn the weapons, both the shields and bucklers, the bows and arrows, the javelins and spears; and they will make fires with them for seven years. ¹⁰ They will not take wood from the field nor cut down any from the forests, because they will make fires with the weapons; and they will plunder those who plundered them, and pillage those who pillaged them, says the Lord GOD. ¹¹ It will come to pass in that day that I will give Gog a burial place there in Israel, the valley of those who pass by east of the sea; and it will obstruct travelers, because there they will bury Gog and all his multitude. Therefore they will call it the Valley of Hamon Gog. ¹² For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them, in order to cleanse the land. ¹³ Indeed all the people of the land will be burying, and they will gain renown for it on the day that I am glorified, says the Lord GOD. ¹⁴ They will set apart men regularly employed, with the help of a search party, to pass through the land and bury those bodies remaining on the ground, in order to cleanse it. At the end of seven months they will make a search. ¹⁵ The search party will pass through the land; and when anyone sees a man's bone, he shall set up a marker by it, till the buriers have buried it in the Valley of Hamon Gog. ¹⁶ The name of the city will also be Hamonah. Thus they shall cleanse the land.

Note that this refers to a cleansing not by birds, but by human beings, specifically, by Israelites. Furthermore, this passage is part of the great prediction of Gog of Magog which begins in Ezekiel 38. Gog is evidently the leader of a northern confederacy that contains several nations (Ezekiel 38:5,6). The translation of these names is difficult. Perhaps the following is the best way to identify them:

Gog is allied with Persia, Cush, Put, Gomer and Togarmah.

Persia is modern Iran. Cush, traditionally identified with Ethiopia and so translated, may represent a people associated with Babylonia, or northern Arabia. Put, traditionally identified with Libya in Africa, is identified by many as referring to a people associated with Cush, that is from the north rather than from Africa. Gomer is identified in the *Talmud* as the Germans. “(Togarmah) is generally identified as Turkey or Armenia, although it is extended by some to include central Asia” (Pentecost, *Things to Come*, pg. 330)

It seems conclusive that Gog is the initiator of a confederacy of northern peoples. He himself is from the “far north” (Ezekiel 38:15).

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The timing of Ezekiel 38 and 39 is difficult. Some attempt to make it the same event as at the end of the millennial period where the terms Gog and Magog are used again. But this is simply not possible, as the circumstances which Ezekiel describes are not millennial, and the armies of Gog in Ezekiel come from the north. In Revelation 20:7-9 the armies come from “the four quarters of the earth.”

Others make this one of the invasions of the second half of Daniel’s 70th week. This is problematical, and it doesn’t seem to fit. The events of the second half of the week, but that doesn’t work well, so some, indeed many, make Ezekiel 38 and 39 refer to the beginning of Christ millennial reign. Now that does fit better in many ways, but not in others. Israel is in the land, living in peace in Ezekiel 38. That somewhat reflects the millennial state. Israel does the fighting in Ezekiel, and is victorious. As such, they bring glory to God. However, the battles are over by the beginning of the millennial period, and one wonders why Christ allows a group from the far north to escape the judgment of the nations that takes place during the gap between the tribulation and kingdom.

There is another possibility, though I have never heard it expressed. It is possible that this invasion from the far north takes place prior to the beginning of the 70th week. It may well be that this invasion is what triggers the man of sin to sign a covenant with Israel for seven years. He, in essence, guarantees that such an event will not occur again. note the following:

1. Israel will use the fuel from the invasion for seven years. This seems an incredible coincidence if some seven year period other than Daniel’s 70th week is meant. However, the remnant does not remain in the land for 7 years, but departs after three and a half years. Prior to the tribulation, however, Israel is still mainly in unbelief. Perhaps the unbelieving Israelites who succumb to the allures of the beast and the false prophet will continue to inhabit the land and continue to use the fuel.
2. Israel will bury the dead for seven months. Indeed, all the people of the land will participate. If this battle is in the gap, it will take up approximately the first seven months of the millennial period. But if the battle is before the 70th week, the cleansing may take place during the first half of the week.
3. Gog will be buried in Israel. A specific place is named, a valley to the east of the sea. However, there is a translation problem in verse 11. The above reference is taken from the NKJV, which is typical of how this passage is normally translated. Another, perhaps more accurate translation follows:

And it will be on that day I will give to Gog a place there, a grave in Israel, the valley of Abarim, east of the sea, and it will block the passerby. And they will bury Gog there and all his multitude, and they will call it the valley of The Multitude of Gog (lit. Hamongog, perhaps a proper name).

The valley of Abarim, which is immediately east of the Dead Sea rather than the Mediterranean, is the way Israel passed into the promised land (see Numbers 33:48). At the time of Joshua, Abarim was in Moab, but it rightly belongs to Israel. This location is more consistent with the historical context, since this valley is actually a somewhat steep-sided gorge which could more easily be blocked than the coastal road, which is on a huge plain.

This interpretation would explain why Edom, Moab, and Ammon are spared invasion by Gog. He is defeated on his way to the entrance to those lands at Abarim. People who pass through Israel will mark the bones they see, which will be transported to this place. It will take 7 months to cleanse the land (Ezekiel 39:12-16). The name of the place is shortened to simply “Hammon” (vs. 16) meaning

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horde or *multitude*. Some have suggested that the gathering of bones will be indiscriminate, and that all the armies of the world will have Hammon as their final burial place.

Verse 18 presents a view of the need to clean up the earth from this battle. The next statement in verse 19 tells us the extent of the armies arrayed for battle.

Verses 19

The purpose of this element of the vision is to show that Christ's enemies are extensive. The beast, that is, the man of sin and all that he represents, will fight against Christ and His armies. But not the man of sin alone; the kings of the earth and their armies are gathered. This probably represents all those in that area who have come to do battle with one another. But when Christ returns they turn against Him, recognizing their peril. It is most probable that the "kings of the earth" are indeed represented by the Kings of the North, South, and East that are presented in Daniel and other places.

The book of Revelation says nothing about the actual battles that occur, however, nor does it identify the various "kings of the earth." For that information we must look elsewhere, which is beyond the scope of this study. However, a series of battles begin, probably right at the middle of the 70th week. Several passages occur in Ezekiel, Daniel, Isaiah and Zechariah that refer to the battles during the second half of Daniel's 70th week. See my notes entitled, "Bible Prophecy Concerning Israel and the Gentiles" for more information on these events.

4. *The Judgment of the Beast and the False Prophet (19:20-21)*

- 20a** **And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived the ones who had received the mark of the beast and the ones who worshiped his image.**
- 20b-21** **The two were cast alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur, ²¹ and the rest were killed with the sword which came out of mouth of the one who sat upon the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.**

Between verses 19 and 20 the actual second coming of Christ takes place. It is not pictured, and we must go to other Scripture at this point for that description. The actual coming is presented in Matthew 24:27-31. But here we see the aftermath, that is, the destruction which Christ pronounced upon His enemies.

Verse 20a

The close association of this event with the second coming of Christ gives us the time frame during which it occurs. Clearly it is during the gap between the end of the 70th week and the beginning of the kingdom. When Christ comes the beast, that is, the man of sin, will be "seized." The Greek word for *seized* (πιάζω) means that he will be captured alive, which is stated explicitly in the next sentence. The man of sin does not die during the wars. Nor does the false prophet, whose ability to deceive the unbelievers who had received the mark of the beast does him no good at this point. He's up against One Whom he cannot deceive, nor can either of them avoid.

Verses 20b-21

The first mention of the lake of fire occurs in this sentence. It is stated to burn "with sulfur," the evident meaning of the older English word "brimstone." Sulfur, which was known throughout the ancient world, burns easily, and produces a blue flame that is difficult to see in a lighted space.

This event occurs prior to the millennial period, and these two are the first to be so condemned. They are "cast alive" (ζῶντες - while living) into the lake of fire. They are not killed. They remain alone, just the two of them, for a thousand years. Not even Satan will join them at this time.

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Unbelievers in general will not enter into this horrendous state until after the thousand years are over. They remain in torment in Hades until at that time Hades is cast into the lake of fire. That is the meaning of the fact that “the rest were killed with the sword which came out of his mouth of the one who sat upon the horse.” They join the carcasses of those upon whom the birds feast. These individuals will participate in the second resurrection, the resurrection of the unrighteous.

Endnotes

- ¹ This is an important idea. See the notes on verse 8.
- ² Seiss's approach is typical of older scholars. He makes passages that deal with Israel refer to the church since he sees the "saved" as one homogeneous group. To him, all believers make up the bride, though he recognizes different groups of believers. He brings in the New Jerusalem as the bride (see my notes on chapter 21), but his statements are confusing. Note the following, "In general terms the whole city, as made up of those who inhabit it, including all the saved up to the time of the resurrection of all saints, is the Bride, the Lamb's wife, because all that are there pertain to her company, fill out the grandeur and glory of her estate and share immensely in it; albeit, some are there who, in a narrower and more particular discrimination, are not actually the Bride." (Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, pg 428.)
- ³ Larkin's approach to this passage is a good example of unwarranted and selective connections regarding the interpretation of the bride. While he does distinguish between the church and Israel, as well as the two brides mentioned in Scripture, he strains to find the bride in Revelation to be the church (Larkin, *The Book of Revelation*, pgs. 164-170).
- ⁴ Perhaps "scattered" rather than "shattered," as signified by the Hebrew root. The root can mean both. During the second three and one half years of Daniel's 70th week Israel is scattered, having been driven from the land or taken captive. Therefore, the power (lit. hand...but used metaphorically of power or ability) of the people is rendered ineffective, shattered.
- ⁵ Keil & Delitzch, *Daniel*.
- ⁶ John Walvoord, *Daniel, the Key to Prophetic Revelation*. Chicago: Moody Press, page 293.
- ⁷ Throughout verse 18 the word "flesh" is plural, indicating "pieces of flesh," an accurate portrayal of how birds pick at the flesh of dead animals.

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Chapter Twenty

N. The Millennium and the Final Judgment (20:1-15)

1. The Devil Bound (20:1-3)

SCOPE: VERSES 20:1-6 DEAL WITH THE FULL THOUSAND YEAR MILLENNIAL STATE.

Introduction

Is the thousand years to be taken literally? Revelation 20 uses the term “thousand years” six times. How are we to understand this phrase? Several objections have been raised to a literal understanding of the thousand years. There are three major views of this passage that have been taken by those who claim to believe the Bible:

1. A relatively recent view is that of *postmillennialism*. This view states the thousand years indicate the victory of evangelism during the present time, which introduces the millennium, and indeterminate period of time. After the kingdom is brought in by the church’s evangelism, Christ returns. That is, Christ’s return will follow the Millennium. Daniel Whitby, who wrote during the 17th century, probably came up with this view, as it was not held before that time. However, several men took up the view, including Charles Hodge, and Augustus H. Strong. In the 20th century, Loraine Boettner promoted it. According to Walvord:

Basically it is an optimistic view that Christ will reign spiritually on earth through the work of the church and the preaching of the gospel. This view has largely been discarded in the 20th century, because many anti-Christian movements have prospered and the world has not progressed spiritually.¹

2. An older error is *amillennialism*. The word means “no millennium” and rejects any sense in which there will be a kingdom of God on earth apart from the church. Indeed, the kingdom of Christ is said to be some kind of internal, spiritual activity within believers. Amillennialism confuses the universal kingdom, that is the reign of God over the entire creation, and the earthly kingdom. Hence, today, Christ is reigning not only over the earth through the church, but throughout the universe. This view is at wide variance with Scripture, and one must completely ignore normal interpretation of Old Testament kingdom passages to believe it. It is steeped in the illegitimate and dishonest practice of “spiritualization of Scripture.” But it is not new. Augustine who lived in the 4th and 5th centuries, was originally premillennial (see the next view), but changed to amillennialism because of what he conceived of as unspiritual practice by those who were premillennial. According to Dr. Walvoord, “Before Augustine, it is difficult to find one orthodox amillenarian. Modern advocates include such respected 20th-century theologians as Oswald Allis, Louis Berkhof, William Hendriksen, Abraham Kuyper, R.C.H. Lenski, and Gerhardus Vos.”
3. The correct interpretation of Scripture results in *premillennialism*. This view interprets Scripture normally in both Old and New Testaments, and as a result it views Revelation 20 to mean that Christ will return before the millennium to establish His kingdom. In other words, Christ coming is *pre* (before) *millennial* (thousand years). Again we quote Dr. Walvoord:

Twentieth-century advocates of this position include Lewis Sperry Chafer, Charles L. Feinberg, A.C. Gaebelein, H.A. Ironside, Alva McClain, William Pettingill, Charles C. Ryrie, C.I. Scofield, Wilbur Smith, and Merrill F. Unger. Other premillenarians can be found from the first century on, including Papias, Justin Martyr, and many other early church fathers. Arguments for this position are based on the natural sequence of events in

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Rev 20:1-15 following Rev 19:1-21, viewing them as sequential and as stemming from the second coming of Christ.²

As stated, some have confused the universal Kingdom of God with the earthly Kingdom of God. In doing so, they conclude that since the universal kingdom has no time limits, it is absurd to take the thousand years literally. In order to confuse the two aspects of God's rule, one must interpret the Old Testament kingdom passages according to some abnormal set of hermeneutical principles. The Scriptures clearly present an earthly kingdom, a kingdom in perpetuity throughout future ages, which is the culmination of God's program of bringing mankind as a whole into a permanent relationship to Himself.

The absurdity of the willful confusion of the universal with the earthly kingdom is clearly seen when it is realized that those who do allegorize or spiritualize the earthly kingdom passages only do so in the prophetic passages dealing with the second advent. The same people recognize that the various prophecies which were fulfilled concerning the first coming of Christ were fulfilled literally, but they refuse to acknowledge that the prophecies concerning the second coming are to be fulfilled the same way.

Some have used the idea that the "thousand years" sounds suspiciously like a rounded number. If it is a rounded number, they say, it cannot be taken literally. Such an approach shows the abject bias of the anti-millennial view, and a willful disregard of what rounding means.

First, the sovereign God of creation could easily establish the millennial period for exactly one thousand years to the day with precision, if He so determines.

Second, assuming the "thousand years" is a rounded number, such a rounding must follow the principles concerning rounded numbers. The only reason to "round off" a number is because the precise number is not greatly important. However, the rounded number must approximate the correct number closely enough to be sufficient. In other words, the "thousand years," if rounded, cannot be, say, nine hundred years, else the rounding would have been "nine hundred years." Likewise the "thousand years" could not be significantly longer, say, "twelve hundred years" for the same reason. "Rounding" cannot be made to mean "an indeterminate period," which is what the non-millennialist is attempting to establish.

Those who use the rounding idea don't really believe that the number is rounded. They want to eliminate the idea of a literal fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy ALTOGETHER. They don't want to believe that God will establish an earthly kingdom for Israel as the Old Testament says He will do! They, in fact, desire to spiritualize the Old Testament kingdom passages and apply them to the church and thereby blur the distinctions of normal interpretive procedure, so that they can ultimately apply the legalism of Israel's kingdom program to believers today, which is exactly what they do!

In fact, there is no legitimate exegetical or interpretive reason for rejecting the thousand year aspect of a literal earthly kingdom. While we cannot speak to the ultimate motivation of those who reject the obviously correct view of the kingdom, we can say that at best they are deluded and inconsistent.

- 1** **And I saw an angel descending out of heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand.**
- 2-3** **And he laid hold on the dragon, the old serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years,³ and cast him into the abyss, and shut it, and sealed it over him, in order that he should deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years should be finished, and after these things it is necessary for him to be loosed for a little time.**

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Verse 1

An angel, we are not told his name, will descend out of heaven. This individual is evidently the guardian of the abyss, as he has the key which controls it. The symbol of the key is clear. The entering and exiting of the abyss is under his control. Now this angel is not to be confused with the star that fell from heaven in Revelation 9:1. That star was undoubtedly Satan, and he was given the key to the abyss. But it had to be given to him, because he did not originally control it. That control remained in God's hands, and He ultimately gave that control to this angel.

The chain that he holds in his hand indicates the nature of his descent. In chapter 9 the abyss was opened by Satan, and smoke and locust/demons existed. No one exits at this time; someone is cast in.

Verses 2-3

The millennium is about to begin. The dragon, who is the devil and Satan, is taken by this angel. This is a singular event, as Satan is a cherub with great power. But to this angelic being is given the power and authority to lay hold of him and bind him.

The text indicates that the length of the binding is for the thousand years, that is, for a millennium. *Here is the first time we hear that number in Scripture.* We are dealing with an age of years, not with a dispensation, as some believe. The kingdom is not a dispensation, but the governmental authority of God on the earth that lasts throughout the ages. The first age of that ageless kingdom is a thousand years long.

The period of time is characterized by one major fact. Satan is bound during the time, thrown into the abyss as his prison, and the prison is shut and sealed so that there is no possibility for escape. The specific wording of Satan's imprisonment is designed to give strength to the next statement, that indicates the *purpose* for the thousand year sentence. Satanic influence is removed from the earth. Specifically, the gentile nations will no longer be deceived by him, something that is not true today. Indeed, it is a major part of Satan's program today to control the nations by deception. But that will happen not at all during the thousand years.

One of the purposes of the millennial period is to show that even under ideal conditions, fallen man will fail. The curse will be lifted from earth, so that there will be an abundance. Satan will be bound and not influencing the events of mankind. The only spiritual enemy left will be the principle of indwelling sin. Those who enter the kingdom will be believers, but they will have children, and not all the children of the nations will become justified saints. Therefore, when Satan is set free or loosed for a little time after the thousand years is over, unbelieving man will flock to him and he will attack God's people (see comments on verses 7 & 8 below.)

2. *The Millennium Proclaimed (20:4-6)*

- 4 **And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them, and I saw the souls of the ones who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus, and because of the word of God, and who worshiped not the beast, neither his image, and received not the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand, and they lived, and reigned with Christ the thousand years.**
- 5 **The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years should be finished. This is the first resurrection.**
- 6 **Blessed and holy is the one who has part in the first resurrection, over these the second death has no authority, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.**

Verse 4

The millennial period began in the previous paragraph. Here it continues and several elements are discussed throughout this chapter dealing with that period of time.

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Several elements are found in verse 4. First, the thrones, and those who sat upon them to whom judgment was given need identification. Second, the identity of souls of those who had been beheaded needs to be clarified, as well as the state in which they appear. Third, the various descriptive elements of these souls require comment. And fourth and finally, the statement "...and they lived, and reigned with Christ the thousand years" must be examined.

Those Who Sit on the Thrones

By process of elimination, it is possible to identify the ones sitting on the thrones. The thrones themselves are simply chairs. Sometimes thrones are used to indicate kingship, but in this case they seem to indicate the authority to pronounce judgment. Those who sit on them cannot be certain groups, all of which have been suggested: They are not Old Testament gentile or pre-Israelite saints, as they have no authority in this arena. As we shall see, this judgment deals with the kingdom period, and it seems more likely that a group of believing Israelites would be judging than for believing non-Israelites.

Nor can they be tribulation saints who have been killed, as they are clearly distinguished from them in this very sentence. It is unlikely, though not completely impossible that they are angels or other spirit beings. While the execution of judgment may be given to such individuals, the pronouncement of judgment is not. For, such is the meaning of the statement "judgment was given to them."

Some have suggested that this is the church, that is, the body of Christ. This also seems farfetched. There is no reason to think that the church's primary mission during the millennium will be judgment. It is much more likely that the body of Christ will be in a ruling capacity.

The most likely candidates as judges for the period at the beginning of the thousand years are a group of resurrected Israelites. And Scripture speaks of such a group in Luke 22:29-30 where Christ's kingdom apostles will sit on twelve thrones and judge Israel. Their judgeship shall be over the earthly kingdom under the rule of Christ.

Those Whose Souls John Saw

This second group are clearly those killed during the tribulation. They are not, however, Israelites, but gentiles. But they are the gentiles of Revelation 6:9, not the gentiles of Revelation 7:9. But this is the complete group, whereas the gentile martyrs of Revelation 6:9 were told in verse 11 that there were others who would join their number.

It is common to understand these individuals as being seen by John because they had some kind of intermediate body. While that is a possibility, it is not really necessary. The normal meaning of the word *soul* here is someone who is disembodied altogether. John is able to see their souls because of the nature of the vision that he is having. Inherent in John's vision state is an understanding of some elements that would not otherwise be seeable or understandable. It is best to think of these as disembodied individuals.

As stated, this same group is mentioned in Revelation 6:9-11 (see note there). We discovered then that they were gentile believers who were killed because of their faith. Here we're told that these individuals were beheaded.

The Descriptive Elements of these Disembodied Souls

The reasons for their deaths are presented in the following descriptions:

1. They were beheaded because of the testimony of (concerning) Jesus.
2. They were beheaded because of the word of God.

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3. They were beheaded because they did not worship the beast, nor his image.
4. They were beheaded because they did not receive the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand.

The implication of the wording is that these gentiles willingly died rather than compromise their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore, it appears that they did so in large numbers since the original group of souls were told that they must wait for their brothers who were to be killed (6:11).

The Statement, “over these the second death has no authority, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ”

The second death, that is being cast into the lake of fire, has no authority over these souls. But we are introduced to a new idea. Here we have a new group of priests. These are not members of the Aaronic priesthood of Israel. Nor are they to be confused with the “royal priesthood” of 1 Peter 2:9. This is a priesthood of gentile tribulation martyrs. They probably make up the true priesthood for the gentile nations during the coming thousand year period.

The Statement, “they lived, and reigned with Christ the thousand years”

The words “they lived” means that they came to life, they were resurrected. This resurrection occurs after the tribulation, but before the beginning of the kingdom. They shall be in a resurrected state throughout the millennial period. When John first saw them prior to the millennial period, they were souls, without bodies. They came to life and reigned with Christ for the thousand year period. Being “made alive” is used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 referring to the resurrection from the dead:

For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.”

Now, the statement “they lived, and reigned with Christ the thousand years” is often applied to the church, but it should not be. It is referring to those gentiles who die for Christ during the tribulation period. It is a fact that the church will have a place of authority throughout the kingdom of God, but it is not the only group of believers who will do so. Here is another, made up of martyred gentiles who will not simply be priests, but shall also have a reigning and ruling authority as well.

Verse 5

Verse 5 is easy to misconstrue. “The rest of the dead” refer to the unbelievers who are inhabiting Hades. They “lived not” means that they were disembodied while in Hades. They are resurrected and given new bodies after the thousand years.

The statement “This is the first resurrection” refers back to those who lived and reigned with Christ during the thousand years. They will participate in the resurrection of the righteous. The second resurrection of the unrighteous takes place at the end of the thousand years. This is confirmed in the verse 6.

Verse 6

The first resurrection is for the righteous only. This is the same resurrection that Paul referred to in 1 Corinthians 15:22-23:

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. ²³ But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming.

Again we see similar wording by the apostle regarding the resurrection. Everyone “in Christ” “shall be made alive.” Paul presents regular order of resurrections by naming the resurrection of Christ first, and then after that those who are Christ’s “at His coming.” Some have taken this as the resurrection of the church at the time of the rapture, but that is a mistake. The prepositional phrase “in Christ” in 1

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Corinthians 15:22 is not the same as the “in Christ” which Paul uses with reference to those baptized into the body of Christ. Note the contrast between “in Adam” and “in Christ.” The issue is not a relationship to Christ because of being in the church, but because of being the head of those declared righteous. Paul uses similar terminology in Romans 5 of the same truth. However, the church is not part of the regular order of resurrections, and is not mentioned in verses 23-24. Paul refers to the second coming of Christ, not the rapture. At Christ’s premillennial second coming, He will raise the righteous dead from both the tribulation as well as the Old Testament period. This is the first resurrection.

Back in Revelation 20:5, we read that the rest of the dead, that is, those not raised in the first resurrection, did not live again until the thousand years are completed. This second resurrection is mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:24:

Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power.

“The end” is an adjective that refers to the final act in the order of “being made alive” mentioned in verse 1 Corinthians 15:22. This takes place after the first thousand years of the kingdom, when the Lord Jesus Christ delivers the kingdom to the Father. For all the subsequent ages, the Father and Son share the earthly kingdom rule.

The phrase “the second death” implies a “first death.” As we shall see, the second death refers to being cast into the lake of fire. The first death is a reference to physical death, from which all men, both believers and unbelievers, will be resurrected and receive new bodies. Hence the two resurrections of Revelation 20. The first resurrection of the righteous and the second resurrection of the unrighteous.

We must again state that the first resurrection is not the resurrection of the church. It is, in fact, the resurrection of “some to everlasting life” mentioned in Daniel 12:1.

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt.

The second resurrection after the thousand years corresponds exactly to Daniel’s resurrection of “some to shame and everlasting contempt.” The resurrection of the church is not part of the normal order of resurrections predicted in both the Old and New Testaments. It is a “mystery” event that is found only in the Pauline epistles.

Those who participate in this first resurrection are of different groups. In this group we meet those who were beheaded during the 70th week of Daniel.

3. *The Devil Destroyed (20:7-10)*

SCOPE: REVELATION 20:7-15 DEAL WITH THE PERIOD OF TIME AFTER THE MILLENNIAL STATE BUT BEFORE THE BEGINNING OF FOLLOWING AGES.

7-8 And when the thousand years are finished, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, ⁸ and shall come forth to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to the war, the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.

9 And they ascended over the breadth of the earth, and surrounded the camp of the saints, even the beloved city, and fire descended out of heaven, and devoured them.

10 And the devil who deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and sulfur, where are also the beast and the false prophet, and they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

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Verses 7-8

In verses 7-10 John has moved beyond the thousand year period. Satan will not be loosed until the thousand years are over, at which time he begins his deceptive actions once again.

The object of Satan's deception are the nations. During the thousand years, the gentiles have continued to multiply. They are gathered from all over the earth, and are "as the sand of the sea." Many are born during the thousand years who reject the truth of the Lord, and maintain order only under the threat of violence. But when Satan is released he is able to convince these unbelieving gentiles that they can have victory over God. His thousand year prison sentence will do nothing to stem his evil machinations.

From the entire earth gentiles, under the sobriquet of Gog and Magog, gather for war. This is *not* the original Gog and Magog mentioned in Ezekiel 38:2. Rather, that earlier group is from the far north, and attacks, perhaps even before the 70th week of Daniel begins, whereas this Gog and Magog is gathered "from the four corners of the earth." But as a final act of violence by reprobate mankind, the designation of Gog and Magog is appropriate. As the program to destroy Israel was begun by one Gog and Magog, the final attempt to destroy Israel will be performed by another Gog and Magog.

This "Gog and Magog" in verse 8, then, is the entirety of the nations that gather together to make war after the thousand years. How is this possible? At the beginning of the thousand years it appears that all inhabitants of the earth are believers, both Israelites and Gentiles. During the thousand years, however, natural birth will continue, and among the Gentile nations not all will become believers, though they are descended from believing parents. A huge number, "as the sand of the sea," will rebel against God's righteous rule. These unbelieving Gentiles will be suborned by Satan to attack Israel.

Verse 9

Gog and Magog ascends over the breadth of the earth. The word "breadth" is actually "width." The word "earth" may here refer to the land of Israel. At any rate, the gentiles "surround the camp of the saints, even the beloved city." The word "camp" can refer to a military encampment, and probably does so here. The term "saints" in this context must refer to Israelites exclusively. Such was its use in the Old Testament. Gog and Magog goes up against the only other group of individuals in natural bodies, the chosen people of God. The beloved city can be none other than Jerusalem. Isaiah 2:1-5 indicates the importance of Jerusalem during the thousand year period:

The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. ² Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the LORD's house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it. ³ Many people shall come and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ⁴ He shall judge between the nations, And rebuke many people; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore. ⁵ O house of Jacob, come and let us walk In the light of the LORD.

The city will perhaps be seen as the source of the restrictions placed on the unbelieving Gentile world. Perhaps the specter of democracy will raise its ugly head, and men will think again that they can rule themselves better than the Lord Jesus can. God's method of rule on this earth will be a benevolent dictatorship, but men want to be free to enter into living an unrighteous life. Such will not be tolerated during the millennial period, and men will become rebellious against God.

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The end of the gentile rebellion is swift, terrible and supernatural. Fire from heaven devours them. End of problem.

Verse 10

The final destruction of Satan, who deceived the nations, is presented. After the thousand years he is cast into the lake of fire where the beast and the false prophet have been for a thousand years. Human beings and spirit being shall be tormented (βασανίζω meaning to trouble or torment) constantly (day and night), for all future ages (for ever and ever, literally “unto the ages of the ages.”)

The false doctrine of annihilation cannot be sustained using normal interpretive methods. Here are two human beings who are included in the perpetual judgment throughout future ages that is brought also upon Satan. That false doctrine may be an emotional reaction by which individuals cannot conceive of the nature of God’s justice. Because of the false view that many have concerning God’s character they do not want to believe the straightforward statements of Scripture.

4. The Unbeliever Condemned (20:11-15)

- 11 **And I saw a great white throne, and the one who sat upon it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them.**
- 12 **And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the one of life, and the dead were judged by the things which were written in the books, according to their works.**
- 13 **And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and they were judged every man according to their works.**
- 14 **And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This, the second death, is the lake of fire.**
- 15 **And if any was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.**

Now we come to the final act of judgment upon the earth. When viewed through the lens of normal interpretation, this is the most frightening scene in the entire Bible.

Verse 11

John sees both the throne and the one who sat on it. Who is this individual who John sees? He is not named, which has produced a two different viewpoints.

1. *The individual is God the Father.* Those who hold this position see the great white throne as being identical as the throne earlier in the book on which the Father sits. Robertson, for instance, says, The name of God is not mentioned, but the Almighty Father sits upon the throne (Rev 4:2., Rev 4:9; Rev 5:1, Rev 5:7, Rev 5:13; Rev 6:16; Rev 7:10, Rev 7:15; Rev 19:4; Rev 21:5)... (Robertson, *Word Pictures*)

His view is shared by Alford.

However, this is an assumption that seems to be hasty. With the exception of Revelation 21:5, which refers to the New Jerusalem throne, all the other verses refer back to the tribulation period, which Dr. Robertson rejects, being an amillennialist. And there is evidence that the New Jerusalem throne may belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. We are afraid that Dr. Robertson is guilty of “black-pot theology.” He mixes ideas in a great black-pot without distinction.

Indeed, the great white throne is distinct, and is mentioned only in this passage. It should not be confused with the other 45 times the word throne is used in the Revelation. Its very description is evidence of its uniqueness. It is “great,” that is, large. There have been many “great” things in this book: a great voice, a great tribulation, a great sword, a great earthquake, a great wind, a great day,

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a great river, and even a great prostitute. Several other things called great, but this is the only great throne.

It is a white throne. Many expositors have commented that the throne is white because the color represents pure righteousness, or righteous judgment. This seems reasonable.

We conclude that the throne is distinct and unique. One cannot say that the person who sits on it is the person who sits on the other thrones of the Revelation.

2. *The individual is the Lord Jesus Christ.* This view is held by many including Walvoord, Barnes, JFB, Strauss, Newell, and McGee. This is a much more reasonable view. John 5:22 states,

For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son...

The Lord Jesus is dealing His enemies concerning the future resurrection, the resurrection, not of Christ Himself, but of human beings (vs. 21). In connection with that future resurrection, the Father does not judge, and has give judgment to the Son. This seems conclusive. However, note Paul's statement in Acts 17:30-31:

Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, ³¹ because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.

Here we learn the same lesson. John says the Father committed all judgment to the Son. Paul says God the Father will judge "by the Man whom He has ordained." He repeats essentially the same thing in Romans 2:16. Nothing could be clearer.

It is Christ "from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them." What, exactly, is John seeing? Some have attempted to make the statement metaphorical so that there is no actual event involved, but the problem with that is that John is seeing a vision. He sees the heaven and earth "flee" from Christ. That is not so much a metaphor as it is a personification, and with all figures of speech, the expression itself does not remove the requirement for a normal, literal interpretation of the statement.

The best interpretation is the straightforward one. The event of the great white throne takes place during which the physical universe is itself being judged. This means that the event itself is after the thousand years, and signals the production of the new heavens and earth. It is without doubt the same event spoken of in 2 Peter 3:10:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

There is some controversy over this event, even by those who take a literal approach to Scripture. Basically, two views are held.

1. Some believe that the destruction of the elements with a fervent heat means that they will melt, but that the actual substance will remain. Like ice melts, the elements will simply go from one state to another. This is taken from the verb "shall melt" retained in the NKJV from the KJV. However, the actual Greek word (*luo*) simply means "shall be destroyed," and no such meaning can be attached to it. A similar argument is taken from 2 Peter 3:11 where the NKJV states that "all these things will be dissolved." However, the same verb *luo* is used there.

Also, according to this view, the word for "new" in Revelation 21:1 (*kainos*) is used since it does not imply an actual new thing, as would the use of the word *neos*. While this is not conclusive, *kainos* is used of something "new in kind" rather than "new in time." However, such a meaning

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does not indicate that the new thing is a remaking of an old thing. Paul, for instance, uses it in 2 Corinthians 5:17 to mean something new was coming into existence.

2. The second view is that the actual elements will cease to exist. The primary argument in favor of this view is the verb that Peter uses when he says that the heavens “will pass away” (*parerchomai*). The word was used in ancient times to mean to come to an end, or even to disappear (DBAG, on the word). Paul seems to use it that way in 2 Corinthians 5:17:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

Paul’s intention is to teach that the New Testament believer who is in Christ is not part of the old program for Israel. That program has been eliminated. The same word is used in Revelation 21:1:

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.

It seems conclusive that the first heaven and earth had ceased to exist. The word “no more” is actually “yet” or “any longer.” The actual statement is quite strong. A literal translation of that clause is “and the sea no longer was.” The normal meaning of the words indicates that the sea had ceased to exist, and its connection to the previous statement with a coordinate conjunction seems conclusive. The first heaven and earth had ceased to exist.

Verse 12

The phrase “the dead” used in verses 12 and 13 is difficult. Since this is a vision, and in a vision John can see disembodied dead souls, might that be what is meant here? However, the wording seems to desire another possibility. These dead are “standing before the throne.” Also, verse 13, which seems to be expressing the mechanism by which the dead are standing before the throne, states that the sea, death, and Hades “gave up” the dead. It seems clear that what is in view are the dead who have been resurrected after the thousand years. Perhaps the word “dead” refers to the fact that they remained physically dead for the thousand years, a more likely interpretation than that they were disembodied standing before the throne.

The phrase “the great and the small” refers to the importance of the people who are standing. The people of importance are treated the same way as people of little importance. “Greatness” in the human sense is meaningless.

Who, then, is included in this statement. All unbelievers from the beginning of time through the millennial state are included.

For a discussion of the book of life, see the note on Revelation 3:5-6. Whoever’s name is not therein will be cast into the lake of fire (vs. 15). But what about the other books. These books (plural) must contain the record of the deeds of the unrighteous. They are judged by the things written in them. So the books contain an accurate presentation of those things. So the dead are judged according to their works.

Works are not the issue as to why someone stands before the throne, but they are the issue concerning the nature of the judgment. The judgment will be consistent with these works, so that a person who is a simple unbeliever, but lived a fairly innocuous life, will not receive the intensity or degree of punishment of a person whose life was full of wicked works.

Verse 13

The statement of this verse is to show that no unbelieving individuals were left out. All are resurrection, as such is the meaning of “gave up.” This does not mean that the bodies of those

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individuals were preserved in those places. The bodies of those who died at sea disintegrated, and those who went into Hades did so in a disembodied state. The phrase “death and *Hades*” do not refer to two different places. Rather “death” is the condition, and “*Hades*” is the place.

Unfortunately, the word Hades is translated *hell* in some versions. I say unfortunately, because in modern speech, the word hell has come to mean the final catastrophic judgment. Depictions of hell are often confused with the lake of fire. The Greek word *hades* occurs 11 times in the New Testament, and is the functional equivalent of the Hebrew word *sheol*. But the words do not overlap totally in meaning, so the functional equivalency is limited. *Sheol* also refers to the grave, as well as to the place of the dead.

Significantly, Jesus uses the word *hades* as referring to the same place of the dead as *sheol*, never to the grave proper. *Sheol* occurs 65 times in the Old Testament, and usually refers to the grave, either literally or metaphorically. However, its earliest use in Genesis 37:35 may go beyond the meaning of grave. Concerning the loss of his son Joseph, Jacob said,

And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said, For I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning. Thus his father wept for him.

The phrase “to my son” may be a simple mourning phrase, but it may signify that Jacob was thinking of going to where his son already was, that is, to *sheol*. But Jonah 2:2 cannot be taken of the grave in any literal sense. Jonah had been swallowed by the fish, and 2:1-2 states,

Then Jonah prayed to Yahweh his God from the fish's belly. ² And he said: I cried out to Yahweh because of my affliction, and He answered me. Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, And You heard my voice.

Jonah’s body was in the belly of the fish, but Jonah himself was in the belly of *sheol*, the place of the dead. It is clear that *sheol* cannot refer to a physical grave on land, but to the residence of a person who had died. The miracle is not that Jonah survived all that time in the belly of the fish, but that God returned life to his dead body when he was vomited out upon the land.

Prior to the death of Christ, all believers and unbelievers were confined to *Hades* or *Sheol*. It evidently had two parts. See the parable of Lazarus in Luke 16:20ff. He and the rich man were in the same general area, though his part is a place of comfort called “Abraham’s bosom.” Evidently, the word *Hades* was used by the Lord to refer only to the other side, not the side of comfort. Abraham was also there “far off,” and the rich man called out to him. But, according to Abraham, a great “gulf” was fixed and a person could not travel from one side to the other.

Where Hades exists is unknown, but it seems that it resides in the bowels of the earth somewhere. There are flames there, which the rich man mentions. But it is only an intermediate holding place, not the final place of judgment, not the lake of fire.

Another term, which may refer to the lake of fire, is *Gehenna*. In the KJV that word is also translated “hell,” so a great confusion exists. *Gehenna* is a transliteration of an Aramaic form of a Hebrew word into Greek letters. It means “the valley of *Hinnom*” and is used 12 times in the New Testament, 11 times in the gospels and once in James 3:6. Matthew 5:29 is typical of its use:

If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

See also Matthew 10:28:

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

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The word *gehenna*, translated hell, is used in both the above statements metaphorically. There was a literal “valley of *Hinnom*” which is mentioned some 13 times in the Old Testament. In Joshua 18:16 it is called “the valley of the son of *Hinnom*.” Who *Hinnom* was is unknown, but the valley, or depression, was just outside the gates of Jerusalem. According to Nehemiah 2:13 and 3:13, the Valley Gate opened to it. Unfortunately, which gate this was has been lost to antiquity. It was the scene of idolatrous practices in the days of Ahaz (2 Chronicles 28:3) and of Manasseh, who “caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of *Hinnom*” (2 Chronicles 33:6). These acts were part of the so-called “worship” of the god Molech. This valley was also called *Tophet*. According to ISBE,

Into this valley dead bodies were probably cast to be consumed by the dogs..., and fires were here kept burning to consume the rubbish of the city. Such associations led to the *Gehinnom* (New Testament ‘*Gehenna*’) becoming the “type of Hell.”

The exact location of the valley of *Hinnom* is disputed. Again, according to ISBE:

The Valley of *Hinnom* has been located by different writers in each of the three great valleys of Jerusalem. In favor of the eastern or *Kidron* valley we have the facts that Eusebius and Jerome (*Onom*) place “*Gehennom*” under the eastern wall of Jerusalem and the Moslem geographical writers, Mukaddasi and Nasir-i-khusran, call the *Kidron* valley *Wady Jahamum*. The Jewish writer Kimchi also identifies the Valley of *Jehoshaphat* (i.e. the *Kidron*) with *Hinnom*. These ideas are probably due to the identification of the eastern valley, on account of its propinquity to the Temple, as the scene of the last judgment - the “Valley of *Jehoshaphat*” of Joel 3:2 - and the consequent transference there of the scene of the punishment of the wicked, *Gehenna*, after the ancient geographical position of the Valley of *Hinnom*, had long been lost.

In short, today we cannot know for certain which of the three valleys associated with ancient Jerusalem was actually the valley of *Hinnom*, though *Kidron*, to the east of Jerusalem, is a good candidate.

That Jesus used *Gehenna* to refer to the lake of fire rather than to Hades is clear. He says that the “whole body” can be “cast into *Gehenna*.” This can only refer to the resurrection state, not to the intermediate disembodied state of those in Hades. The fact that the body can be thrown into “*gehenna* fire” substantiates that *gehenna* is the lake of fire.

In vs. 13, again John states that every person was judged “according to their works.” The expression is one of perfectly righteous punishment. God does not make any mistakes concerning the severity of punishment a person will receive at this time. They will get exactly and precisely what they deserve, neither more or less.

Verse 14

Here we have the figure of speech called metonymy, where the container is used for the thing contained. The dead people contained in Hades were cast into the lake of fire, not the actual place itself. This is clear from the next verse.

The phrase “second death” means that those who had died physically now die a second time through judgment. They are separated, not from their bodies, but from God and His program of benefit. The second death is the lake of fire.

Many refer to this death as “eternal death.” A better phrase would be “forever death” as the word “eternal” is reserved in Scripture for the nature of God and how He applies His nature to the life of

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the believer. The Bible does speak, therefore, of “eternal life, but the phrase “eternal death” never occurs in the Bible and should be avoided.

Verse 15

Verse 15 is a summary of this short paragraph. It is the “bottom line” of judgment. A person not found written in the book of life suffers the judgment of the great white throne. See the note on Revelation 3:5-6 for a discussion of the book of life. The fact is, all unbelievers, all not written in the book of life, end up in the lake of fire.

Endnotes

- ¹ Walvoord, *BKC*, “Revelation.”
- ² Walvoord, *Ibid.*

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O. The Final Matters (21:1-22:21)

1. *The Creation Renewed (21:1-8)*

SCOPE: VERSES 1-8 DEAL WITH THE AGE PROGRAM IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE THOUSAND YEARS AND THE JUDGMENT OF THE GREAT WHITE THRONE.

a. The New Heaven and New Earth (21:1)

1 **And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea is no more.**

Verse 1

John's visions move beyond the great white throne into the next set of events. He sees a new heaven and a new earth. This event has already be alluded to by John in 20:11 where heaven and earth fled away from the one on the throne. The actual event of the creation of the new heavens and earth is prior to the white throne, but this vision deals with the elements that come to pass after the judgment of the white throne.

The first heaven and earth "had passed away." As we stated in the note on 20:11, we believe that this means they blinked out of existence. The new heaven and earth are brand new, made from different material.

That there was no more sea indicates the incredible difference between the two physical existences, the old and the new. In current existence, water is what sustained life. Such is no longer needed. Whatever water will exist at that time will not come into the land as the result of the "hydrological cycle" as it does today. It will exist, like all the new heaven and earth, as the result of the direct intervention of God.

Current physical laws will no longer apply. One thinks of the current laws of thermodynamics, by which we understand that the current creation is running down like a clock. But the new creation will be different in several ways. It will not go from complex to simple, but will maintain its complexity. Humanity itself will not need the physical creation to maintain its existence. Rather, it will be sustained by God's direct maintenance, not through His indirect maintenance as it is today.

Some have been confused because of how the phrase new heaven and new earth is associated with the kingdom of God in the book of Isaiah. Note Isaiah 65:17-25:

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. ¹⁸ But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; For behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, And her people a joy. ¹⁹ I will rejoice in Jerusalem, And joy in My people; The voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, Nor the voice of crying. ²⁰ No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, Nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; For the child shall die one hundred years old, But the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed. ²¹ They shall build houses and inhabit them; They shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ²² They shall not build and another inhabit; They shall not plant and another eat; For as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people, And My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. ²³ They shall not labor in vain, Nor bring forth children for trouble; For they shall be the descendants of the blessed of the LORD, And their offspring with them. ²⁴ It shall come to pass That before they call, I will answer; And while they are still speaking, I will hear. ²⁵ The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, The lion shall eat straw like the ox, And dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, Says the LORD.

The description clearly fits the thousand year period better than it does the post-thousand year period. Was Isaiah saying that the creation of the new heavens and earth pre-date the establishment of the kingdom? If we were left to this passage we might think so. But we must remember how the prophets

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viewed the future. They were less concerned with the order of future events than they were with the relationship of certain realities. The kingdom of God is one of those realities, and it was revealed to Isaiah that the kingdom would be on-going because of the act of new creation. Clearly the current creation cannot maintain such a creation, as it is sinfully flawed.

We look back on Old Testament prophecies and see time spans where the original prophets did not see them. For instance, the prophets often “telescoped” the two comings of Christ into a single set of events. (See Malachi 4:5, 6, where the second coming of Christ is mentioned before the first coming.) In Daniel 12:2 the two resurrections, which we know to be a thousand years apart, are spoken of as though they occurred at the same time. Likewise, the kingdom of God is presented as a unified element, without examining the nature of the time span and changes that will take place. The kingdom begins on the old earth. It continues on the new. But Isaiah knew nothing of this, and one suspects that if asked, he might have said, “Who cares? God Himself will be in control.” For that is the one salient truth of the future Kingdom. God is in control both during the thousand year age that begins it, and throughout all the subsequent unending ages that follow as a result of the new creation.

b. The New Jerusalem (21:2)

- 2 **And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.**

Verse 2

We are introduced to one of the most controversial ideas in the Revelation, the New Jerusalem. Among premillennial and pretribulational scholars there is little uniformity concerning either its ultimate purpose, nor its time of creation. Some even believe that there might be two distinct cities called New Jerusalem! (See comments on 21:10 below). The only general agreement is that there will be a true, physical city, and that the description of it is to be taken in a normal, literal sense.

It is clear that its creation was not associated directly with the creation of the new earth. John sees the holy city descending out of heaven from God. This associates the creation of city with the new heaven. Why? Contextually, one thing is certain. The city is for the habitation of God. Others will undoubtedly inhabit the city, but this is God the Father’s city. The New Jerusalem is specifically stated to be from God the Father, whose previous residence was in heaven. Also it is adorned as a bride for her husband. In vs. 9 below we learn that the husband is the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son.

This is the second time in Revelation where marriage relationships are used to make a point. The first was the wedding feast mentioned in 19:8-9. There we saw Israel being married to Christ, though the word *bride* itself was not used. The first use of the word in Revelation occurs in the verse before us, and it refers to the New Jerusalem.

The idea that this city will be the habitation of the church is without merit. See the comments on verses 21:3-4 and 21:10-13 below.

c. The Voice from the Throne (21:3-8)

- 3-4 **And I heard a great voice out of the throne saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God, ⁴ and he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more, because the first things have passed away.**
- 5 **And the one who sits on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he says, Write, because these words are faithful and true.**

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- 6 **And he said to me, They have come to pass. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who is thirsty from the fountain of the water of life freely.**
- 7 **The one who is victorious shall inherit these things, and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.**
- 8 **But for the cowardly, and unbelieving, and detestable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.**

Verses 3-4

The significance of this statement cannot be overly emphasized. It tells us the purpose for the New Jerusalem. It will be the “tabernacle of God.” The actual Greek word means “tent” and is used of the Tabernacle in the wilderness. See Hebrews 9:8. It was the place where God met with the Israelites before the temple was built. Some have emphasized its temporary nature. Certainly it was temporary, but the importance of the Tabernacle is that it was where God made His residence on the earth. When He transferred His residence to the Temple, that was not simply to make the temporary permanent.¹ In fact, it did not do that, because the temple was also temporary, as is seen by the simple truth that it no longer exists.

The loud voice specifically states that “the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them.” Nothing could be clearer. The New Jerusalem is the residential palace for God the Father. As we shall see, this is appropriate since God’s earthly people are in their final state of salvation at this time. But more than that, all mankind will benefit from the presence of the Father upon the earth.

They, men, shall be “his people.” This cannot be limited to Israel, but it is clearly not referring to the church. Men who have participated in the first resurrection are clearly in view. The voice states “God himself shall be with them, and be their God.” Not that they will go to heaven to be with Him. He inhabits the New Jerusalem to be with them. He will be “their God.” This is a reversion to the Old Testament idea of the geographical location God’s presence. Pagan man had the idea that their false gods were regional. That was not true, but what was true is that God in the Old Testament manifested Himself locally in the tabernacle and temple in Jerusalem. This made Him “Israel’s God.” After the millennium He was reside on earth. That makes Him the God of all mankind.

Verse 4 is clearly a post-millennial scene, but it describes the people on earth in terms of their previous physical weakness. God “shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.” This does not mean that mankind will sometimes suffer emotionally after the millennium. Rather it means that God has established a future state in which the whole idea of crying is eliminated. Notice the statement, “neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more.” This elements simply will not exist. Furthermore, “death shall be no more.” This clearly is after the millennial state, as we know that death does occur during that period.

The “icing on the cake” is provided in the last clause of verse 4. It gives the cause for the previous conditions, “because the first things have passed away.” This is a clear allusion back to the fact that the old heavens and earth passed away. “Passed away” is in the aorist tense, indicative mood, indicating the simple fact in past time. The word does not carry the nuance of “abolished” as does the word translated “passed away” in verse 1. Rather it simply means that they no long are there. They’re gone. They’re past.

Verse 5

We revert to the scene in heaven in John’s vision. The one who sits on the throne, God the Father, makes the next statement, though many, such as Dr. Walvoord, make it the Son. However, the

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wording of the context makes that clearly impossible. The confusion comes because of the terms “Alpha and Omega” in verse 6 (q.v.).

It is a simple statement of summary, “Behold, I make all things new.” The negative is “passed away” in verse 4. The positive is “all things new” in verse 5. God does it, as no one else is able.

The command of God, “Write” is given to John. The reason is that the words are “faithful and true.” Faithful means believable, and true means that they are an accurate representation of reality. What John saw was an accurate presentation of future facts.

Verse 6

God the Father continues talking to John. Note the pronouns “he” and “me.” The statement of God begins with the pronoun “they.” God is talking about the new conditions after the millennial period. The statement “I am the Alpha and the Omega” indicates why the conditions are viewed as already accomplished. From man’s limited perspective today, they are yet future. But from God’s omniscient perspective, they’ve as good as happened already. He is “the beginning and the end” a way of saying that God does not see things as they occur, but in an instantaneous and eternal “now.”

The phrase “Alpha and Omega” has caused quite some confusion. The phrase occurs three times in the Revelation (1:8; 21:6; 22:13). It is used in 1:8 by the Lord Jesus Christ. (Revelation 1:11 contains a textual problem, and even the majority text by Farstad and Hodges rejects the phrase in that verse.) In 22:13 the Lord Jesus uses it again of Himself. How then, can this be God the Father using the same phrase? The answer is two-fold.

First, the phrase “the Alpha and the Omega” must include more than eternity. The *infinity* of the person is expressed in metaphorical form by the statement. Infinity is the quality of the nature of God whereby He has no limitations whatsoever in His expression of Who He is. It includes all His abilities, as well as to the eternity of His essence. In other words, the phrase seems to carry the meaning that God is without limitation in any of his qualities. Clearly this can (and does) apply to God the Father as well as to God the Son.

Second, the context has already defined the word throne. Verse 3 says, “And I heard a great voice out of the throne” (some manuscripts read “out of heaven.”) This is the final use of the phrase that has occurred some 20 times in the book of Revelation. And it has always referred to God the Father, in front of Whose throne the Lamb stands (See Revelation 5:6-7). There is no reason to think that the word throne in verse 6 refers to a different throne than the one throughout the heavenly scenes in Revelation, or that the voice from heaven is no longer the Father but the Son. They are the same throne, and the same person is sitting on it, with the same voice from heaven, God the Father.

God the Father also states, “I will give to the one who is thirsty from the fountain of the water of life freely.” This appears to be a statement of spiritual rather than physical thirst. Most commentators make the “water of life” to be salvation, usually referring to the incident at the well in John 4:10-14. According that view, the “one who is thirsty” is the unbeliever. This seems unlikely. It’s possible that the statement refers to the believer. If so, the water of life probably refers to the word of God rather than salvation. That God is referring to believers seems to be confirmed by verse 7.

Verse 7

“The one who is victorious” of verse 7 refers to the believer, not the unbeliever. In its earlier use in Revelation 2, 3, it referred to church saints. Here it seems to refer to believers in general at that future, not to certain believers, not a select group. This is confirmed by their contrast to unbelievers in the next verse. However, since the New Jerusalem comes to earth, it is intimately associated with

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the program for the new earth. Church saints will not be earthly in the ultimate sense, and while the church will undoubtedly have access to the new earth, including New Jerusalem, it will not be limited to it.

“Shall inherit these things” must refer to the entirety of the program after the millennial period upon the earth. It seems that the New Jerusalem will be part of that inheritance for all earthly saints, not for Israel alone. In other words, the benefits of the presence of God on earth making His residence in the New Jerusalem will be beneficial to all believers on the earth. Nevertheless, as we shall see beginning in verse 9, Israel has a special relationship to New Jerusalem.

“I will be his God” hearkens back to the geographical references of the Old Testament. But again, it is related to the new earth and specifically to the New Jerusalem where God will take up residence. See the discussion on verse 3 above.

“He shall be my son,” carries certain cultural ideas. Sonship is not based on birth, as it is today, but on the maturity of the individual, either real or imputed. The church believer is viewed both as a positional son who is mature, and a child of birth who is gaining maturity. Israel, during the Mosaic years, was viewed as immature, and not yet having attained sonship (Galatians 4). Since the passage before us is viewing both Israelite and Gentile believers after their resurrection, the term son will be applied to them. They will have reached their ultimate maturity. They will not be simply children, but sons.²

Verse 8

The statement in verse 21:8, along with the statement of 21:25-27 (see notes there), has been the cause of much debate. Many have assumed from these verses that the scene is millennial rather than post-millennial. They point to the idea that there is an assumption that unbelievers are on earth at the time to which the verses are referring.

As far as 21:8 is concerned such a view is clearly not possible. To say that this verse assumes unbelievers on the earth is to violate the already stated truth of the context. Verse 4 above specifically states that crying is wiped away, not because God comforts those who need to cry, but because they have passed away. They are no longer in existence. Likewise, 21:8 indicates that unbelievers will not be on earth at that future time because they have already been cast into the lake of fire. They are already participating in the “second death.”

The perspective of the verbal tenses is clear. John is hearing, during his lifetime in his vision, some truth about the future. The future tense of the statement “their part shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur” is future from his perspective, as it is from ours. It’s explaining why these individuals will not be in the post-millennial state of perfection on earth.

A similar truth is applicable to 21:25-27, as we will see when we study those verses.

2. *The New Jerusalem Described (21:9-22:5)*

a. **The Bride (21:9)**

- 9 **And there came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls that were full of the seven last plagues, and he spoke with me, saying, Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.**

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Verse 9

Remember the seven angels who had the seven bowls? This angel is specified as John's guide. Why? Probably because the judgments of the bowls were necessary for the rest of God's program to unfold. No longer is this angel concerned about judgment, however, it has been completed, so he has a new task, as did the rest of that group of angels.

The word *bride* occurs here for the first time as a positive prophetic element. Prior to this time it was used only one other time in the Revelation at 18:23, and that of the tribulation period. The word is used only three other times: once each in Matthew and Luke, where it means "daughter-in-law," and once in John where it is used metaphorically of Christ Himself.

Christians often speak of the church as being the "bride of Christ" but that phrase is never used. It is taken from oblique references in other places, including Revelation 19:7-9 where the marriage supper of the Lamb is taught. We have concluded that the marriage supper there does not have the church, but Israel, in mind.

Biblically, it is only correct to speak of the New Jerusalem as a bride in the future prophetic sense. Again, the bridegroom is seen to be the Lamb, and the city is called "the wife of the Lamb."

The Purpose for the Metaphor

But why a bride? A city as a bride seems odd. However, the bride motif is but an extension of a simile. A simile is a comparison using "like" or "as." In verse 2 we read that the city is descending from heaven, "made ready as a bride adorned for her husband." The New Jerusalem is being compared to a bride. There are several indications as to the purpose of this in the text.

1. Three times the city is viewed as coming out of heaven from God (3:12; 21:2; 21:10). In the wedding metaphor, God the Father is "giving away the bride." It is probable that the city was created by Him and He presents it to the Son.
2. The city is "adorned" (vs. 2). This adornment is quite important, as much of chapter 21 is taken up with a description of the city. It speaks to the purpose for the original simile. See below.
3. The husband of the bride is "the Lamb" (vs. 9). In other words, the marriage motif is carried out in that the Father presents His daughter to the groom, that is, to Christ.

Now, we must not take this metaphor too far. Its purpose is apparent. The reason the city is so beautiful is because of the Father who presents her and the Lamb who receives her does so "like a bride." But the wedding metaphor stops there. There is no other significance presented in the text, and it is beyond useless to speculate. We must not indulge in flights of emotional fancy at this point. We must let the text speak for itself, and when it stops we must stop.

The Timing of the Vision

There are those who hold that this vision is set at the beginning of the millennium rather than at its end. Some even hold that the New Jerusalem described beginning here is a different city than the one mentioned in chapter 21:1. Such is not necessary, and is based on a misunderstanding of 21:25-27 (q.v.). Dr. Walvoord is correct in rejecting this view:

Expositors have raised questions about the additional revelation of the New Jerusalem, beginning in Rev 21:9. Some believe that this section is a recapitulation and pictures the New Jerusalem as it will be suspended over the earth during the millennial reign of Christ. A preferred interpretation, however, is that the passage continues to describe the New

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Jerusalem as it will be in the eternal state. Obviously the city would be much the same in either case, but various indications seem to relate this to the eternal state rather than to the Millennium.

We must remind the reader that Dr. Walvoord engages in some loose language in referring to the “eternal state.” Scripture uses no such terminology, and it is wrong to suggest that human beings will enter into some kind of future eternal state. Indeed, after the millennium, the ages of time continue without end. Eternity is not simply time extending without end, both backward and forward. The terms “eternity future” and “eternity past” are fallacious. There is no such thing. Those charts that show the sequence of time interrupting eternity are false. Eternity cannot be interrupted.

The meaning of eternity is not that it is the same as “forever” except that it has no beginning. That is the definition that many give to the word eternity. Unlike the word “forever” they say, which means a beginning but no ending, the word “eternity” means, they say, neither beginning nor ending. That is a nonsensical way of thinking, as it reduces eternity to nothing but the same kind of thing as time, just extending both directions.

In fact, eternity is not a duration of time both backward and forward. It is the state of existence of God in which *there is no time*. God is eternal in that He exists apart from time, and with reference to the sequence of time, He exists simultaneously at all points of that sequence. So God is, as I write, in the garden dealing with Adam, in the days of Judges dealing with Gideon, and in the far future dealing with the beast and the false prophet. He is outside of and has no dependence on time sequence.

A Strange Interpretation of the New Jerusalem

One very peculiar interpretation is that of Dr. McGee. He believes that the New Jerusalem will remain floating in space, and that the entire universe will revolve around it. He states:

The New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, does not mean another satellite for the earth, but rather the earth and all of the new creation with all of the galactic systems will revolve about the New Jerusalem because it is the dwelling place of God and of Christ.³

Dr. McGee gives no exegetical reason for his conclusion about the “floating Jerusalem,” and one wonders if he is not indulging in some serious flights of fancy. He goes on to say:

The church will have already left the earth, and its dwelling place is in the New Jerusalem.⁴

Again, Dr. McGee gives no reason for his conclusion that the church will dwell in the New Jerusalem, and we must reject any such view as being beyond the statements of Scripture.

Why, then, does he so speculate? First, he seems to have drawn unwarranted conclusions from the statement that John sees the city “descending out of heaven.” Many, including McGee, have wrongly concluded that this means that it doesn’t “land” on the earth. Here we have an argument from silence. The statement “out of heaven” seems to indicate that it is not a heavenly city in the positional sense, but in the governmental sense. There is no reason to conclude that the city will end up floating in space.

The reason that McGee sees it as the center of the universe is probably based on the statement in 21:24 that “the nations shall walk by its light.” It must then, he supposes, take the place of the sun, and the earth revolves around it. And if the earth revolves around it, why not the rest of the universe? However, the nations walking by its light does not prove that the city is floating above the earth. The statement may simply mean that it will glow so brightly that all will be able to see it. The statement

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“there will be no night there” in vs. 25 refers only to the city itself, which indicates that it will continue to be lighted without interruption of darkness.

Possibly one reason that Dr. McGee wants the New Jerusalem to float above the earth is to legitimize his claim that it is the habitation for the church. He realizes that the church cannot live on the earth. So its habitation must float above it.

The idea that the church will inhabit the New Jerusalem is not limited to Dr. McGee, however. William Newell says concerning the New Jerusalem:

It will be peculiarly *the home of the Church*, the Lamb’s wife (*Ephesians 5:27-32*); others will be there, and many will have access (*Revelation 21:24-26*); but the Church will be as the wife in the home.⁵

This brings us to the next consideration. Is the New Jerusalem the permanent place of habitation for the church?

The Inhabitants of the New Jerusalem

The only Person stated to inhabit the New Jerusalem is God the Father (21:3). In fact, no human inhabitants of the city are ever mentioned. Certainly the church is never mentioned as such. But there are some indications for the reason the city exists. These indications actually begin in Revelation 3:12. To the assembly in Philadelphia Christ states:

The one who is victorious, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out from there no more, and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which descends out of heaven from my God, and my own new name.

Later in this chapter, vs. 21, we find:

And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple.

There is no physical temple in the New Jerusalem. So the sense in which the Christian (all Christians are victorious, or overcomers) will be a pillar in the temple of God must refer to something else. Dr. Walvoord is correct when he states:

Everyone who is an overcomer will become a pillar in the temple of...God. This is of course symbolic of the permanent place in heaven for believers, referred to here as the temple of God.

The church’s ultimate destiny is heavenly, not earthly, and the New Jerusalem is clearly an earthly place, as is clear from the fact that the gentiles will have entrance to it (Revelation 21:24). But Christians will inhabit heaven, and they will “go out from there no more.” This probably means that they will not find any other habitation, not that they are imprisoned in heaven. Undoubtedly the church will go wherever Christ is, including the New Jerusalem from time to time. But there is no reason to limit their travels to heaven itself.

Who inhabits the New Jerusalem? The best answer lies in the nature of the city, as seen from its description. It is clearly an Israelite city. As we study the following description, we will conclude that if humans inhabit the New Jerusalem, post-millennial Israel may be its inhabitants, but this is deductive logic which can be challenged. Again, the only statement made is that God the Father will inhabit the New Jerusalem (21:3).

b. The City’s Gates’ Description (21:10-13)

10-13 **And he carried me away in spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, ¹¹ having the glory of God, her light was like a stone most precious, like a jasper, shining like a crystal, ¹² having a wall great and high, having twelve gates,**

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and at the gates twelve angels, and having names written, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel, ¹³ on the east three gates, and on the north three gates, and on the south three gates, and on the west three gates.

Verses 10-11

Verses 10-11 give a general description of the city as John sees it descending from heaven. The phrase “having the glory of God” is an appearance phrase. The idea is that it will shine and its shine is from God because of His nature as being glorious, which undoubtedly means that God Himself will be in the city as it descends. This seems to signal a change of residence for the Father, who will depart heaven to live in the New Jerusalem on the earth.

John further describes that shine by the statement that “her light was like a stone most precious.” But he doesn’t stop there. He compares the light to the glitter of a “jasper stone, like crystal.” Now jasper is not clear as many translations have it; indeed there are many variations in color, which has caused some to question the meaning here. Some interpret the word *jasper* in this context to refer not to the historical jasper, but to a diamond.

However, grammatically John is describing the light from the city expressing God’s glory as shining like crystal, not the stone itself. Furthermore, the word *clear*, which as stated occurs in many translations, does not occur in the original. Rather, the Greek word is κρυσταλλίζω and means “resembling a crystal” or “shining like a crystal.”

Also, according to *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary Vol 2*, pgs 781-788, “Jewels and Precious Stones,” the first diamond was not known until sometime during the first century (q.v.), and we do not know how fast the discovery was dispersed, or whether John had actually ever seen one. That being the case, the jasper in Revelation 21 is more likely to be the historical stone than a diamond.

Verses 12-13

Starting with vs. 12 we have a description of what John saw concerning the city’s gates. There are twelve of them, a reference to the twelve tribes of Israel, whose names are written on them. The city itself is square, and has three gates on each wall. Furthermore, this description lends to the credibility that the city is sitting on the earth, in that the directions east, north, south, and west are used. John himself is seeing the city by looking at the east wall, the first one mentioned. Today, one sees the east wall by looking from the Mount of Olives, but at that time, there will be no mountains.

This is definitely an Israelite city, and the more we read the more we understand that to be true.

c. The City’s Wall’s Description (21:14)

14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Verse 14

Exactly what is meant by the twelve foundations is difficult to say. Perhaps there is one foundation for each gate. At any rate, each foundation has one of the twelve apostles names on it. Now many struggle with this. Dr. Walvoord’s statement is typical:

The apostles were part of the church, the body of Christ. Thus both the church and Israel will be in the city; the former are represented by the apostles’ names on the foundations (Rev 21:14), and the latter by the names of Israel’s 12 tribes on the gates (Rev 21:12). The distinction between Israel and the church is thus maintained.

Dr. Walvoord desires to maintain the distinction between Israel and the church, while at the same time relating them both to the New Jerusalem. However, the twelve apostles are not apostles to the

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church, but to Israel. There is great confusion today about the twelve. The twelve are a different set of apostles than the New Testament apostles. Paul was not one of the twelve, as sometimes is erroneously supposed. The New Testament apostles such as Paul were “gifted” as apostles because of their relationship to the new household, the body of Christ. The twelve who Jesus appointed (Matthew 10) were not gifted at the time they became apostles. Yes, the eleven plus Matthias became associated with the body of Christ, but they were still transitional apostles to Israel, not to the church. Isn’t it possible that when the day of Pentecost came, the twelve became gifted as apostles to the church? Certainly it’s possible, but it’s never so stated! We do not know how many became New Testament apostles. Perhaps Peter did, but if so, it was to the circumcision, not to the church at large.

In fact, there is no reason to assume that the twelve apostles of the Lamb refer to a church relationship. Furthermore, even if they did, there’s no reason to assume that because their names are written on its foundations that the church will therefore inhabit the New Jerusalem. Such a leap in logic cannot stand. The church is heavenly, not earthly.

d. The City’s Measurement (21:15-17)

- 15 **And the one who spoke with me had a golden reed measure in order that he might measure the city, and its gates, and its wall.**
- 16 **And the city is laid square, and its length is as long as the breadth. And he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand stadia. Its length and breadth and height are equal.**
- 17 **And he measured its wall, a hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, which is of an angel.**

Verse 15

The angel, one of the seven bowl-carrying angels, now has a “golden reed measure.” Such rods were generally about ten feet in length. This was a special rod, however, since it was golden, fitting with the precious construction of the city.

Verse 16

First, realize that the angel is measuring the city, *not the wall*. Exactly what that entails we are not told, but typically at the time, the wall surrounded a city, and its outside measurement was larger than the city itself. Sometimes people actually lived in the wall as their domicile.

A *stadia* is about six hundred feet, times twelve thousand makes it about 720,000 feet on a side. That’s about 1363 miles on a side. The city seems to be a perfect cube. As a cube, its internal capacity is approximately 2,535,685,424.49 cubic miles. The place is huge.

Some, like Larkin and Walvoord, think the city is a pyramid shape. This is a strange view, since Scripture says otherwise. There’s no compelling reason to think of it as anything other than cubical. Why, then, do some question this obvious truth? It’s because they cannot conceive of such a construction on the earth. Our earth, they say, is too small to hold this city! It would wrap around the horizon, and cannot, therefore, have walls at 90 degrees to its foundation.

The problem is, simply stated, that the New Jerusalem is not on our earth. It is on the new earth, and we simply do not know the new earth’s structure or size. The universe, heaven and earth, will undergo a great transformation. It is likely that the New Jerusalem is designed specifically for the new earth. As such, its size and shape are irrelevant to the current earth. Again, there is no compelling reason to make the New Jerusalem any shape other than that stated by a normal interpretation of Scripture. It’s a cube.

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Verse 17

The measurement of the wall is separate from that of the city proper. The hundred forty-four cubits probably refers to its thickness. Using the standard cubit of the day, the wall will be about 216 feet thick.

“According to the measure of a man, which is of an angel” simply means that the angel has taken upon himself standard human size, the size of a man. He is using his own body length to measure the cubits, the distance from the crook of the elbow to the tip of the fingers. The description seems to indicate that this is the standard cubit in use in John’s day.

e. The City’s Wall’s Construction (21:18-20)

18 And the construction of its wall was jasper, and the city was pure gold, like pure glass.

19a The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones.

19b-20 The first foundation was jasper, the second, sapphire, the third, chalcedony, the fourth, emerald, ²⁰ the fifth, sardonyx, the sixth, sardius, the seventh, chrysolite, the eighth, beryl, the ninth, topaz, the tenth, chrysoprase, the eleventh, jacinth, the twelfth, amethyst.

Verse 18

Again we see jasper, but this is not a metaphorical description like the light of the city above. Enough jasper stones to make a wall of this type could only be produced by a supernatural agency of God.

A city of gold is beyond our understanding. Again, so much gold must be of supernatural origin. The gold is pure “like pure glass,” a simile, but it does not mean that the gold is transparent like glass. Rather it means that the gold is without impurities. The Greek word is καθαρός simply meaning pure or clean, not transparent.

Verse 19a

These are the foundations upon which the names of the twelve apostles are written. The foundations themselves are adorned with a variety of reflecting colored precious stones.

Verses 19b-20

Each foundation was decorated with a different precious stone.

1. The first is jasper, but the color is not indicated. Modern jasper has various minerals associated with it, so it is not a gem stone, but silica. One common color is red, though it is rusty red, but some is yellow, brown, or green. Even blue is found in jasper.
2. The sapphire was probably blue.
3. The chalcedony comes from Chalcedon, in what is modern day Turkey. It is generally blue with flecks and strips of various colors.
4. The emerald is a bright green.
5. The sardonyx is red and white.
6. The sardius is probably ruby-red in color, though more often it is yellow/amber. (The red is more valuable.)
7. The chrysolite is a golden color (not the modern green stone).
8. The beryl is a light green.
9. The topaz is a semi-transparent yellow-green.
10. The chrysoprase is also green.
11. The jacinth is violet.

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12. The amethyst is purple.

f. The City's Gates' Construction (21:21)

21 **And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each one of the individual gates was of one pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.**

Verse 21

The twelve gates, upon which are written the names of the twelve tribes, are made from huge supernaturally produced pearls, one per gate.

The street paving is pure gold, and here we do have the statement "like transparent glass." But note that it does not say that the gold is transparent, but like glass which is transparent. The meaning is probably the same as above. In order for glass to be transparent, it must be clean, with no significant impurity embedded in it. So the gold streets, like the city itself, are pure.

g. The City's Temple (21:22)

22 **And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple.**

Verse 22

The purpose for a temple is to have a place for humans to meet God. But that is the purpose for the entire city, so the presence of the persons of the Godhead are the temple.

h. The City's Illumination (21:23-24)

23 **And the city has no need of the sun, neither of the moon, in order that they should shine upon it, for the glory of God illuminated it, and its lamp is the Lamb.**

24 **And the nations shall walk by its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it.**

Verse 23

Many take this reference as symbolical, but there is no need for that. The light should be taken as literal light, not spiritual enlightenment.

Some have concluded that there will be no more sun or moon from this statement. Such is possible, but not required. The statement is simply that there will be no need for a sun or moon. A similar statement is made in 22:5. The sun itself has gone through several changes during the 70th week. At several points its light is not allowed to escape, and at one point its heat is such that men are scorched. We haven't enough information to state what the physical condition of the sun will be during this future time.

However, we do know the source of light for the city. It is the glory of God. Here, as elsewhere, the word glory refers to the physical light that signals God's presence. At this future time it will be God the Father's presence that provides this glory. The statement that the Lamb will be its lamp indicates the application of the glory. The word lamp means that which holds or carries the light. In NT times the word often meant a portable lamp. The overall affect is that the Father and the Lamb's presence brings all areas of the city into light.

Verse 24

The believing gentile nations will enter into the future post-millennial state. They will "walk by its light." Does this mean that the entire globe is illuminated by the New Jerusalem? Perhaps. Such is not impossible given that the new heaven and earth are a different order of creation than the current heaven and earth.

The earth shall have kings in those days. This should not be surprising, since a righteous monarchy is God's preferred method of governing the earth. These will undoubtedly be sub-rulers under God.

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Man will be in a state of righteousness, so that each individual will obey God. There will be no need for government to perform modern duties of policing and judging. Perhaps these kings are simply men honored because of their faithfulness in the millennial program, or even before. Whatever the case may be, it seems clear that there will be kings on the earth throughout the future ages.

Unlike the use in vs. 23, glory in vs. 24 is not physical. “Their glory” refers to the kings being in an elevated position.

Some have expressed the idea that vs. 24 teaches that the Gentiles will inhabit the New Jerusalem. Walvoord seems to hold this position. However, the phrase “bring their glory and honor into it” seems to be at odds with such a view. Why bring something into the city if its already there? The more important point is that God’s distinction between Israel and the Gentiles will remain throughout future time. While the church is not in view here, it is reasonable to believe that the distinctions between the church and Israel will also remain.

Those who hold that this is a picture of the millennial state use this verse to support their position. There can be no kings in the post-millennial state, they think, because God is on earth ruling directly. However such an assumption cannot stand. God can, and will, order the post-millennial state according to His own determination.

i. The City’s Distinction (21:25-22:5)

25-27 And its gates in no way should be shut by day, for there shall be no night there, ²⁶ and they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it, ²⁷ and there shall in no way enter into it anything unclean, or the one who performs a detestable thing and a lie, but only they who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

Verses 25-27

The reason for the gates remaining perpetually open is stated to be because of there being no night in the New Jerusalem. In biblical times, gates were kept closed during the dark to protect the city. After dark was when danger was the greatest. This is another of those statements that have caused some expositors to make this a millennial scene. After all, there can be no danger when God is on earth, and all men are in a state of righteousness. The further statement that nothing will enter that is unclean, or detestable person or a one who lies will enter seems to support this view. Only those written in the Lamb’s book of life are allowed to enter because they will be the only human beings left on the earth.

There is no need to revert to a millennial scene, however. It is just as reasonable to believe that the reason that the city is unassailable by these evil elements is that they no longer exist. They have been dealt with by God before the City is brought down from heaven. Only those who names are in the Lamb’s book of life will be allowed in because they are the only ones left. B. W. Johnson correctly states,

The gates were never shut. This implies, first, that the city has no fear of any foes. These have all been conquered and subdued. (B. W. Johnson, *The People’s New Testament*, electronic ed. e-Sword.)

The Book of Life and The Lamb’s Book of Life

Compared and Contrasted

Book	Lamb’s Book
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of Life	of Life
<p>1. Evidently this book originally includes both elect and non-elect. Note the scene at the judgment of the white throne, which is a judgment of unbelievers. “And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the <i>one</i> of life, and the dead were judged by the things which were written in the books, according to their works” (Revelation 20:12).</p>	<p>1. This book seems to include only the elect. (See number 3 below). Concerning entering into the New Jerusalem, John states: ...and there shall in no way enter into it anything unclean, or the one who performs a detestable thing and a lie, but only they who are written in the Lamb’s book of life (Revelation 21:27).</p>
<p>2. Names are blotted out when their deeds show them to be beyond the hope of salvation. But to the resurrected church saint Christ promises that in no way will his name be removed. “The one who is victorious shall thus be arrayed in white garments, and I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels” (Revelation 3:5). Evidently the unbeliever who will be cast into the lake of fire will have had their names blotted out. “And if any was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15).</p>	<p>2. Revelation 17:8 seems to be referring to the Lamb’s book of life rather than the book of life. No names are blotted out of the Lamb’s book of life. The book includes only those whose names were placed in it from the foundation of the world. “And they who dwell on the earth shall wonder, they whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast, that he was, and is not, and shall arrive” (Revelation 17:8).</p>
<p>3. It appears that the unbelievers’ names will be blotted out for our benefit, not God’s. The statement in Revelation 20:15 is to show that God is keeping tabs on whatever criteria necessary to identify the non-elect from a Christian’s perspective. The decision to blot out is made in time, not eternity. “...and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the book of life, the tree of life, and from the holy city, which are written in this book” (Revelation 22:19).</p>	<p>3. The Lamb’s book of life indicates true believers. Anyone in the book will be allowed to enter the New Jerusalem. “And its gates in no way should be shut by day, for there shall be no night there, and they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it, and there shall in no way enter into it anything unclean, or the one who performs a detestable thing and a lie, but only they who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” (Revelation 21:25-27).</p>

Endnotes

- ¹ What the change of residence from one earthly structure, the Tabernacle, to another, the Temple, actually accomplished was to go from a movable structure to an immovable one. The presence of God had a place in the land to which Israelites could come for their worship (sacrifice).
- ² Interestingly, the term “children of Israel” in the Old Testament should be translated “sons of Israel” because the original twelve sons had received their father Jacob’s blessing. Collectively, then, the descendants of Israel’s twelve sons are considered themselves sons. But Paul is explicit in Galatians 4:1-4. While Israel was under the law they were not adult sons, but still children.
- ³ McGee, *Revelation, Vol. III*, pg. 169.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Newell, *The Book of the Revelation*, page 341. The italics were in the original.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Chapter Twenty-two

1-2a **And he showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb,² in the middle of its street.**

Verses 1-2a

First, we must state that this is a real river, not a symbolical reference. Many downplay this fact, and some even reject the river's literal existence. In the New Jerusalem, coming out of the throne of God, a river "bright as crystal"¹ will flow. However, is there a symbolical reference here, especially associated with the prepositional statements "of water of life?" Perhaps so. In normal symbolism, the meaning is that the source of life is God and the Lamb. The word "life" would then refer to the state of life after the millennium, rather than its sustenance. In other words, the water does not sustain life, but is symbolical of the state of life that God provides.

Some have confused this river with others. Dr. Walvoord well states,

This reference to a river should not be confused with similar millennial situations such as those in Eze 47:1, Eze 47:12 and Zec 14:8. These refer to literal rivers flowing from the temple and from Jerusalem and will be part of the millennial scene. The river in Rev 22:1 will be part of the New Jerusalem in the new earth.

We learn something of the geography of the New Jerusalem. A street comes from the throne. This is probably to be construed as the main thoroughfare, as direct access to God is the implication of this statement. The river flows in the middle. Some have suggested that one side of the street is for access to the throne, and the other side for egress. There is, however, no way to support that idea from Scripture.

A significant fact is relayed here concerning the post-millennial rule. Both the Father and the Son sit upon one throne. 1 Corinthians 15:24 states that the Son hands the kingdom over to the Father after the second resurrection. This cannot mean that the Son gives up His authority as king, as that is a kingship which lasts forever. With the New Jerusalem throne, we are given a glimpse of that future shared rule.

2b **And on this side of the river and on that was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruits, yielding its fruit every month, and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.**

Verse 2b

The Placement of the Tree of Life

On either side of the river, presumably on its banks, grows the tree of life. Some have thought that this is a single tree that somehow bridges the river. Others believe that there are different trees on each side. Still others believe that the river splits for a short distance and the tree is on an island, though this seems unlikely. The word "tree" is singular, and it seems that there is only one. Probably John's vision saw it straddle the river in some way, but it is impossible to be certain.²

The Fruit of the Tree of Life

However, what is certain is that we are dealing with a literal tree with literal fruit! This is obviously a different kind of tree than is associated with the current creation, as it is able to produce twelve different kinds of fruit on a monthly basis. The number twelve here simply indicates that this is a year-around yielding tree, and no growing seasons are involved. No other speculative symbolism is involved.

Nothing is said about eating from the tree in this passage, but in Revelation 2:7 we read that the Christian will eat of the tree of life that grows in the paradise of God. That is presumably this tree.

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The Nature and Purpose of the Tree of Life

“Of life” has caused a multitude of problems. One, of course, is that the idea of the original tree of life was to prolong physical life. Those that see this tree as having the same function use it as an argument that this is a millennial scene. People will continue to die during the millennium, but not in the post-millennial ages. However, Revelation 2:7 cannot be referring to a tree that produces physical life, nor does it seem likely that the meaning concerns sustaining physical life in this passage.

So we conclude that the tree of life, which is associated with the river of water of life, refers to the life that comes from God that is provided in the post-millennial state. The new earth will not produce food from trees to sustain life. Rather, like the river itself, this tree will be symbolical of God’s provision of life.

The Leaves of the Tree of Life

Another difficult statement is found in the purpose for the leaves of this tree. They are for the healing of the nations. Dr. Walvoord, while recognizing that this cannot refer to the millennial period, nonetheless identifies the word “healing” with “health giving” in the sense of being therapeutic. Concerning the word “healing” he goes on to say,

The English “therapeutic” is derived from this Greek word. Even though there is no sickness in the eternal state, the tree’s fruit and leaves seem to contribute to the physical well-being of those in the eternal state.³

Given the fact that the English word therapeutic has a somewhat different meaning than the ancient meaning of this Greek word, one wonders why Dr. Walvoord goes the interpretive direction he does. Since there will be no illness, it’s obvious there is no need for “therapeutic” leaves. We must conclude that the phrase “healing of the nations” has nothing to do with the process of healing after the millennial state, and that the leaves have no therapeutic value whatsoever.

A much better interpretation is that these leaves symbolize the fact that God’s program for the nations has been brought to completion. They are in a state of having been healed, and are able to enjoy life on the new earth as God’s people.

3-4 And there shall be no curse any longer, and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his bond-servants shall serve him,⁴ and they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads.

Verses 3-4

The curse of Genesis 3 is eliminated with the new earth’s creation. The simple statement of verse three carries away all fear of death, illness, the sweat of the brow, etc.

Again the statement that the throne (singular) of God and of the Lamb will be in it. The city itself will be Their dwelling place, and there will be no temple in it. The pronoun “it” is a rare case where we have no stated antecedent. Sometimes, when the referent to a pronoun is obvious, ancient writers found it unnecessary to repeat it. “It” must refer to the New Jerusalem itself. The last reference to the New Jerusalem was in 21:2.

Who are the “bond-servants” in verse 3? Many commentators assume that it is the church, but this seems quite unlikely. All references to the future of the church indicate that it will not be in a state of slavery. For instance, 2 Timothy 2:12 states “If we endure, We shall also reign with Him.” In Revelation 3:21 we read, “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.” Likewise, the twenty-four elders representing the church sing the new song in Revelation 5:10, “And have made us kings and priests to our God;

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And we shall reign on the earth.” All indicates are that the church will not be God’s slaves, but Christ’s co-rulers.

There are better candidates for the position of God’s slaves during the future ages than the church. This may be a reference to the seraphim, who serve God in the throne room. However, the statement that “they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads” seems to indicate human beings. The name on the foreheads is in juxtaposition with the name mark on the foreheads of the tribulation period (Revelation 13:16ff; 14:9ff).

Better candidates for the servitude position are the Gentile nations, especially those who are saved out of the tribulation period. In Isaiah 56:6-8 we read:

Also the sons of the foreigner Who join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him, And to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants -- Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, And holds fast My covenant -- Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices Will be accepted on My altar; For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations. The Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, says, Yet I will gather to him Others besides those who are gathered to him.

The words “foreigner” and “others” here must refer to Gentiles. The immediate reference of Isaiah is undoubtedly the millennial period as burnt offerings imply the death of animals which will cease after the millennium, but it is likely that the servitude of gentiles will extend into the subsequent ages. This is certainly more likely that the slaves of God being the church.

See our comments on Revelation 7:14-17.

One other group could also meet the criteria for being these slaves. We read in Revelation 14:9 that the 144,000 had the name of God written on their foreheads. Perhaps they will go on to be the slaves of God in the New Jerusalem.

- 5 **And there shall be night no more, and they need no light of lamp, neither light of sun, because the Lord God shall give them light, and they shall reign for ever and ever.**

Verse 5

The truth of Revelation 21:23 is repeated here in a slightly different context, that is, the continuation of the condition of the New Jerusalem forever. The pronoun references are difficult as well. The pronoun “them” probably refers to the slaves of God in the previous verse. Some have attempted to apply it to mankind living on the new earth in general, but that is not the normal meaning in context.

The word “they,” however, must refer to God and the Lamb, though some refer it to the slaves, which seems unlikely. The significant statement of this sentence is that the Father and the Son will reign forever and ever. The emphatic form is used to indicate that there will be no end to their reign. Notice that John does not use the phrase “for eternity.” The fact of the matter is that the concept of the “eternal state” as used by so many theologians is false. Man will never “enter eternity” in the sense that is often stated. But man will live forever and God and the Son will reign on the earth forever.

3. John Encouraged (22:6-17)

a. The Report of the Angel (22:6-7)

- 6 **And he said to me, These words are faithful and true, and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angels to show to his bond-servants the things which must with speed come to pass.**
- 7 **And behold, I come quickly. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.**

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Verse 6

The word “he” refers to the angel. The “words” are those immediately preceding which refer to the New Jerusalem. It is for this revelation that the Lord sent His angels. The Lord is said to be “the God of the spirits of the prophets.” This seems an odd statement to many, but it fits perfectly. The topic under consideration is a continuation of the prophetic statements of the Old Testament prophets who predicted the future glory. In this passage, the details of that prophetic glory are described.

The word “bond-servants” or “slaves” clearly refers to God’s people. Is it limited to the church, the body of Christ. Certainly not. Future believers who exist after the rapture of the church will also read and study this truth.

The things which “with speed” must come to pass again refers to the establishment of the New Jerusalem and, by implication, the new heavens and earth. It does not mean that these things will happen soon from John’s perspective, though one might argue that they do from God’s. But since this revelation is to show men, it is best to think of the sudden speed which will characterize the events.

Verse 7

Since this is the angel still speaking, some have thought that he is referring to himself. This is possible, since the sudden coming of this and other angels will bring about the judgments of the book. However, most refer these words to the Lord Jesus Christ. Given the nature of apocalyptic literature, this is certainly possible. At any rate, the Lord Jesus is definitely stating the words in verse 12 below, and it appears that the angel is still speaking, but standing in the place of the Lord.

The word “blessed” (*makarios*) means “happy.” A person who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book is happy. The word “keeps” does not mean to obey, but to guard or maintain. It carries the idea that the individual who treasures the words of the book of Revelation will receive the blessing of happiness.

b. The Reaction of John (22:8)

- 8 **And I John am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things.**

Verse 8

John reacted based upon what he saw and heard. The nature of the vision and its angelic explanation was too much for him. He fell down to worship. Physical prostration is the meaning of this word *worship*. To make sure there is no mistake, John says that he fell “before the feet of the angel.” Hence, he was worshipping an angel, for which he is upbraided by the spirit being (vs. 9).

Now, John had done this before, with much the same results. See Revelation 19:10

c. The Remonstrance of the Angel (22:9)

- 9 **And he says to me, See, no! I am a fellow-servant with you and with your brothers the prophets, and with the ones who keep the words of this book.**
Worship God.

Verse 9

Again, as in chapter 19, John is rebuked. The angel is a “fellow-servant.” John sees the angel as special, but the angel sees himself as similar to John and human beings. True, angels are more powerful and of greater knowledge than humans today, but they are still servants of God, just like man. And in that future time, they will see themselves on the same level as human beings.

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The angel gives John a simple command. “Worship God.” This is in distinction to worshipping the angel, which is unacceptable. Acceptable worship is for God alone.

d. The Requirement of the Angel (22:10-11)

- 10 **And he says to me, Seal not up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the season is near.**
- 11 **The one who is unrighteous, let him do unrighteousness still, and the one who is filthy, let him be made filthy still, and the one who is righteous, let him do righteousness still, and the one who is holy, let him be sanctified still.**

Verse 10

To seal a book was to make it impossible to read. Remember that the seven seals of this book. They must be broken by an authorized individual in order for the contents to be known. The book of Revelation as a whole is unsealed, and is therefore available for understanding.

Often expositors mention the fact that Daniel was told that the words were sealed till the time of the end. In so doing, they generally relate the idea of Daniel’s day to that of John’s. However, one should not confuse the seals. Daniel’s seal was not the same as those of the book of Revelation. Rather books and other things were sealed in Daniel’s day to preserve them, which is undoubtedly the meaning in Daniel 12:9. In Revelation, the book was sealed to keep it from being read, and is now unsealed, and intended to remain that way.

The reason for keeping the book unsealed is “because the season is near.” Much has been written about this, but most expositors do not explain what a season is, nor why it is used here. Indeed, it is usual to translate the word “season” (καιρός) as time (χρόνος), a grave error. Time is not the meaning. The word χρόνος means duration during which the moments pass. A καιρός is a period of time, and is therefore a subset of χρόνος. It is a special period of time that is characterized by something suitable going on during that season. Thus Matthew 13:30 speaks of the “season of harvest” while Mark 11:13 refers to the “season of figs.” Likewise, the Lord Jesus Christ died, according to Romans 5:6, “in due season” (κατὰ καιρὸν).

The question arises, then, what “season” or appropriate time period is in view in Revelation 22:10. There can be no doubt that a specific season is in view, for the word is articular. Many automatically assume that the word refers to the future tribulation or kingdom period. That is certainly possible, but not likely. Dr. McGee, holding to the “church history” view of the seven churches in Asia, makes the season those historical periods.⁴ Dr. Walvoord says,

The time period in which the tremendous consummation of the ages is to take place, according to John’s instruction, is near. The indeterminate period assigned to the church is the last dispensation before end-time events, and in John’s day as in ours, the end is always impending because of the imminent return of Christ at the rapture with the ordered sequence of events to follow.⁵

The season is said to be near, and since the word *season* is a “time word,” near (ἐγγύς) undoubtedly means near in time (the word can mean “near in space”). Dr. Walvoord’s statement reflects the view of many, but in a sense, Dr. McGee’s view is closer, we believe, to the correct understanding. While we reject the “church history” view of the seven churches, it is nevertheless to the seven churches that the book of Revelation is written. The season is best understood as the period of time that those in the churches have to study and understand the book of Revelation, rather than a far distant set of events.

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Verse 11

This verse is not so difficult as many make out. The idea is that in relationship to the Revelation's events, people are going to be confirmed in their final destiny. That statements are a series of parallels designed to show that the act of prophecy does not change an individual's character or destiny.

e. The Remarks by Jesus (22:12-17)

- 12 Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to render to each man as his work is.
- 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.
- 14 Blessed are they who wash their robes, in order that they may have the right to come to the tree of life, and by the gates may enter into the city.
- 15 Outside are the dogs, and the sorcerers, and the fornicators, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and every one who loves and makes a lie.
- 16 I Jesus have sent my angel to testify to you these things for the assemblies. I myself am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star.
- 17 And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And the one who hears, let him say, Come. And the one who is thirsty, let him come. The one who desires, let him take the water of life freely.

Verse 12

There is a change of speaker as indicated by verse 16 below, and the Lord Jesus Christ speaks directly. The prediction of quick coming does not necessarily mean close in time. The more normal meaning is that it will be sudden. This is a truth that cannot be denied, as the timing of the second coming is unknown. His coming will be sudden. One moment He will appear where He had not been before.

Judgment is still in view in the words "to render to each man as his work is." This must refer to the final judgment of the great white throne, during which men will be judged according to their works.

Verse 13

For the fourth and last time the words Alpha and Omega are presented. See comments on 1:8; 1:11; and 21:6. Again we see that the phrase "the Alpha and the Omega" must include more than eternal existence. The *infinity* of the person is expressed in metaphorical form by the statement. Infinity is the quality of the nature of God whereby He has no limitations whatsoever in His expression of Who He is. It includes all His abilities, as well as to the eternal existence of His essence. In other words, the phrase seems to carry the meaning that God is without limitation in any of His qualities.

Verse 14

A textual variant occurs in this verse. Many manuscripts have "who do his commandments" rather than "who wash their robes." Walter Scott rejects the change because "Obedience to commandments is not the ground on which eternal life is bestowed. It is God's gift to all who believe (John 5:24).⁶ However, the issue isn't one of eternal life, nor of having the right to enter because of faith. Believers will enter the New Jerusalem, unbelievers will not. Whether one reads the text as "who wash their robes" or "who do his commandments" neither phrase is to be taken as a condition for entering. It is, in fact, a description of fact. Believers wash their robes, believers do his commandments.

J. B. Smith rejects "who do his commandments" because he believes only the church will be allowed to enter the New Jerusalem. But his argument is weak, because a theological position, even if correct (his is not), should not bear on whether one accepts a particular reading.

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In fact “who wash their robes” is the stronger of the two readings. While it is possible to apply this to the church, it is more normal contextually to apply it to terrestrial saints living after the new earth is formed. Certainly, one cannot exclude the terrestrial saints from the New Jerusalem, as Smith attempts to do.

For a detailed discussion of the tree of life see the notes on verse 2b above. The washing of the robes means that these are believers. The metaphor of the robes is best understood to be the condition of the individual, that is, believers.

Verse 15

“Outside” (ἐξω) does not mean, “outside the gates” as though these unbelievers are living on the earth. Indeed, they have been consigned to the lake of fire. But they are, forever, outside the city. “Dogs” means men of ill repute, while the other words clearly indicate people who are characterized by evil.

Verse 16

Utmost importance must be assigned to the statement “I, Jesus.” The claim of authorship through His angel is to either be accepted or rejected. To reject the authoritative statements of the resurrected Christ is most dangerous, as it makes a claim that the Revelation is but a lie, a forgery made to deceive. But, in fact, the book is the Revelation of Jesus Christ,⁷ and those who are students of Scripture will take it at equal value with all the rest of inspired Scripture.

The book is for “the assemblies.” This is the first time the word “church” has appeared since the first three chapters. The seven assemblies in Asia are the intended recipients. As with all books written to local assemblies in New Testament times, the book of Revelation is to be studied in the assemblies of believers, correctly interpreted and applied. It is not to be assigned to a class of books that cannot be understood. But the understanding of it does imply a consistently literal, normal approach to interpretation not only of the book itself, but of all the Bible. The book of Revelation is the culmination of predictive Scripture, and without a good grounding in the truth of predictive Scripture, believers will be unable to receive the full benefit of the truth that Christ has put into the Apocalypse.

It is significant that Christ refers to himself as “the root and the offspring of David.” This reaffirms the contextual purpose for the Revelation itself. It is to give in-depth information concerning Christ’s messianic relationships as they unfold in the future. The primary focus of the book is Israel and the Gentile nations. The church is the recipient, but Israel and the Gentiles are the subject.

Christ’s final description of Himself is “the bright and morning star.” This phrase is not to be taken as a signal of the rapture of the church. That is simply not the context here. Rather, Christ is the culmination of the night personified. The future New Jerusalem, in association with the new heaven and earth, are produced by the Lord for bringing to light the ultimate purpose of the created universe. Christ is central to that vision. He is the one who produces the new order, and He is the one who sheds light on its existence.

Verse 17

Here we have the reversion to the New Jerusalem context. For the first time the Holy Spirit is brought into the narrative. He, along with the bride, that is with the New Jerusalem itself, presented in the figure of personification, speak. Their message is not to the church, nor is it to unbelievers. It is to those living on the new earth.

“Come” they say, “The one who is thirsty, let him come.” We must take “come” literally. A physical change of space is dictated. This is not an invitation to get saved, though it is generally taught as

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such. Rather it is directed to those believers on the new earth who will be eligible to enter into the presence of God and the Lamb in the New Jerusalem. The thirst is to be taken as a metaphor for those who desire to enter the presence of God. The way will be open.

The one who desires must be one who will take the water of life freely during the future on-going ages of the new earth. For a discussion of the water of life, see the discussion on verses 1-2 above. The idea is not of physical water, but of the symbolic representation of the state of life found in God and the Lamb.

4. The Warning Given (22:18-21)

18-19 I testify to every man who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book, ¹⁹ and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and from the holy city, which are written in this book.

20 The one who testifies to these things says, Yes, I come quickly, amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with the saints, amen.

Verses 18-19

The warning of verses 18-19 is for unbelievers who will tamper with the book of Revelation. It is not, however, a general warning to all unbelievers, as is generally taught. Nor is it a warning concerning the rest of the Bible. While it is true that those who tamper with God's word in general are going to be in dire circumstances at the Great White Throne, it is not of this that Jesus speaks.

The problem, of course, is the phrase "every man." As with the common use of the word "every man," for it is one word in the original, the Greek word *πᾶς* is limited by context. Every man who hears the words, and adds to them, shall have the plagues which are written in the book applied to him. That means that the direct audience for this communication is those living during the tribulation period. It cannot be applied generally to unbelievers today, even those who tamper with Scripture. They will never have these plagues added to them.

The same is true, then of verse 19. It is only applicable to those living at the time who, given the right set of faith circumstances, could participate in the truth of the tree of life and the holy city, the New Jerusalem.

During the tribulation, the book of Revelation will be proclaimed, perhaps aloud, and it will be perverted by those under the influence of Satan. They will participate in the plagues. They will not have access to the tree and city.

Verse 20

The final affirmation of the Lord's sudden coming is preceded by the word "yes." The KJV translates the word "surely" which is more of an interpretation. The word does provide a certain emphasis to the fact of Christ's sudden coming, especially since it is from Him directly, the one who testifies to the things written in the book. The word "amen," which is found immediately following the word "yes" in the original text, means truly.

The words "Come, Lord Jesus," are probably attached by John. It was his desire for the soon return of the Lord, so he makes this simple statement. The very brevity and simplicity of John's words portray the poignant desire of a man near death, deserted on Patmos, and looking for the coming of the Lord.

Verse 21

The final benediction is appropriate to the closing of the book. The readers are the assemblies, the churches, who will not experience most of the events in the book. To them, the saints,⁸ the desire of

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John is for the grace of the Lord Jesus to be applied. Grace is used here in the general sense of provision for the needs of daily life.

Endnotes

- ¹ The Greek here is the adjective λαμπρός meaning bright or shining.
- ² A problem that bedevils theological studies about the postmillennial condition is the use of the phrase “eternal state.” One is not always certain what a person means by that phrase. Given thought, most would not define the continued existence of man as being “eternal,” even given the problematic “elementary school” definition that some teach, that is, that everlasting means having a beginning but no end, when eternal mans having neither beginning nor end.
- While the definition of everlasting may be fairly accurate, this is not the case with the above definition of eternal. To define eternal as without beginning or end is to fall into the trap of defining the word as a time word, a word of duration. When used of God and His nature, such a definition falls flat. It is much better to define eternal as meaning “apart from time,” altogether. God exists in a state of non-duration, so that He sees time as an instaneous present. That is the meaning of the phrase God “knows the end from the beginning” (Isaiah 46:10).
- Many theologians recognize that it is incorrect to say that God “lives forever,” as the NASB translates Isaiah 57:15. A better translation of the Hebrew phrase עַד שֶׁכֶּן is “inhabits eternity.” (עַד is used here in the sense of perpetuity, not in the sense of forever.) Nevertheless, even those who ought to know better continue to use the phrase “eternal state” to indicate a future period of time after the formation of the new heavens and earth, as though it means to live forever. In fact, “live forever” is the correct situation in that future time, as the Greek word employed to describe that future is a time word, αἰών, generally translated *age*. Several constructions with this noun carry the idea of “forever,” usually in a preposition phrase.
- It is the the phrase *the coming ages* (τοῖς αἰώσιν τοῖς ἐπερχομένοις) that Paul uses in Ephesians 2:7 to express that future time. The term phrase eternal state should be abandoned, for the Pauline phrase in the verse cited. It is more accurate to use biblical terminology than a phrase that occurs nowhere in Scripture to express the truth that man will enjoy an endless future in the presence of Christ.
- ³ Walvoord, *BKC*.
- ⁴ *Revelation*, Vol. III, pg. 207.
- ⁵ *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pg. 334.
- ⁶ *Exposition of the Revelation*, pg. 446.
- ⁷ See my notes on vs. 1-2 of chapter one. The phrase “of Jesus Christ” is a subjective genitive, indicating that Jesus Christ is the one doing the act of revealing.
- ⁸ The majority text reads “with you all” rather than “with the saints.”

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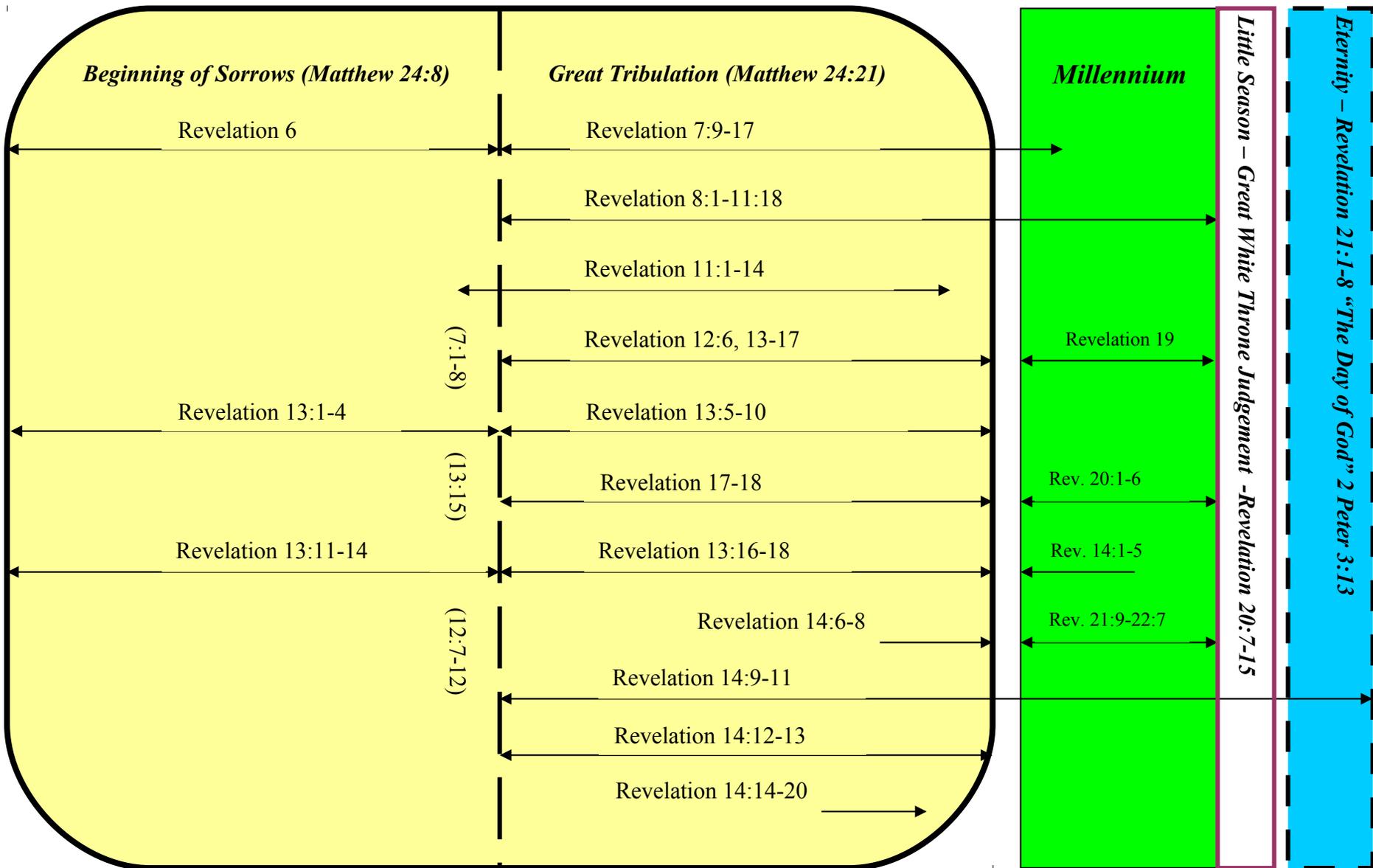
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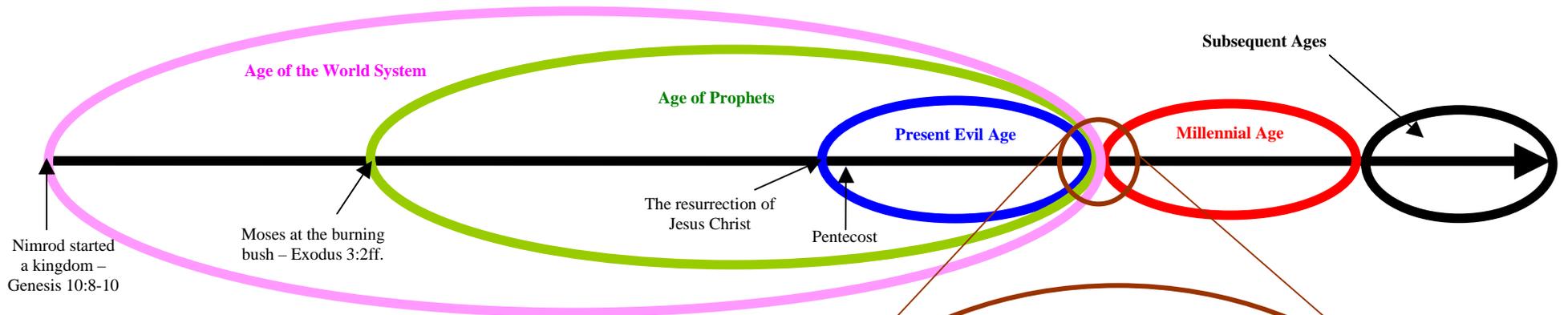
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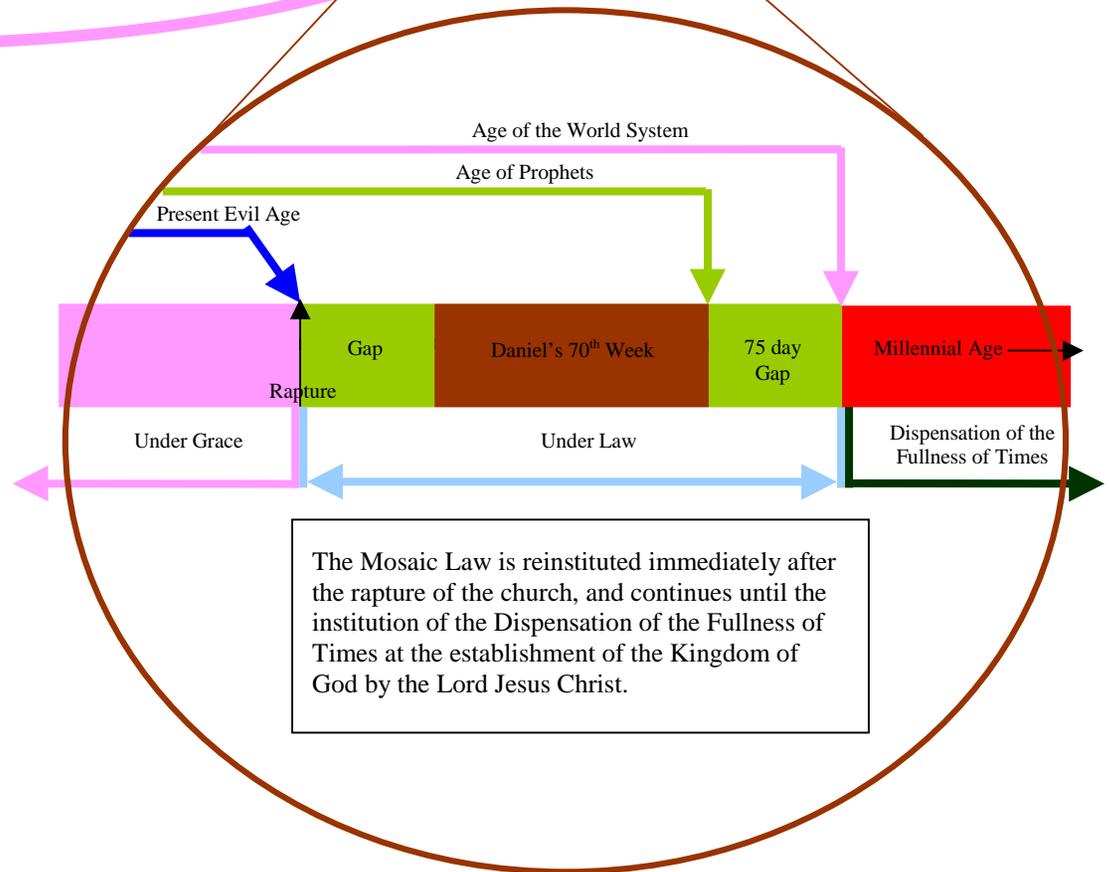
Daniel's 70th Week, the Millennium, and Beyond

The Ages and the Millennium



The term “millennium” refers to a period of time, that is, an age. During the millennial age Israel is in a state of salvation, having received eternal life, an age related concept. In the present evil age, eternal life is already applied to all believers.

The “Dispensation of the Fullness of Times” will take place near the beginning of the millennial age. It is a relationship in which all things find their culmination in the person of Christ, both in heaven and on earth (Eph. 1:10). Who the dispenser of the fullness of times is unknown, though it may be the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It appears that the household may be all of creation.



The Mosaic Law is reinstated immediately after the rapture of the church, and continues until the institution of the Dispensation of the Fullness of Times at the establishment of the Kingdom of God by the Lord Jesus Christ.

The “One who is Victorious” in Revelation Two and Three

“The one who is victorious” refers to the Christian after the mystery resurrection of 1 Corinthians 15:51. John refers to the victorious one in 1 John 5:4, 5 as one who has faith. All true believers are therefore victorious. The victorious one is addressed in each of the messages to the seven assemblies in Revelation as an encouragement to correct Christian living. Since all believers who are resurrected or raptured are in view in this phrase, it cannot refer to a select group of believers, as some believe.

Assembly	Passage	Quote	Comment
Ephesus	2:7	To the one who is victorious, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.	The one who is victorious can only refer to the believer, never to the unbeliever. The New Jerusalem has the tree of life (Revelation 22:2, 14). The “paradise of God” is the New Jerusalem.
Smyrna	2:11	The one who is victorious shall not be harmed by the second death.	The second death is mentioned in Revelation 20:6,14, and 21:8, referring to the final judgment of unbelievers. This judgment takes place after the final resurrection.
Pergamos	2:17	To the one who is victorious, to him will I give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knows but the one who receives it.	Hidden manna, refers to spiritual blessing, to doctrinal sustenance as opposed to false doctrine. The white stone refers to the acquittal of a charge, an act of blessing
Thyatira	2:26-28	And the one who is victorious, and the one who keeps my works to the end, to him will I give authority over the nations, ²⁷ and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to shivers, as I also have received of my Father, ²⁸ and I will give him the morning star.	Future millennial rule is promised to the believer. The nations are the gentiles. The morning star refers not to Christ Himself, but to His coming for the church. For a discussion of “keeps my works” see my paper “The One Who Keeps My Works to the End” (included in the Revelation Notebook).
Sardis	3:5	The one who is victorious shall thus be arrayed in white garments, and I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.	After the church’s resurrection, all true believers, regardless of how well they lived the life, will be robed in white. All Christian believers at that time will share the character of Christ. He will confess that fact to the Father. See the chart “The Book of Life and the Lamb's Book of Life.”
Philadelphia	3:12	The one who is victorious, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out from there no more, and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which descends out of heaven from my God, and my own new name.	Being a pillar in the temple of God refers to the believers permanent place in heaven. By the writing of two names, the believer will be associated with the character of God Himself. and with the city of God, the New Jerusalem.
Laodicea	3:21	The one who is victorious, I will give to him to sit with me in my throne, as I also was victorious, and sat down with my Father in his throne.	“My throne” is the rule of Christ during the millennium. Christ was victorious in His resurrection, as will be the Christian believer. The Father’s throne is the rule over creation, which cannot be shared by the believer, but by Christ alone.

Trumpets

1 HAIL, FIRE, BLOOD

2 SEA TO BLOOD

3 RIVERS POLLUTED

4 DARKNESS

5 LOCUSTS

6 EUPHRATES

7 EARTHQUAKES, ETC.

Bowls

1 SORES

2 SEA TO BLOOD

3 RIVERS POLLUTED

4 HEAT

5 DARKNESS

6 EUPHRATES

7 EARTHQUAKES, ETC.

The Book of Life and The Lamb's Book of Life

Compared and Contrasted

by G. H. Shinn

Book of Life	Lamb's Book of Life
<p>1. Evidently this book includes both elect and non-elect. Note this scene which is at the judgment of the white throne, a judgment of unbelievers.</p> <p>And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the <i>one</i> of life, and the dead were judged by the things which were written in the books, according to their works (Revelation 20:12).</p>	<p>1. This book seems to include only the elect. (See number 3 below.) Concerning entering into the New Jerusalem, John states:</p> <p>...and there shall in no way enter into it anything unclean, or the one who performs a detestable thing and a lie, but only they who are written in the Lamb's book of life (Revelation 21:27).</p>
<p>2. Names are blotted out when their deeds show them to be beyond the hope of salvation. But to the resurrected church saint Christ promises that there is no way that his name will be removed.</p> <p>The one who is victorious shall thus be arrayed in white garments, and I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels (Revelation 3:5).</p> <p>Evidently the unbeliever who will be cast in to the lake of fire will have their names blotted out.</p> <p>And if any was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15).</p>	<p>2. Revelation 17:8 seems to be referring to the Lamb's book of life rather than the book of life. No names are blotted out of the Lamb's book of life. The book includes only those whose names were placed in it from the foundation of the world.</p> <p>And they who dwell on the earth shall wonder, they whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast, that he was, and is not, and shall arrive (Revelation 17:8).</p>
<p>3. It appears that the unbelievers' names will be blotted out for our benefit, not God's. The statement in Revelation 20:15 is to show that God is keeping tabs on whatever criteria necessary to identify the non-elect from a Christian's perspective. Decision to blot out is made in time, not eternity.</p> <p>...and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the book of life, the tree of life, and from the holy city, which are written in this book (Revelation 22:19).</p>	<p>3. The Lamb's book of life indicates true believers. Anyone in the book will be allowed to enter the New Jerusalem.</p> <p>And its gates in no way should be shut by day, for there shall be no night there, and they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it, and there shall in no way enter into it anything unclean, or the one who performs a detestable thing and a lie, but only they who are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Revelation 21:25-27).</p>

Tribulation Saints

	7:1-8	7:9-17
HOW MANY?	<i>144,000</i>	<i>Unnumbered</i>
FROM WHERE?	<i>Israel</i>	<i>All Gentile Nations</i>
WHERE SEEN?	<i>On Earth</i>	<i>In Heaven</i>
WHAT DONE TO?	<i>Preserved</i>	<i>Removed</i>
REWARD?	<i>Yet Future</i>	<i>White Robes, Palms</i>